



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

A consultation on our inspection of the Probation Service

HM Inspectorate of Probation, April 2026

Foreword

In 2018 we began to inspect and rate probation services against inspection standards as part of our routine probation inspection framework. We have adapted our approach in response to system changes and in 2025 we focused specifically on work to protect the public. Although our standards and methodology have performed well, we want to continue to meet our assurance and scrutiny functions and maximise our impact by driving improvements where they are needed and shaping the policy landscape. The proposals set out here are to ensure that we do this to the best of our ability.

In developing our proposals, we have engaged with His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) leaders, the Ministry of Justice, and those responsible for delivering probation services. We will consult with stakeholders as our plans develop, including with academics, other regulators and inspectorates and those with lived experience of probation services, including victims and their families. We are grateful to everyone involved so far and would now like to reach out to a wider audience.

In this consultation we are asking for your views on two phases of our work. The first is our proposed standards for inspection of probation delivery units (PDUs). Our aim is to remain focused on the things that make a difference to the quality of probation work, aligning strategic activity with frontline delivery to people on probation. We have reduced the number of standards that we base our judgements on and have consolidated the areas that sit beneath the standards. Our standard-level ratings will continue to follow our established four-point scale, and we will continue to publish these. We are proposing to move away from giving overall ratings to PDUs.

We are also considering how we select PDUs for inspection, enabling us to focus our resources where we can have most impact, provide a proportionate approach to inspection and allow ourselves and those who provide probation services to measure progress. We are asking for your views on how best to shape recommendations, using learning from other inspectorates.

Development work for phase two of our proposals will begin once we have started to deliver our PDU inspections. This work will focus on the inspection activity that we could undertake at a regional, area or national level alongside specific areas of delivery, such as victim work, court work and resettlement. Our intention throughout both phases is on driving improvements in practice to achieve change and keep people safe.

Subject to the outcome of this consultation and the pilot activity that we are undertaking, we plan to carry out the first PDU inspection in November 2026. Over the 12 months from then we will develop our approach to inspecting other areas of probation delivery.

Our consultation closes on **Sunday 17 May at 11:59pm** We would very much welcome your views on the detail of our proposals, and I hope you will take the opportunity to respond.



Martin Jones CBE

Chief Inspector of Probation

1. Background

1.1 The Probation Service is split into 12 regions across England and Wales. Seven area executive directors provide leadership across the regions. Each region is overseen by a regional probation director, who is responsible for the commissioning and delivery of probation services in their region. Operational delivery in each region is organised around 110 PDUs, led by a head of PDU. The governance for all these arrangements sits under HMPPS.

1.2 Since 2018, HM Inspectorate of Probation (the Inspectorate) has inspected both probation regions and PDUs against a set of evidence-based standards. The programme was originally designed to inspect National Probation Service (NPS) divisions and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), and did not include local PDU inspections. After unification of the NPS and CRCs into a new Probation Service, we initially inspected probation regions, later adding PDU inspections to the programme. This was to enable more local-level reporting alongside our strategic regional messaging. At a later stage, we carried out two national inspections. This means that we now have a core programme with three layers of inspection activity. Each layer of inspection activity has its own standards. For PDUs, we inspect and rate against seven standards across two domains; for regional inspections, we inspect and rate against eight standards across two domains; and for each national inspection, we have taken different approaches but based them on the same standards and ratings structure.

1.3 From October 2025, we paused this multi-layered approach and focused inspection activity on the arrangements for and delivery of public protection in regions. This Dynamic Inspection of Public Protection (DIPP) programme will come to an end in July 2026. We are now planning what we will do next to provide assurance, deliver scrutiny and drive improvement. We are considering the impact of the Sentencing Act 2026 and associated operational changes across the Probation Service. We are mindful of how these may affect inspection activity as the changes embed.

1.4 We are now consulting on five key areas of work to help us shape our development and piloting work. Our proposals include:

- what and how we should inspect in PDUs
- how we should inspect the areas not covered by our PDU inspections
- how we decide where to inspect
- whether we should continue to award overall ratings
- how we shape our recommendations.

1.5 We intend these PDU inspections to be delivered at the end of 2026, with a second phase of delivery from the autumn of 2027. We will consult separately on the detail of the second phase later this year.

2. Legislation

2.1 The Inspectorate has a statutory duty to inspect probation services. Section 7(1) of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000* (subsequently amended) confirms our duty to inspect the probation service. It states:

The Chief Inspector must secure that the provision made in pursuance of arrangements made by the Secretary of State under section 3 of the Offender Management Act 2007 (power to make arrangements for the provision of probation services) is inspected by a member of the Inspectorate.

