



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

West Sussex PDU

Probation Service - Kent, Surrey and Sussex region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2022

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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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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Foreword

This is the second Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) in England to be inspected using our new methodology, which was developed following the integration of Community Rehabilitation Services (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) into a single unified probation service. The new methodology contains stronger links between our judgements on organisational delivery and casework. Poor scoring in casework limits the scores we are able to award for organisational delivery and we have seen this evidenced in the scores awarded in the inspection of West Sussex PDU with three out of five of case supervision standards being rated as 'Inadequate'. As a result, the overall rating for this service was also 'Inadequate'.

The unification of The Probation Service occurred, in England, on 26 June 2021. At that time, there were still national and local restrictions in place, associated with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, West Sussex PDU, which was newly formed following unification, continued to be impacted by limited access to offices, reduced face-to-face contact with people on probation, and reduced capacity in unpaid work, group work and interventions. In addition to this, they have had to manage severe staffing shortages which have also been felt acutely across The Probation Service more widely. The frequency and extent of the changes experienced across the service in the past year have been momentous and the nine months preceding this inspection were exceptionally turbulent. Yet, staff speak with enthusiasm and optimism about the future and, despite a multitude of challenges and competing priorities, they continue to be motivated by the important work they can do, given the correct resources, to change lives.

Strategic relationships in West Sussex have been changed as a result of unification, but there are positive messages about relationships growing, and, as the dust settles on unification, we hope to see these return to full strength. Due to the staffing challenges, a prioritising probation framework is in place across West Sussex PDU. Staff knew, without uncertainty, what they were being asked to prioritise and we praise the strength of leadership that this reflects. Unfortunately, despite this clarity, the casework we inspected demonstrates that there are deficits in the quality of work. Of particular concern are the shortfalls in work being undertaken to manage the potential risks of people on probation to the public. We expect to see work relating to risk of harm being prioritised, but we saw too many cases where this was not the case.

West Sussex PDU, as with all probation services across England and Wales, continues to have difficulties with delivery of accredited programmes, structured interventions and unpaid work as it recovers from the pandemic. While we are encouraged to hear that there are ongoing efforts to reduce backlogs and waiting lists, our case assessment findings demonstrate the importance of suitable alternatives to accredited programmes being used and appropriately quality assured to ensure that some service delivery does take place.

We saw concerning evidence of cases assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm scoring lower in our quality standards, than those assessed as a high or low risk. Given the number of serious further offences that are committed by individuals assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm, we would like to see swift and appropriate action taken by the PDU to address this.

The PDU will undoubtedly be disappointed with the results of this inspection. Moving forward, the service needs to focus on the basics of probation service delivery, with a

clear plan of how to return to quality service delivery which sees impactful probation work being undertaken as a matter of routine. Ultimately, this cannot be achieved without more staff, and so we are keen to see the PDU receive the support it needs from both the regional and national teams to address staffing issues in West Sussex. This will allow the leadership team in the PDU to begin to work towards the promising plans that they have, and ensure the wider staff group are rewarded for their maintained enthusiasm and optimism.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

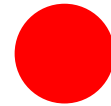
Ratings

West Sussex PDU

Score **4/27**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2 Staff	Inadequate	
1.3 Services	Inadequate	
1.4 Information and facilities	Requires improvement	

2. Court work and case supervision

2.1 Court work	Requires improvement	
2.2 Assessment	Inadequate	
2.3 Planning	Inadequate	
2.4 Implementation and delivery	Inadequate	
2.5 Reviewing	Requires improvement	

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.¹

West Sussex PDU should:

1. prioritise all staff receiving the training required to move to mixed caseloads, and then roll-out the training promptly to ensure caseload allocations can be made more evenly across practitioners
2. ensure staff have the relevant training to use risk and safeguarding information, obtained from key stakeholders, to appropriately inform risk assessments and sentence plans
3. ensure that administrators receive training and support to better manage the changes to their workload, following unification.

Kent, Surrey and Sussex region should:

4. share the target staffing data with the PDU so they may undertake appropriate workforce planning and support the PDU to promptly improve staffing levels
5. engage with people on probation to inform service delivery.

The Probation Service should:

6. review the provision of services delivered by CRS providers by: giving CRS providers access to nDelius and the Offender Assessment System to ensure they have adequate access to risk and safeguarding information; ensuring CRS providers are adequately resourced for the volume of referrals being made; and ensuring CRS providers are accountable for quality service delivery
7. ensure that commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS) provision meets the needs of people on probation
8. address and significantly reduce the 20-week delay in vetting for both new and existing staff
9. consider whether the Touchpoints² model is suitable for use in the new, unified probation service
10. consider the sequencing and priority of large-scale change projects and the impact upon staff welfare and service delivery.

¹ Progress against previous inspection recommendations for the relevant CRC or NPS Division are included in annexe one.

² The Touchpoints model supports decision-making around risks. Cases are discussed with line managers and robust risk management plans are developed. This includes a requirement to review risk management activity when issuing licence warnings and considering alternatives to recall.

Background

West Sussex PDU

West Sussex PDU is one of five PDUs within the wider Kent Surrey and Sussex (KSS) region, the others being East Kent, West Kent, Surrey and East Sussex.