3. What we believe

3.1 Our proposals are grounded in the following principles:

- We are primarily interested in the quality of frontline delivery; we want to understand how well all services meet the needs of individuals.
- If the quality of frontline services is insufficient, we must be able to explain why.
- We should move away from inspection against processes or operating models and instead judge quality in the context of local, regional or national delivery arrangements.
- We should be bold in our thinking and not unduly constrain ourselves either by historical or current approaches or by the current approach of the probation service itself.
- We should be flexible enough to put inspection resources where they will have the greatest impact.
- We should apply any relevant learning from our other programmes of inspection.
- We should be mindful of the effort and activity that inspection generates and ensure that all our activity is necessary and undertaken in the right manner and measure to provide assurance and drive improvement.

4. The evidence base

4.1 As an independent and influential voice, we are not aligned with any one single academic approach. Instead, as an evidence-based organisation, all our activity is founded on research and inspection evidence. Our inspection activity is always based on established models and frameworks, grounded in evidence, learning and experience. This includes the primary colours model of leadership, the well-established and recognised ASPIRE model for case management (Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Review and Evaluation), desistance principles, PRESENCE components and trauma-informed practice. The evidence can be seen in full on our website: [Evidence base – probation services – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#) and [Evidence base – relationship-centred services – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#) and [High-quality services and delivery – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#).