West Sussex PDU covers five district council areas – Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham and Mid Sussex – and includes one public-sector prison (HM Prison Ford). It is policed by Sussex Police, which serves East and West Sussex and the city of Brighton & Hove – an area of 3,780 square kilometres. The force covers a resident population of 1.65 million and has the added complexity of holidaymakers, students, seasonal workers and the 39 million passengers who travel through Gatwick Airport. The blend of policing ranges from urban areas, with day- and night-time economies, and more sparsely populated rural areas, with a range of alcohol and drug-related crime to wildlife crime.

As of January 2022, the KSS probation region had a total caseload of 14,780, including 10,516 under supervision in the community and 4,264 subject to pre-release supervision. West Sussex PDU's total caseload was 2,311, of which 555 are pre-release and 1,756 in the community. West Sussex is the smallest PDU in KSS, measured by caseload – 16 per cent of the total KSS caseload. As of January 2022, West Sussex had 471 high and very high-risk people on probation, which is 16 per cent of KSS's total.

Since June 2021, and in line with the new target operating model, The Probation Service has commissioned external providers to deliver rehabilitative services. In West Sussex PDU, accommodation support is provided by Seotec (although they do not provide accommodation themselves), as is the education, training and employment provision. The Forward Trust provides wellbeing support to people on probation. Brighton Women's Centre (BWC) provides services for women. The case sample was drawn from cases which started supervision in the community in August and September 2021, meaning West Sussex PDU was operating under an exceptional delivery model to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the subsequent prioritisation framework which was introduced in January 2022. This framework allows regional probation directors to have flexibility to respond to ongoing demand management and capacity pressures.

1. Organisational delivery

The head of West Sussex Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) is visible and approachable and there is an effective strategic link between the Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) region and the PDU. The ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is evident across the PDU, and recovery has been hindered by disruptions related to unification and ongoing staffing shortages. Nevertheless, staff in West Sussex report feeling that the PDU has an open culture in which they feel safe to challenge.

Despite there being clear strengths in the leadership of West Sussex PDU, the domain two case management data demonstrates that the effectiveness of this leadership is yet to be seen in the form of impactful service delivery. In our case reviews, across three of the domain two standards – assessment, planning and implementation – fewer than half of cases we inspected were deemed to have had a sufficient focus on keeping people safe. In the remaining standard – reviewing – it was only just over half at 54 per cent. Furthermore, medium-risk cases consistently scored lower than low and high risk, and this is a serious concern.

While average caseloads across the PDU do not appear to be excessive when considering the workload measurement tool (WMT), in our probation practitioner interviews, 79 per cent of staff told us that their workload was “not so” or “not at all” manageable. This was echoed in our interviews with staff, some of whom described the situation as the “worst it’s ever been”. Nonetheless, other staff spoke with enthusiasm and passion about their work, and feel positive about the future.

Current staffing difficulties are significantly increasing the pressure on administrative staff. Whilst managers told us a training package had been provided, administrative staff we spoke to told us that they had received no training or additional support ahead of unification.

Senior probation officers (SPOs) have substantial workloads, reporting that they were having to undertake aspects of service delivery, such as undertaking breach reports and supervision sessions with people on probation, which should be undertaken by frontline practitioners. Nonetheless, case-focused and reflective supervision is happening regularly, and in our interviews, staff spoke highly of the support they get from SPOs. Unfortunately, management oversight on sentence management has suffered as a consequence of SPO workloads and we found in our review of cases for domain two that management oversight was deemed insufficient, ineffective or absent in 60 per cent of cases.

The views of people on probation are not routinely sought to help analyse, review and develop services. While early plans are in place to improve this, it is a significant gap. The arrangements for key aspects of service delivery, specifically the exchange of risk and safeguarding information, are working effectively with police and children’s services, but not as well with commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS) providers.

Strengths:

- The head of the PDU is visible and approachable.
- Staff report feeling that the PDU has an open culture in which they feel safe to challenge.
- Staff at all grades report feeling well supported by their colleagues.

- Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their work; despite the multitude of challenges they currently face.
- Staff are clearly able to identify the areas of work they are being asked to prioritise and this creates a sense of security for staff.

Areas for improvement:

- The views of people on probation should be routinely sought to help analyse, review and develop services.
- Delivery plans should be better informed by people on probation.
- Staff should be supported to improve service delivery.
- Sharing of appropriate risk information with CRS providers should be improved.
- Feedback from practitioners showed that 79 per cent felt their workload was not manageable and further work should be undertaken to ensure staff feel their workloads are manageable.
- SPOs should be supported to ensure they are not having to hold cases in their own names.
- All cases should be allocated to a suitable probation practitioner.

1.1. Leadership



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

Requires improvement

In making a judgement about leadership, we take into account the answers to the following three questions together with the results of our review of cases against the domain two standards. A key element of leadership is the ability to deliver results in practice and therefore we operate a decision rule which means that if the results from each area of the domain two standard are inadequate or requires improvement then performance against the leadership standard can only be rated inadequate or requires improvement. For West Sussex PDU that decision rule is in operation which has resulted in a rating for leadership of 'Requires improvement'.

Does the vision and strategy of the PDU leadership team drive effectively the delivery of high-quality services for all people on probation?

It is clear that the head of the PDU is visible, approachable and well thought of by many staff. There is an effective strategic link between the KSS region and the PDU, although this does appear to be a 'command and control' approach passed nationally down to the region. In the short-term this may be viewed as necessary, given early pressures on the newly unified service, including the Covid-19 pandemic, staffing shortages and high workloads, but it gave the head of PDU very little autonomy over decision-making locally.

Unsurprisingly, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is evident across the PDU. Recovery from the pandemic has been hindered by the demands of unification and continued staffing shortages. Nevertheless, staff reported feeling that the PDU has an open culture in which they feel safe to challenge. We found that staff across all grades remain enthusiastic and passionate about their work, despite the multitude of challenges they currently face. Staff at all grades were clear about what they need to prioritise and, while some did not agree with the specified priorities, clear and effective leadership has resulted in a staffing group that, surprisingly, appeared to be positive and optimistic about the future.

The vision and strategy to work together to protect the public and victims, improve services and reduce reoffending is set out in the KSS regional business plan. The plan commits the PDU to “enable people to be their best, promote an open learning culture, transform through partnerships and modernise estates and technology” as per the principles outlined in HM Prison and Probation Service’s (HMPPS’s) business plan. Evidence of the strategic link between West Sussex PDU and the wider KSS region can be seen in the West Sussex PDU mobilisation plan, within which activities across the PDU are allocated timeframes and are red, amber or green (RAG) rated.

Many of the policies, structures and procedures that are designed regionally have little or no consideration for the local adaptations that may be required in this PDU. However, the direction from the KSS region has been embraced by the PDU head, who recognises the benefits of this approach in the short-term, and has communicated this well to all other staff in the PDU. This was evident in staff being able to clearly outline the priorities in our interviews.

West Sussex PDU is currently adhering to a “prioritising probation framework” which prioritises the following areas of work: four-weekly contact for all cases, four-weekly, in person, contact for high and very high-risk cases, prioritising cases with safeguarding or domestic abuse concerns who do not have a contact recorded in the preceding three months, missing risk of harm registrations, Offender Assessment System (OASys) completions (initial assessments and cases which do not have a full layer three assessment that should have), outstanding enforcement, unflagged multi-agency public protection arrangement registration and reallocation of tier A and B (high and very high risk) cases who have been retired under the unified tiering model and are allocated to a probation service officer (PSO) or an officer holding the professional qualification in probation (PQiP).

The focus on quality and effective practice is not currently being realised. This, in part, is because there are only 2.8 Quality Development Officers (QDOs) in place across the whole KSS region. We heard that where QDO input had been provided to practitioners, the quality of assessments was much improved.

The head of the PDU is a strong advocate of The Probation Service and it is clear that there are both formal and informal engagement opportunities for staff to engage with him. The shared commitment to making improvements to service delivery is evident when speaking to staff and partner agencies. Partner agencies say they have good relationships with staff, albeit they recognise that these have changed as a result of unification. Nonetheless, we note that where in-person joint working between probation practitioners and partner agencies takes place, service provision is better both in terms of desistance and helping to reduce risk of serious harm, particularly in women’s services.

The PDU does need to make improvements to information sharing around relevant risk and safeguarding information with CRS partners, who would benefit from having

more detail about offences and relevant information to support the person on probation's desistance. However, we are encouraged to see that risk and safeguarding information is being sought from other partners. For children's safeguarding, checks had been made in 67 per cent of cases. For domestic abuse, it was better, and checks were sought in 73 per cent of the cases we looked at. The PDU also effectively communicates with courts to support service delivery. They are influenced at a regional level through the wider HMPPS arrangements but there is evidence of local engagement via sentencer forums.

We saw no evidence that a strategic approach to meeting diverse needs is in place. Although we saw evidence of arrangements being made where needs were identified, such as enhanced women's services, this appeared to be a reactive response, rather than a proactive or strategic piece of work. Similarly, there is no evidence of PDU leadership being deliberately involved in work to diversify the workforce and ensure a diverse range of needs are being met. While regional diversity initiatives such as having diverse interview panels for recruitment are a good start, more work could be done at a local level to increase the emphasis on diversity.

There is a significant gap in work to address issues of equality, inclusion and engagement with people on probation. Again, we have heard the early plans to develop these aspects of work, but there is no time frame allocated for delivery.

Despite strong leadership in the PDU, our review of cases in domain two demonstrates that effective arrangements and clear local delivery plans have not translated the vision and strategy into frontline practice, particularly relating to keeping other people safe. In our case reviews, across assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery, over half of all cases inspected were deemed to not have had a sufficient focus on safety.

Are potential risks to service delivery anticipated and planned for in advance?

Transition to a unified service occurred in June 2021. Throughout this time, the service has been experiencing the ongoing impact of restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Governance in the KSS region centres around six transition-related areas, and the regional risk register is used to manage and review progress. In West Sussex PDU, this is supported by a localised risk register which identifies key risks including: estates and facilities management, transition, performance and quality, people and information assurance.

Overall, risks to service delivery are well understood, and the mitigations and controls to manage service delivery are decided regionally. They are well executed by the PDU head, and we saw encouraging evidence of the head of PDU being proactive in workforce planning across his PDU, particularly in relation to staffing levels across offices. While it was clear that this did not act as a formal workforce planning tool, the information is used to help inform regional workforce planning.

The return to in-person service provision has been steadily increasing as Covid-19 restrictions have been easing. This is a welcome change and in our review of cases in domain two, 55 per cent of cases had the level and nature of contact offered that was sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm.