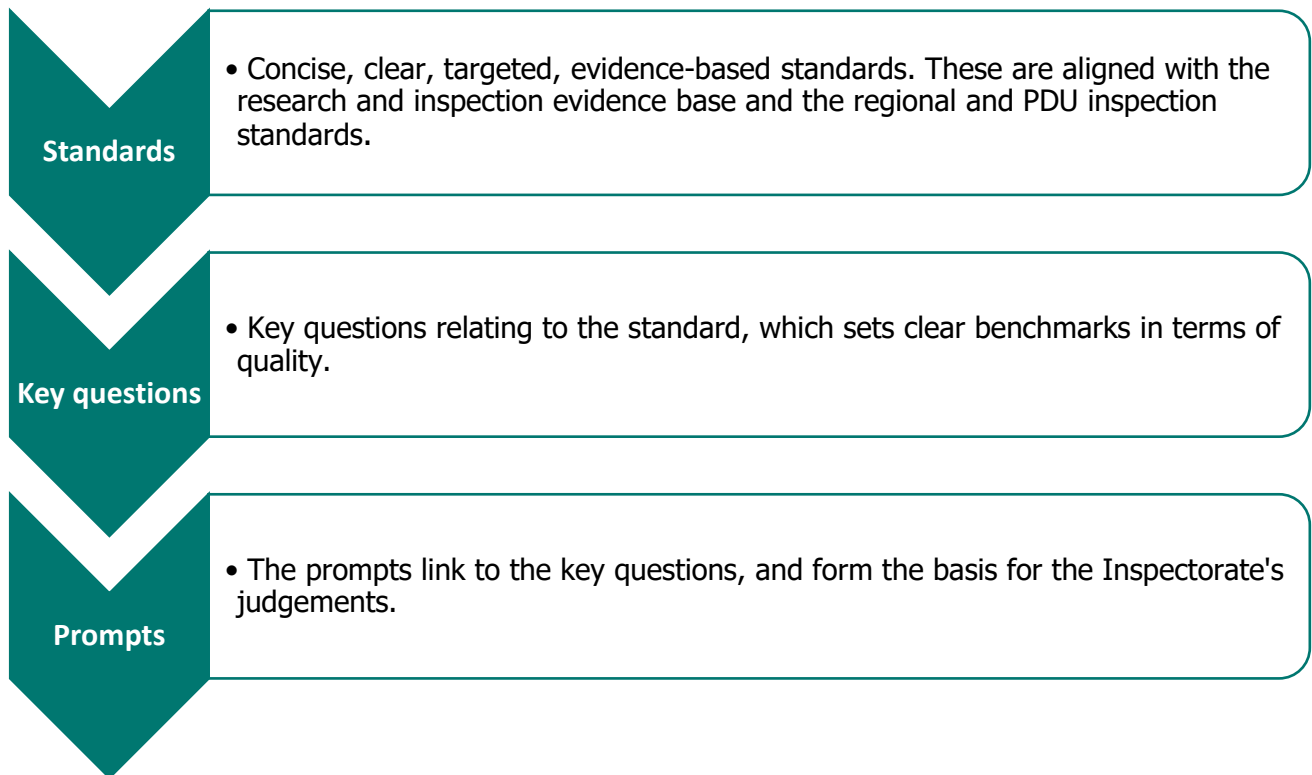
5. Phase one – PDU inspection

5.1 Our priority through the Sentencing Act 2026 changes is to assure the quality of work provided for people on probation, victims and communities. This will be at the forefront of our inspections from November 2026. In PDUs, we will inspect and rate work to achieve change and keep people safe. We will not rate leadership, staffing or services in these inspections. We see effective frontline delivery as a product of effective leadership, the right staffing arrangements and strong partnerships and services. As such, we will assess leadership, staffing and services through the cases that we inspect. For instance, we would see whether workloads were manageable and whether staff were supported through effective oversight of their work.

5.2 As part of each PDU inspection, we will undertake activity alongside our inspection of cases. This will include observations of practice, focus groups, interviews and multi-agency learning panels, and will enable us to build on findings from cases, explain why we are seeing what we are seeing and best target recommendations or communicate concerns. We will report our findings in our published reports.

Question one – is a focus on sentence management inspection in the first 12 months of the Sentencing Act 2026 changes the right approach?

5.3 Our established approach to standards is based on the logic model. Rather than inspect against outcomes for people on probation, we focus on inputs and activities. Without good-quality inputs (such as effective leadership, competent staff and comprehensive services) and activities (such as effective sentence management), probation services will not be able to deliver quality services. This logic model remains as the basis of our proposals.



5.4 Although our structure remains unchanged, we have revised the detail of our PDU standards. Our current case inspection approach provides a robust assessment of sentence management. However, we think we can go further in looking at some of the central tenets of effective probation practice, such as relational practice¹ and a strengths-based approach. The proposed standards link strongly to the research evidence base² and we will set out in our guidance documents what this should look like in practice. The proposed draft standards can be seen in full at Annex One.

Question two – do the questions focus well enough on relational practice and strengths-based practice?

5.5 We are also thinking about the boundaries of probation activity and what is within the gift of the service to influence. Probation is not solely responsible for protecting the public and arguably no one agency can do this. Given that effective partnership working is a central tenet of effective probation delivery, we think it may be more helpful to think of probation's role as contributing to community safety³ rather than being entirely responsible for public protection. We think this language shift could be helpful in resetting the balance of probation expectations. In our key

¹ [Evidence base – relationship-centred services – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

² [Evidence base – probation services – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

³ McNeill, F. (2010). Probation, Credibility and Justice, *Probation Journal*, 58.

questions, we are proposing to use terminology of 'keeping people safe' and 'contributing to community safety' in recognition of this.

Question three – is the language of 'keeping people safe' and 'contributing to community safety' compatible with the role and reach of probation?

5.6 In our probation inspections, we have historically had one set of standards to cover our inspection of the sentence management function. These were the domain two standards, and they applied to all types of cases but with some additional questions for specific areas of work, including resettlement, unpaid work, court work and statutory victim work. When the probation service's operational change through *Probation Reset* was introduced,⁴ we amended our standards framework to include core and adjusted standards, to reflect these operational changes. This moved us away from inspecting wholly against quality and instead moved us towards inspecting a specific operating model. Applying the temporarily adjusted standards was also sometimes problematic in practice, given local variations in delivery arrangements and interpretation.

5.7 We propose to have the same expectations of quality for all people on probation, regardless of their sentence type or supervision arrangements. As such, we would inspect the quality of personalised, responsive delivery based on the needs of the individual, rather than on the type of sentence or length of supervision. This does not mean that we would expect to see the same volume of work delivered in all cases. Instead, we would expect to see a personalised and responsive approach, where the individual's needs have been assessed and planned for effectively and the right delivery, referrals and exit planning arrangements have been made. This requires strong, proactive partnerships and access to the right services, and just as we do now, we would expect to see this in all the cases that we inspect.

5.8 Our proposal is to return to one set of standards, key questions and prompts that apply regardless of the type of case or any operational directive that applies. Our guidance documents will set out how to do this in a way that is proportionate, fair and reasonable and is understood by the sector. We will continue to illustrate our findings as relevant to specific groups, such as those based on sex and ethnicity. This is important, as it will enable us to make recommendations or highlight concerns that are specific and best placed to drive improvement. We have successfully adopted this approach in our inspection of youth justice services.

Question four – should we return to one set of standards that apply in all cases?