We heard that the PDU felt frustrated about the "fetish for immediacy" from centralised HMPPS directives, particularly when it came to changes to systems, processes or staffing. We share this frustration and have seen the impact of this on

local service delivery, particularly in relation to the workload of SPOs. This demonstrates the importance of undertaking proper impact analysis to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Does the PDU ensure the delivery model meets effectively the needs of all people on probation?

Strategic relationships with key stakeholders and partners across the PDU's area have suffered due to the scale of change resulting from Covid-19 restrictions, unification and the introduction of the prioritising probation framework. It is acknowledged that much of this is outside of the control of West Sussex PDU, and we did see promising attempts to develop local relationships. For example, CRS providers told us they felt welcome and able to access probation offices across West Sussex PDU, for the purpose of being co-located with probation practitioners. We heard, for example, how the accommodation service provision, was much more effective for people on probation when CRS providers were able to work alongside probation practitioners in person.

Delivery plans in West Sussex PDU reflect the regional model, but we also saw a good example of a local initiative in the breakfast club. Probation service provision in West Sussex PDU is divided into four teams; however, this does not include the specialist teams that the PDU intend to implement eventually - linked to wider initiatives across the KSS region. We did not see evidence of plans to ensure these teams also reflect local needs.

Staff engagement events and briefings take place to promote staff understanding of what they are accountable for delivering. It was clear that staff understood what was required of them. Unfortunately, during the inspection, we saw no evidence that the PDU are taking account of the views of people on probation and delivery plans do not sufficiently take account of their views.

Our own consultation with people on probation showed that they feel their probation officer (PO) is accessible but are experiencing a revolving door of probation practitioners (PPs). They reported that effective signposting is dependent on a good probation practitioner, with half of people on probation feeling unsupported with access to services, and nobody we spoke to felt they had a say in the way probation is run. People on probation highlighted they wanted face-to-face contact, and also to feel safe in probation offices. While some of the feedback from people on probation is positive, it also highlights that there is work to be done around continuity of probation practitioners, and consultation with people on probation, to ensure their views are sought and utilised to inform service delivery in the PDU.

1.2. Staff



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

Inadequate

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following four questions. A key element of staffing is whether staff within the PDU are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all

people on probation. For West Sussex PDU, we have assessed this not to be the case which has resulted in a rating for staffing of 'Inadequate'.

Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation?

The target staffing model is not currently known by the PDU, and this is having a clear impact on their ability to undertake appropriate workforce planning. It was clear that, as much as possible, PDU staffing levels are planned, reviewed and changes are made to meet demand, for example through the offer of overtime to staff and the prioritising probation framework. Nevertheless, there is a serious staffing issue across West Sussex PDU.

According to data provided by the PDU, the average caseload is 39 for POs (124 per cent according to the WMT) and 52 for PSOs (124 per cent according to WMT). Caseloads in the PDU are high and across the board, staff said that their caseloads were not manageable. In our probation practitioner interviews, 79 per cent of staff told us that their workload was "not so" or "not at all" manageable, and 42 per cent of staff told us they were responsible for 61+ cases.

We also heard that SPOs were holding large numbers of cases in their own names, which distorts the true workload figures shown in the WMT. While some staff described the situation as the "worst it's ever been", many also acknowledged the support from their colleagues, managers, and in some cases from the head of PDU. There is clearly a serious staffing issue, the gravity of which should not be underestimated, in terms of impact upon staff welfare and service delivery.

The current staffing difficulties are significantly increasing the pressure on administrative staff. Administration staff workloads were described as "massive" and were impacted both by the shortage of probation practitioners, and also by a recruitment freeze for band 1 staff. Currently, reception staff are not able to be recruited. The cumulative effect of these pressures is that administration staff are overwhelmed with their workloads and report struggling with the competing demands on their time. This may be exacerbated by the reported lack of training and/or preparation for them having to take on processes inherited either from legacy Community Rehabilitation Services (CRC) or legacy National Probation Service (NPS) workstreams. Administrators describe having no preparation for this, and having to self-manage the changes day by day.

Likewise, SPOs report having workloads that mean they are unable to provide the level of oversight to both staff and practice improvement that they would like. They report that this makes them anxious that "something could be missed". They do, however, feel well supported, and feel that the value of the work, their colleagues and their teams are the reasons they remain so positive, despite such challenging circumstances.

We were pleased to hear that three new staff are due to join the Worthing office. However, across Sussex there are 26 PSO vacancies and a 20-week (or four-month) wait for vetting. This includes vetting for a receptionist who has been successful in obtaining a PSO role. This is undoubtedly having an impact on the PDU's ability to retain staff to whom offers of employment have been made, and echoes findings from previous inspections which indicate the problem of vetting delay is not improving.

Alternative workload demand options are provided to PDUs as part of the prioritising probation framework and these are in place at West Sussex PDU. The priorities of

the framework are to see people on probation for a timely initial contact and then at least monthly, and ensure risk assessments are being completed. Current staffing levels and the associated workloads do not allow for a suitable focus on the quality of this work.

Do the skills and profile of staff support the delivery of a high-quality service for all people on probation?

The workforce of West Sussex PDU does not reflect the local population. A disproportionate percentage of the workforce (86 per cent) are female, but 10 per cent are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background compared with the non-white population in West Sussex which is estimated to be 6.2 per cent. In West Sussex PDU, the proportion of people on probation who are black, Asian or minority ethnic is 9.5 per cent.

Of the four teams across West Sussex PDU, there are currently no specialist teams, but there are plans for these to be implemented eventually. Specialist provision for women through women-only caseloads is currently available, and having a positive impact, although staff report that their caseloads are so high that any associated positive weighting to their workload on the workload management tool is meaningless in practice.

According to data provided by the PDU, the staff attrition rate is 12 per cent per year. However, we heard that the majority of this is made up of PSO-grade staff, many of whom have moved into PQiP roles. Currently there are 11 PQiPs in the PDU, which is good evidence of the PDU developing their staff. The overall vacancy rate is reported to be 16 per cent. The true figure is likely to be higher, but will not be known until updated staffing figures are provided to the PDU.

There has been an attempt to maintain staff training, with online platforms being utilised to deliver this throughout the pandemic. However, progress on mandatory training post-unification to enable mixed caseloads, has been slow, with only one third of staff having been 'signed off' on this training. In our probation practitioner interviews, 53 per cent of respondents felt that they always had the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to supervise the case in question.

There is a KSS regional 'equalities roadmap' and within that there is a section on 'Creating a Diverse Workforce'. It outlines attempts to build a more diverse recruitment panel. While there are also diversity champions across the region, it is not clear what the PDU is doing to actively promote more diversity within the workforce. The primary focus for the PDU currently is filling posts that are vacant and not prioritising diversity.

Volunteers had been used to promote women-only services via the User Voice provision, and this had been an important part of advocating and securing women-only services. We would encourage further use of volunteers within the PDU to promote local links.

Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?

A culture of learning and continuous improvement has been hampered by the staffing shortages being felt across the PDU. However, there are encouraging examples of staff being promoted into other roles, for instance from receptionist to administrator and from probation practitioner to SPO. There are also internal training opportunities available.

Despite the pressure on SPO resource, staff describe receiving effective case-focused supervision that addresses both their welfare and their practice. SPOs have raised concerns about the use of the 'touchpoints' supervision model, which was developed in the former National Probation Service (NPS), and they felt it is no longer relevant in the unified service due to the length and complexity of it. A possible consequence of this is that in our review of cases for domain two, management oversight was deemed insufficient, ineffective or absent in 60 per cent of cases. We would encourage a review of the suitability of this model, to ensure its relevance given the structure and mixed workloads within the new service. Staff development and appraisal policies are in place at a regional level, and some wider opportunities for development do exist, for example through QDO roles. These roles should be filled, as we saw QDO oversight of probation practitioner work having a positive impact upon quality. There are also encouraging stories of promotion-centred mentoring being available to black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

Access to in-service training has been partly suspended due to the prioritising probation framework being implemented. We have not seen any evidence of training provision being made for administrative staff, to prepare them for mixed caseloads and the changes to the associated administrative processes.

The strategy to ensure that all staff have equitable access to promotion opportunities is not yet fully implemented. The Ministry of Justice's talent and capability strategy commits services to leadership and capability development. A competency-based framework is being introduced in April 2022 to support staff to move up their pay band each year. The core quality management framework is a national framework, supporting regional quality management activity.

Do managers pay sufficient attention to staff engagement?

Whilst reward and recognition may be being used, we have not seen evidence of exceptional work regularly being recognised by managers. However, we do see that staff are motivated to deliver a high-quality service and are engaged in the wider vision of the PDU. Given their current workloads and the associated impact upon welfare, this is surprising.

Some PQiPs within the PDU are from the existing PSO staff group and a number of those vacancies have subsequently been filled by staff from administrative teams. While positive in terms of staff development opportunities, this has added to the staffing pressure across the PDU, which is compounded by the reported 20-week wait to complete the vetting process for both new and existing staff.

There is a focus on staff well-being and engagement, via a Microsoft Teams channel, team-bonding initiatives, wellbeing rooms and resources such as table tennis tables purchased for the PDU's offices. However, some staff feel that these measures are tokenistic, and the real issue is their workload. As such, many of the initiatives are ineffective in terms of the positive impact they are having on staff wellbeing. This is in equal part because staff must manage their workloads, but also, to their credit, because they feel unable to deliver the high-quality service that they want to.

Staff report to being afforded reasonable adjustments if they are required.

1.3. Services



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

Inadequate

In making a judgement about services, we take into account both the answers to the following three questions and also the rating given to implementation and delivery in the domain two cases reviews. Services have been rated 'Inadequate' because the range and quality of services do not support a tailored and responsive service for all people on probation, and the majority of the ratings in our domain two case reviews were also 'Inadequate'.

Are the right volume, range and quality of services in place to meet the needs of people on probation?

Characteristics of inspected cases³

Percentage of caseload who are female	14%
Percentage of inspected cases who are black, Asian or minority ethnic	8%
Percentage of inspected cases with a disability	49%
Number of inspected cases where inspectors identified drug misuse problems	18
Number of inspected cases where inspectors identified alcohol misuse problems	26
Number of accredited programme requirements for individuals convicted of a sexual offence that have not commenced ⁴	27
Number of accredited programme requirements that have not commenced, other than for individuals convicted of a sexual offence	138
Average waiting time before commencing a rehabilitation activity requirement (RAR)	10.7 weeks
Percentage of unpaid work requirements with hours outstanding beyond 12 months	28%

³ HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection data.