5.9 One area that has remained constant in the structure of our standards over time is the inspection of three strands of sentence management work: engagement, desistance, and risk of harm. Separating the strands across each standard has enabled us to report on the sufficiency of work in each of those three areas for each standard. This provides 12 summary judgements in each case, with each of those judgements determining whether work in that area was sufficient or insufficient.

5.10 Although this longstanding approach enables us to highlight strengths and deficits in individual areas, it can make case inspection and report writing repetitive. For instance, the same themes may be found in desistance and engagement work, given the links between activities to address each area. Likewise, engagement work often runs into desistance or public protection work, given that engagement is an essential building block of effective desistance and public protection work. We do not think that continuing to separate each standard into these three areas of work is the most efficient and effective way for us to inspect or report our findings.

⁴ [PowerPoint Presentation](#)

5.11 Rather than separating the work that we see delivered under each standard into three strands, we propose to comment on two strands of work under each standard. We propose to combine engagement and desistance into one strand called 'achieving change' and combining safety and wellbeing with risk of harm work into another strand called 'keeping people safe'. Benefits to this approach include it being better suited to inspecting work based on the needs, risks and strengths, treating engagement as a building block to desistance. It also provides a simpler approach with fewer summary judgements.

5.12 We have successful precedents across other inspection programmes of separating practice into two rather than three themes in this way. Our inspectors are confident and adept at balancing the nuances of each area to reach fair, valid and meaningful judgements.

Question five – should we report our case inspection findings under each standard based on work to achieve change and work to keep people safe?

5.13 In our inspections we always strive to focus on the quality of delivery rather than on whether a specific process or processes have been followed. In our current PDU standards we make a judgement about assessment in individual cases, yet we judge the quality of assessing in its entirety by looking at all assessment activity, not just the completion of a written assessment. We are proposing to change the title of this standard to 'assessing' rather than 'assessment'.

5.14 We will continue to look at information from a range of sources, including case records, written assessments and specific or specialist assessments notes from internal or multi-agency meetings about the individual, and the interview with the probation practitioner. We will continue not to mandate or expect the use of any specific assessment tool for any specific type of work. Instead, we will look at assessing in the round to ensure that sufficient information about the individual and their circumstances has been gathered and analysed. We will continue to expect initial assessing to be completed early enough in the individual's engagement to support planning and delivery.

Question six – should we change the name of our 'assessment' case inspection standard to 'assessing' to better reflect what we expect to see?

5.15 Our PDU domain two standards currently consist of four separately judged and rated standards on *assessment, planning, delivery* and *reviewing*. In practice, reviewing should be a dynamic activity taking place as part of assessing, planning and delivery. To better reflect this in our inspections, we propose to merge the elements of reviewing that currently appear in the separate reviewing standard into the relevant places in the *assessing, planning* and *delivery* standards. We are not changing our expectations about what makes good-quality reviewing; instead, we want to shift the focus from inspecting a process of reviewing to inspecting the role and impact of reviewing in effective assessing, planning and delivery.

Question seven – should we incorporate our quality expectations of reviewing across the three standards of 'assessing,' 'planning' and 'delivery?'

Question eight – is there anything in our proposed standards that you think could lead to undesirable behaviours, outputs or outcomes?

6. Where we inspect

6.1 We currently inspect all PDUs in each region as a group. This means the timing of an inspection of an individual PDU is determined by when we are inspecting the region it is in. Given our

proposed primary focus on PDU inspection and our pausing of regional inspection, continuing with this approach would unnecessarily constrain us. We have an opportunity to take a more flexible approach, allowing us to focus our inspection resource where we believe we can have most impact and enabling us to understand the national picture more quickly. We will maintain an element of random selection, but we will also be able to respond with inspection when we want to explore effective practice or have become concerned about delivery in any given area. This 'risk and random' approach to selection will maximise our assurance and scrutiny functions.

6.2 This approach also moves us away from a rolling programme with a start and finish date over a set period. In any programme of inspection with a start and finish date, a PDU knows that once it has been inspected it is unlikely to be inspected again during that period. This is not an approach that maximises impact. We know that the anticipation of inspection can be as important as inspection itself in terms of driving improvement. A long period between inspections removes much of the anticipation of inspection and improvement cycle that this can create.

Question nine – does inspecting PDUs on a risk and random basis provide a fair, agile and responsive approach to selecting areas for inspection?