⁴ Data supplied by The Probation Service.

Unpaid work (UPW) continues to be a challenge, but there were reassuring advances in the delivery and completion of UPW requirements in our case assessments. We were encouraged to hear that attendee numbers on UPW projects will increase to eight per supervisor, however due to staffing shortages, this cannot yet be achieved. At the time of the inspection announcement, there were 547 cases with a UPW requirement. In 152 of those, the requirement had been imposed more than 12 months ago. The average UPW stand-down rate was four per cent.

The restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic continue to have a significant impact on the delivery of accredited programmes, but the critical issue is the waiting lists. While commendable efforts are being made to deliver to as many people as possible, there are substantial waiting lists. We were again encouraged to hear that group sizes will be increased from three participants to five at the end of March 2022. Successful completion rates for accredited programmes is 41 per cent. We recognise that significant waiting lists are not a West Sussex PDU-specific issue; where accredited programmes cannot be delivered because individuals do not meet the HMPPS prioritisation criteria, the work is returned to the probation practitioner and the use of toolkits⁵ is encouraged.

Probation practitioners report insufficient time to deliver any meaningful one-to-one work themselves, and there is an 11-week wait for commencement of RAR work. The cumulative effect is that little to no meaningful reducing re-offending work is being delivered and this is evidenced in the domain two data. Once again, management oversight regarding delivery and quality assurance of one-to-one work is lacking. Some practitioners report not feeling confident in delivering toolkits due to a lack of training. The PDU head outlines that the toolkits are designed to be used by practitioners with no further toolkit-specific training required.

Services commissioned under the newly established CRS are developing well, but remain in the early stages, and continue to be hampered by restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. CRS providers report that while the quality of referrals have been steadily improving since transition in June 2021, they remain concerned about the lack of access to risk information. This had been hampered by their loss (in most cases) of access to nDelius and OASys following transition to the unified service.

CRS providers report that the number of referrals to their services are, in some cases, 150-200 per cent higher than projected. The result of this is waiting lists and financial penalties for not being able to offer an initial appointment within 10 days of referral as per the service level target. CRS providers have service level targets based on timeliness of the first and then a follow-up appointment. They have no targets regarding outcomes or quality, although we heard that in some instances, these areas have a more informal oversight arrangement by contract managers. We have seen no evidence of targeted service provision based on the profile of people on probation; increasing the use of volunteers may be a way of addressing this.

Services and support for the additional needs associated with protected characteristics is limited; not all diversity factors or issues of disproportionality are

⁵ An Approved Suite of Probation Practitioner Toolkits (ASPPT) can be delivered as standalone resources and in addition to other intervention offers via Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR), licence conditions and some sentence management appointment activities.

sufficiently identified or addressed. While there is some unique and specialised intervention for women in the Inspire model, the focus on addressing race inequalities is less clear. The people on probation we spoke to report a varied experience with signposting. Those surveyed by text reported much better access to services and in general a better experience with signposting than those who were interviewed in person, by User Voice, on our behalf.

In our review of cases for domain two, the implementation and delivery of services did not support the person on probation's desistance in 42 per cent of cases. Similarly, local services to engage, support and sustain desistance during the sentence were only used in 30 per cent of the cases that were assessed. Encouragingly, in our interviews with probation practitioners, 91 per cent of respondents indicated that, for the case in question, they always or most of the time had access to an appropriate range of services to meet the needs and risks of the person on probation.

Are relationships with providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services to people on probation?

Relationships with both police and safeguarding services are clearly effective – this can be seen in the domain two data. Encouragingly, risk information is being sought regarding domestic abuse checks; these had been undertaken in 73 per cent of the cases we looked at. For children's safeguarding, checks had been undertaken in 67 per cent of cases. Unfortunately, the information gained from these checks is not always used to inform the person on probation's risk assessment or sentence plans.

In interviews, staff tell us that they do not have time to deliver interventions in supervision and are often directed to complete appointments within 15 minutes. Many staff feel disappointed and disheartened by this, and they describe situations where they choose to go against this instruction in order to undertake meaningful work with those most in need. We found that in the cases we assessed, 52 per cent had services delivered that are not those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance, which may be evidence of probation practitioners' lack of time to deliver interventions.

Two out of the three sentencers we surveyed said that courts were kept up to date with the outcomes of work undertaken by The Probation Service very well. While courts are happy with the service provision in courts, they also reported wanting information about the efficacy and outcomes of sentences imposed, and more information regarding completion rates, particularly in regard to unpaid work and accredited programmes. Probation court staff report that while they are aware of waiting times for accredited programmes, they have been encouraged not to make reference to these to sentencers and to recommend programmes as usual, despite knowing there will be a likelihood of non-completion.

Resettlement

The offender management in custody (OMiC) model, designed for those serving longer-term sentences, remains problematic and the perception of staff is that there is a complex relationship between the resettlement and OMiC models which they reported having little or no time to get to understand. Consequently, those with longer sentences are less likely to receive the service they should expect from the OMiC model.