7. Ratings

7.1 The expectations of any effective model for regulating public services are generally accepted:⁵ that standards are set and that the model drives improvement; that performance information is available to commissioners; that relevant information on performance (quality and value for money) is published for public accountability reasons; that the model can ensure modification of the behaviour of any provider when necessary; and that, if necessary, effective enforcement action can be taken.

7.2 Research also tells us that the relationship between inspection and improvement is not straightforward.⁶ Unintended consequences from rating organisations have been identified, including reputational damage and defensive behaviours. In addition, there are concerns that one-word overall judgements, while intended to provide a clear and accessible way of summarising an organisation's performance, may not reflect the complexity of the work being delivered and could mask both strengths and weaknesses.

7.3 We introduced standard level and overall ratings to our core inspection programmes in 2018 following extensive stakeholder engagement and formal consultation. We continue to use the four-point rating scale used by other regulators of 'Outstanding,' 'Good,' 'Requires improvement' and 'Inadequate'.

7.4 We have kept our ratings framework under review, including how we calculate and award ratings to ensure they remain fair, valid, proportionate, robust and impactful. We listen to feedback from inspected bodies in terms of how our ratings work. In recent years, one-word overall ratings have been criticised for undermining staff morale. We also know that the effectiveness of inspection depends on credibility, fairness, and relational trust and not on formal outputs alone. Part of our rationale in removing ratings from the DIPP programme was our belief that that ratings may have acted as a barrier to improvement rather than enabling it.

⁵ See Lodge, M. and Hood, C. (2010). 'Regulation Inside Government: retro theory vindicated or outdated?' in Baldwin, R, Cove, M. A, Lodge, M. *The Oxford Handbook of Regulation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁶ Halachmi A. (2014). 'Accountability overloads', *The Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 560–573.

7.5 We will continue to rate the *assessing, planning* and *delivery* standards in our PDU inspections. This meets our assurance function and enables us to specify where there are strengths and areas for improvement. We will make yes/no judgements at key question level in each case and apply ratings at the standard level based on the consolidated results of all work inspected under that standard. For the consolidated results, we will use our four established performance bandings:

Lowest banding (key question level)	Rating (standard level)
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding
Reasonable majority: 65–79%	Good
Too few: 50–64%	Requires improvement
Minority: <50%	Inadequate

7.8 For each standard, the rating will continue to be aligned with the lowest banding at key question level. When we developed our standards, we adopted this approach to recognise that each key question is an integral part of the standard and has equal weighting. Standard level ratings that are determined by the weakest area ensures that it is not possible for an organisation to compensate for poor work in one area, such as keeping people safe, by effective work in another area, such as achieving change. Instead, we see all areas as important.

7.9 Some stakeholders have expressed views that this approach focuses only on deficits in practice. We have listened to this feedback and have considered an alternative mechanism, using the average scores at key question level to determine the standard level rating. There are two significant issues with this approach. The first is that it would allow those areas needing improvement to be masked, with poor practice in one area being compensated for by better practice in another area. This runs the risk of improvement activity being less focussed on those areas. Secondly by overcompensating in this way we could rate a standard as 'Good' despite half the work in the standard being 'Inadequate.' That would not provide a credible and robust description of our findings. Instead, we will continue to focus on the areas most in need of improvement by aligning the rating with the lowest banding at key question level.

7.10 We are proposing to change our overall ratings, however. Unlike other criminal justice inspectorates, we award services an overall rating of 'Outstanding,' 'Good,' 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate'. The benefits of overall ratings are that they are easy to understand, offer an appealing way to summarise a range of performance measures, and illuminate which organisations provide examples of best practice (Jacobs et al., 2007).⁷ The latter argument falls short, however, when, as has occurred recently, there is little variation and mainly negative ratings being applied. There are also known risks in using overall ratings, including oversimplification of findings and the reliance on weighting of certain areas of performance (Jacobs et al., 2007).

7.11 Since we adopted overall ratings, other inspectorates, notably HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), whose approach was a key influence, have stopped using them. In its police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, HMICFRS rates organisations against core questions (currently up to 10) but provides no overarching rating. Similarly, no overall rating is awarded in prison inspections; instead, judgements are made against the four elements of the healthy prison test. HM Crown Prosecution Service

⁷ Jacobs, R., Goddard, M. and Smith, P.C. (2007) *Composite performance measures in the public sector*. Policy Discussion Briefing. York: Centre for Health Economics, University of York.

Inspectorate also does not assign an overall rating in its area inspections of Crown Prosecution Service work. Outside of criminal justice, Ofsted has recently and publicly moved away from overall ratings in both inspections of schools and of local authority children's services. This signals a clear move away from the use of overall ratings by key regulators and inspectorates.