Given the challenges of unification and the Covid-19 pandemic both to resettlement and to service delivery more widely, it is perhaps not surprising that improvement is required in this area. In only 42 per cent of the post-release cases we assessed, was the community probation practitioner deemed to have ensured a proportionate level of contact with the prisoner before release. Further, in only 42 per cent of cases had the community probation practitioner addressed key risk of harm needs before release. More encouragingly though, we were pleased to see that in 67 per cent of cases, the community probation practitioner was assessed to have addressed the key resettlement or desistance needs before release.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all people on probation.

Requires improvement

In making a judgement about information and facilities, we take into account the answers to the following four questions. We have assessed that information and facilities sufficiently support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all people on probation and have therefore rated this as 'Requires improvement'.

Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

HMPPS's performance and quality strategy outlines the regional structure in PDUs across England. The West Sussex performance priority assurance document provides PDU performance information on agreements made under the prioritising probation framework. Dashboard data provides information regarding targets and completions, which in many areas is RAG-rated red. There is a lack of information available regarding the quality or effectiveness of service delivery.

Learning is communicated in a range of ways, including but not limited to, regular 'huddle' meetings, Microsoft Teams channels, video briefings from the PDU head and online training events. Staff report a desire to return to in-person training and briefing events and feel fatigued by the number of online events. The results of the cases reviewed for domain two are not demonstrative of effective learning being embedded and translating into frontline practice; this may be a consequence of the reported feelings of fatigue.

The views of CRS providers are obtained both informally via conversations between staff, and also formally via contract managers. However, it is not clear what impact this is having on making improvements to service delivery and there are frustrated messages from CRS providers about contractual information and clarity from the centre being slow, or in some cases, non-existent. The views of people on probation are not routinely sought to help analyse, review and develop services, while they have been in the past, this is currently a significant gap.

There is strong evidence of service improvement plans covering both the PDU and the region, but these are wholly reliant on stable staffing levels being achieved and, as a result, lack meaningful timelines. Our concern is that, if staffing levels do not improve, the plans for service delivery enhancements cannot and will not be realised.

This will undoubtedly have a significant impact on PDU leaders, staff and people on probation.

Do the policies and guidance in place enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

Policies and guidance are primarily set at a national or regional level, and communicated to all staff through EQuIP (education and quality in practice) and regular email updates. There was no evidence of a service directory or localised policies and guidance regarding the full range of locally commissioned services, their suitability for individual people on probation and the referral processes which would help probation practitioners to understand which services may be suitable to refer to, and which not. This would avoid unsuitable referrals being received and returned by CRS providers.

Diversity information is collected at a regional rather than PDU level, but there is diversity information relating to people on probation contained within the PDU organisational data; it was unclear whether the PDU does anything with this data.

There are regular briefings for all staff across the PDU, but staff also feel that they are able to approach their line managers and senior managers, about issues or concerns they have. The feedback regarding the blended approach to work, termed the smarter working initiative, is mixed. The availability of Microsoft Teams has clearly helped improve attendance at meetings and made all staff events easier for staff to attend. Previously, these types of events would have involved a significant amount of travel for many, given the geography of West Sussex PDU. However, staff also make frequent reference to having reached 'saturation' point in terms of the number of emails about policies, procedures and organisational change; to the extent that many people have stopped reading them all together.

Do the premises and offices enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

There is evidence of a strategic approach to ensuring offices are safe and a clear attempt at maximising the engagement of staff via staff awaydays and regular 'huddle' meetings. Where there is positive feedback about blended working, it is that the use of Microsoft Teams has increased the ability for staff shortages across courts to be better managed. Overwhelmingly though, staff want to return to offices, and to face-to-face training and team meetings.

Premises within West Sussex PDU are accessible for all staff and people on probation. Those that are not are due to close imminently. Feedback from people on probation shows they felt safe in probation offices and they feel they can have private conversations within them.

Our concern relating to offices is that staff located within them do not have a shared probation service function. Instead they are referred to, still, as CRC and NPS buildings and this appears to be hampering the development of a one-service culture across the PDU.

Do the information and communication technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all people on probation?

Performance information is collected and analysed at both a regional and PDU level, and the PDU head demonstrates a clear understanding of the nuances relating to

performance. Performance data is collected via the dashboard, and is presented by individual PDU. The purpose of this is to track performance against targets, and comparisons are made between the PDUs which make up the wider KSS region. ICT systems are able to generate appropriate management information which can be broken down to inform PDU leads about the performance of teams and even an individual's performance.

Management information includes some data regarding protected characteristics, but this is limited to women and those with a black, Asian or minority ethnic background.

Learning obtained via serious further offences appeared to be well understood. However, there are examples of staff feeling isolated and unsupported by senior managers in the process of being interviewed for, and implementing learning from, these incidents.

The roll-out of, and access to, the Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) to probation staff has been delayed and this again, appears to be due to delays in vetting. Long delays are being experienced, particularly since Warwickshire Police have been awarded the contract to undertake ViSOR vetting for the KSS region. However, all POs and PSOs have both laptops and mobile phones. Staff feel that this is sufficient to facilitate their work.

Feedback from people on probation

For the purpose of this inspection, we undertook surveys (conducted via text message) and interviews with people on probation in the West Sussex area. In general, the experiences of people on probation who were interviewed on our behalf by User Voice greatly contrasted with the responses from the survey. It is important to note that the research sample did not reach a wide variety of people on probation. Most notably, the entire sample was 96 per cent white and did not include anybody under the age of 30, with two in three being over 50.