7.12 A risk in continuing to award overall ratings is that, despite our aim to support improvement, the overall rating can become counterproductive to learning, as it can damage morale. This can result in staff disengaging from results rather than being energised to learn and improve. Overall ratings also reduce many judgements across multiple standards into a one-word judgement, which means that the key details can be lost. Pausing ratings for the six-month period of the DIPP inspections has not resulted in a loss of impact.

7.13 Taking all of this into account, our proposal is that we move away from overall ratings and rate PDUs only at an individual standard level.

Question 10 – should we stop giving an overall rating for PDU inspections?

8. Recommendations

8.1 Making recommendations is a long-established and accepted way for regulators and inspectorates to signal where services need to improve. Recommendations can be made in different ways: some are specific about the action that should be taken; others describe what should improve but not how this should be done. Recommendations can also be followed up in different ways, depending on the required and accepted level of oversight and monitoring.

8.2 The efficacy of recommendations was considered in Phillips' (2021) research,⁸ where leaders in inspected organisations reported they sometimes had difficulties implementing actions to address findings because the power to make changes was outside their control. In addition, the study found that recommendations were not always followed up to test impact, a theme also identified by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2015).⁹

8.3 Criminal justice inspectorates take a variety of approaches in making recommendations and have different processes for following these up. Our recommendations are based on findings and state what needs to be done – the action that needs to be taken. This provides clarity, but there are also risks, as the specified actions may be ineffective or not suited to the nuances of an individual area. It can also blur the line between inspection and delivery, potentially placing the inspectorate in a position of partially 'marking its own homework' at the point of the next inspection.

8.4 Wallace (2026)¹⁰ describes senior probation leaders as being frustrated by the Inspectorate's recommendations if they are directed at issues that they are unable to address, either because responsibility sits elsewhere or because the problems, such as staffing or resourcing, are beyond

⁸ Phillips, J. (2021). *Understanding the Impact of Inspection on Probation*, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice.

⁹ National Audit Office (2015). *Inspection: a comparative study*. <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/inspection-a-comparative-study> [Accessed 5 April 2025]

¹⁰ Wallace, N. (2026). *Exploring perceptions of the ratings, one-word judgments and effectiveness of recommendations in Probation Service inspections in the context of other criminal justice inspections*.

their control. Some senior leaders drew attention to recommendations that they viewed as impossible for them to achieve or that were unclear about what they intended to achieve?

8.5 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) takes a different approach to making recommendations to the establishments it inspects. Concerned about making single recommendations to solve complex problems, and to avoid the problem of leaders trying to address too many things at once, HMIP stopped making recommendations from 2022 onwards. Instead, it now identifies what its priority concerns are and expects leaders to address these, but it stops short of recommending how the concerns should be addressed. This approach negates the need for recommendations to be agreed or not agreed.

8.6 We propose that our PDU inspections should move away from specific action-focused recommendations that describe an issue and how it should be addressed. Instead, we will identify where the issue lies by way of a concern and set out the evidence for this in the report. We will identify and publish concerns in place of recommendations, allowing leaders the freedom to determine how improvements should be made. This will strengthen ownership, enable locally developed solutions and maximise the opportunity to deliver sustainable improvement. We will continue to require a response from HMPPS on the areas of concern.

Question 11 – should we move from making recommendations to setting out concerns, enabling PDUs to decide on the action that they will take in response to our inspections?

9. Phase two – regional and modular inspection

9.1 We have described how we can be more flexible, proportionate and targeted in the PDU inspections that we will carry out from November 2026. Once these are underway, we will develop phase two of our approach throughout 2027. We will stop regional inspections during this time and consider two further strands of inspection: regional and modular inspection.

9.2 The work of the probation service is broad, and while we inspect much of it and have recently increased our reach to include approved premises, there are still many areas that we do not inspect. The interventions landscape, for instance, is something that we think could benefit from closer attention. Direct observation of delivery is also valuable in areas such as unpaid work and work in courts. Although we will inspect sentence management through our PDU inspections, there remains much else that we could helpfully comment on.

9.3 Under our current inspection arrangements, once we have inspected all PDUs in a region we carry out a regional inspection. Our proposal to select PDUs for inspection using a risk and random approach is incompatible with a regional inspection that is based on aggregated PDU findings. This, combined with the fact that there are areas that we want to inspect in more detail, means that we are not proposing to undertake regional inspections based directly on aggregated PDU findings from every PDU in each region. During 2027, we will develop proposals for regional, area and national inspections and consult on these proposals.

9.4 As part of our development work, we will consider how we inspect those areas of work that do not fall neatly into either PDU or other regional or area-based inspections. Examples include court work, victim work, unpaid work, interventions and resettlement. We see these as modular areas of the probation delivery landscape and believe we can add value in these areas by taking a regular 'deep dive' approach. We will further develop our proposals around these regional and modular inspections and consult again in early 2027.

Question 12 – what should the key components of a regional or area-based inspection be?

10. Impact assessment

Regulatory

10.1 The quality of probation work is important for all, and we believe that our proposals will help to drive improvements in service delivery where they are needed. Our inspections will set clear, evidence-based standards and provide independent oversight against these standards. We think the standards and ratings that we are proposing are appropriate and proportionate.

Equalities

10.2 The proposed inspection standards and approach will highlight how effectively PDUs deliver probation services. This includes factors relating to equity, diversity and inclusion. The standards framework will be supported by inspection guidance documents, which will include material relating to specific sub-groups and protected characteristics.

11. Summary of questions

Question one – is a focus on sentence management inspection in the first 12 months of the Sentencing Act 2026 changes the right approach?

Question two – do the questions focus well enough on relational practice and strengths-based practice?

Question three – is the language of ‘keeping people safe’ and ‘contributing to community safety’ compatible with the role and reach of probation?

Question four – should we return to one set of standards that apply in all cases?

Question five – should we report our case inspection findings under each standard based on work to achieve change and work to keep people safe?

Question six – should we change the name of our ‘assessment’ case inspection standard to ‘assessing’ to better reflect what we expect to see?

Question seven – should we incorporate our quality expectations of reviewing across the three standards of ‘assessing,’ ‘planning’ and ‘delivery?’

Question eight – is there anything in our proposed standards or the way we suggest we will produce ratings that you think could lead to undesirable behaviours, outputs or outcomes?

Question nine – does inspecting PDUs on a risk and random basis provide a fair, agile and responsive approach to selecting areas for inspection?

Question 10 – should we stop giving an overall rating for PDU inspections?

Question 11 – should we move from making recommendations to setting out concerns, enabling PDUs to decide on the action that they will take in response to our inspections?

Question 12 – what should the key components of a regional or area-based inspection be?

12. Next steps

12.1 Once the consultation has closed we will consider all responses carefully before deciding on our approach, and will develop our inspection framework and supporting guidance accordingly. We will pilot our standards and approach from June 2026. We will continue to work with services and stakeholders to keep our inspection standards relevant, comprehensive and up to date.

13. How to respond

13.1 The deadline for responses is **Sunday 17 May 2026 at 11:59pm.**

Please email responses to helen.mercer@hmiprobation.gov.uk.

13.2 You can also send any questions you may have to this email address, and we will respond as soon as we can. Alternatively, if you would like to discuss any part of the consultation, please email Helen Mercer (helen.mercer@hmiprobation.gov.uk) to arrange a time to do so.

13.3 As part of your response, please ensure that you:

- state clearly who the submission is from, for example from an individual responding in a personal capacity or sent on behalf of an organisation
- include a brief description of yourself/your organisation
- state clearly if you wish your submission to be confidential and/or you do not want to be contacted with follow-up enquiries (see confidentiality statement below).

Confidentiality statement

13.4 The information you send may be published in full or in a summary of responses. All information in responses, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the regimes concerning access to information (these are primarily the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*, the *Data Protection Act 1998* and the *Environmental Information Regulations 2004*).

13.5 If you want your response to remain confidential, you should explain why confidentiality is necessary. We will grant your request only if it is appropriate in the circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding.

Annex A

DRAFT probation inspection 2026 standards

2.1 Assessing

2.1 Assessing is well-informed, personalised and engaging, analysing how to achieve change and keep people safe.

2.1.1 Is assessing well-informed, personalised and engaging, focusing on how to achieve change?

- a) Does assessing identify the offending-related factors impacting on behaviour?
- b) Does assessing analyse the individual's strengths and protective factors?
- c) Does assessing analyse the context of the individual, including their relationships and social environment?
- d) Does assessing recognise and analyse diversity issues?
- e) Does assessing analyse capacity for change, participation, and community integration?
- f) Does assessing analyse the motivation, readiness and ability of the individual to engage and comply with the sentence?
- g) Does assessing include the active participation of and co-production with the individual?
- h) Does assessing draw on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
- i) Is assessing responsive to changes, including to ensure continued engagement and compliance?

2.1.2 Is assessing well-informed, personalised and engaging, focusing on how to keep people safe?

N.B 'Keeping people safe' has two elements: one is public protection (this could be called 'contributing to community safety'); the other is safety of the individual (based on the 2025 thematic findings and recommendations). Prompts a) to f) relate to public protection, and prompts g) to i) relate to the safety and wellbeing of the individual. A similar pattern is followed for 2.2 Planning and 2.3 Delivery.

- a) Does assessing identify and analyse any risk of harm to others?
- b) Does assessing analyse any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?
- c) Does assessing incorporate the needs of the victim(s)?
- d) Does assessing draw on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
- e) Does assessing analyse whether work could be undertaken collaboratively with other agencies that would contribute to community safety?
- f) Is assessing responsive to change, ensuring continued effective arrangements to contribute to community safety?
- g) Does assessing identify and analyse the safety and wellbeing of the individual?
- h) Does assessing analyse whether work that would keep the individual safe could be undertaken collaboratively with other agencies?

- i) Is assessing responsive to change, ensuring continued effective arrangements to keep the individual safe?

2.2 Planning

Planning is well-informed, personalised and engaging, focusing on how to achieve change and keep people safe.

2.2.1 Is planning well-informed, personalised and engaging, focusing on how to achieve change?

- a) Does planning set out what is needed to achieve change and prioritise those areas that are most critical?
- b) Does planning take account of the individual's strengths and protective factors and seek to reinforce or develop these to build resilience?
- c) Does planning take account of the context of the individual, including their relationships and social environment?
- d) Does planning address all the individual's diversity factors, including how they could affect engagement and compliance?
- e) Does planning create opportunities for change, participation and community integration?
- f) Does planning take account of the motivation, readiness and ability of the individual to engage and comply with the sentence?
- g) Does planning include the active participation of and co-production with the individual?
- h) Is there effective planning of delivery with other services, including for exit planning and referral to mainstream services?
- i) Is planning responsive to changes to ensure continued engagement and compliance?

2.2.2 Is planning well-informed, personalised and engaging focussing on how to keep people safe?

- a) Does planning set out what is needed to keep other people safe, addressing risks and prioritising those that are most critical?
- b) Does planning pay attention to the available timescales, coordinating with any other agencies' planning and the need for sequencing?
- c) Does planning set out the necessary constructive and/or restrictive interventions to manage the risk of harm?
- d) Does planning make appropriate links to the work of other agencies involved with the individual to manage the risk of harm and any multi-agency plans?
- e) Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?
- f) Is planning responsive to change, ensuring continued effective arrangements to contribute to community safety?
- g) Does planning promote safety and stability for the individual as foundations for change?
- h) Does planning include relevant action to be undertaken collaboratively with other agencies?
- i) Is planning responsive to change, ensuring continued effective arrangements to keep the individual safe?

2.3 Delivery

Personalised, coordinated and engaging services are delivered to achieve change and keep people safe.

2.3.1 Are personalised, coordinated and engaging services delivered to achieve change?

- a) Does the quality of contact engage the individual and achieve change?
- b) Does delivery take account of the individual's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these to build resilience?
- c) Does delivery take account of the context of the individual, including their relationships and social environment?
- d) Do the services provided address all the individual's diversity factors, making them the most likely to engage the individual and achieve change?
- e) Is focus given to maintaining an effective relationship with the individual, encouraging and enabling engagement?
- f) Does delivery provide opportunities for change, participation and community integration, including access to services post-supervision?
- g) Is delivery aligned and coordinated with the delivery of other services including exit planning and referral to universal services?
- h) Are the quality and impact of the work with the individual reviewed and adapted where necessary?
- i) Is delivery responsive to changes to ensure continued engagement and achieve change?

2.3.2 Are personalised, coordinated and engaging services delivered to keep people safe?

- a) Are the right services delivered to keep other people safe, contributing to effective risk management?
- b) Is attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims in the delivery of services?
- c) Is the involvement of other agencies in managing and minimising the risk of harm well-coordinated?
- d) Are home visits undertaken where they would support the effective management of risk of harm?
- e) Does the quality of contact delivered manage and minimise the risk of harm?
- f) Is delivery responsive to change, ensuring continued effective arrangements to contribute to community safety?
- g) Are the right services delivered to promote safety and stability for the individual?
- h) Are services delivered collaboratively with other agencies to promote safety and protection for the individual?
- i) Is delivery responsive to changes to ensure continued effective arrangements to keep the individual safe?