A high turnover of probation practitioners affected the experience of people on probation negatively. A good handover is therefore essential when practitioners are changed. Of those who answered our survey, 48 per cent stated their 'relationship with their probation practitioner' when asked 'what has been good about your probation experience?' In general, people in West Sussex have a positive experience with their practitioner. However, 20 per cent of the interviewees had a distinctly negative experience.

Probation practitioner performance is 'make or break' for people on probation's experience and rehabilitation. Continuity and active support are key and people on probation mainly want face-to-face contact. However, this also depends on individual preference and areas that impact their life, such as social anxiety. The frequency of contact wanted depended on the individual, though most wanted monthly appointments.

What people get out of their appointment is dependent on the level of support they need. Those that are more independent and have fewer support needs want less contact. When asked, 88 per cent of people on probation agreed that appointments are within a reasonable travelling distance. This may have been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and subsequent phone appointments.

People interviewed had a varied experience with signposting to services. Those responding to our survey said they had much better access to services and in general a better experience with signposting and found the services to be both accessible and relevant to their personal needs. Those interviewed had more varied

experiences; some interviewees found that their needs have not been met, specifically with housing.

The majority of those interviewed were not required to attend UPW as part of their order; when they did, interviewees had generally negative experiences with UPW. No person on probation interviewed said that they felt like they have a say in how probation is run. However, 84 per cent of survey respondents stated that probation had asked for their views about being on supervision.

Over 50 per cent of people on probation interviewed stated that nothing has been positive with their experience on probation, whereas five per cent of those surveyed stated they had no positive experiences. Of those surveyed, 91 per cent stated they were happy with the support they received from probation. Good support and relevant signposting can be the catalyst that allows an individual to 'change their life' (User Voice, PoP Report, March 2022).

The overall feedback from people on probation in West Sussex is therefore mixed and highlights the necessity for the PDU to begin to engage with people on probation to inform high-quality and localised service delivery.

Diversity and inclusion

Diversity information is collected at a regional rather than PDU level, but there is comprehensive diversity information relating to people on probation contained within the PDU performance reports. There is limited evidence to demonstrate the extent to which PDU leadership is deliberately involved in work around diversifying the workforce and ensuring a diverse range of needs are being met.

While regional diversity initiatives such as having diverse interview panels for recruitment are a good start, more work needs to be done at a local level to increase the emphasis on diversity. There is a regional 'equalities roadmap' and within that there is a section on 'Creating a Diverse Workforce'. It outlines attempts to build a more diverse recruitment panel and, while there are also diversity champions across the region, it is again not clear what the PDU is doing to actively promote more diversity.

Given the way recruitment is undertaken, prioritising diversity is more within the remit of the region than the PDU, Services and support for protected characteristics is limited and not all diversity factors or issues of disproportionality are sufficiently identified or addressed. While there is a unique and specialised intervention for women in the Inspire model, there is less of a focus on addressing race inequalities.

2. Court work and case supervision

We inspected 40 community sentence cases and 12 post-release supervision cases, who started supervision in the community in August and September 2021. We inspected 18 relevant court reports arising from those cases. We examined the quality of assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing in each case. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of engaging the person on probation and addressing issues relevant to offending and desistance. The quality of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory. We also inspected the outcomes achieved for people on probation and, while we do not provide a judgement, we do provide data on these results.

In three elements – assessment, implementation and delivery, and planning, we found that questions about the management of risk of harm and keeping other people safe scored poorly. Despite there being signs of positive practice in other areas such as engaging the person on probation and supporting desistance, as a consequence of low scoring in the aforementioned, all three of these elements were rated as 'inadequate'. In reviewing, the score for keeping other people safe was better and as such this element was rated as 'Requires improvement'.

Across West Sussex Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) 67 per cent of all cases, and 73 per cent of the community sentence cases at the time of the inspection, were assessed as a medium risk of harm. Of the cases we inspected, nine per cent of community cases and one per cent of post-release cases were assessed as low risk. 15 per cent of community cases and 45 per cent of post-release cases were assessed as high risk of harm. None of the cases we reviewed were assessed as posing a very high risk of serious harm.

In addition to this, we looked at twelve multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) registered cases. Of these, four were category two eligible cases and they were all post-release. The eight MAPPA category one cases we reviewed were a mix of seven subject to a community order and one post-release. The four cases subject to integrated offender management were also a mix, with three community and one post-release case. Due to the low numbers, it is not possible to say conclusively whether multi-agency work resulted in cases being managed more effectively.

Key data

Case supervision

Strengths:

- The reports provided to the court to aid decision-making are of good quality.
- Safeguarding and domestic abuse checks are routinely undertaken.
- Reviewing of cases is the strongest element of case work.

Areas for improvement:

- Management of medium-risk cases needs to be improved.
- Information obtained from domestic abuse and safeguarding checks is not routinely used to inform risk management plans so these should be improved to include this information.
- Contact with people on probation prior to release from custody is poor and the level of contact made pre-release should be improved.

2.1 Court work



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

Requires improvement

Our rating for court work is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against the key question:

Key question	Score
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?⁶	59%

West Sussex PDU was rated as 'Requires improvement' for court work. As part of our inspection of court work, we assessed 18 court reports, 37 per cent of which were short-format written reports without an Offender Assessment System (OASys) assessment. Of these, five were assessed as medium risk of serious harm, two as high and none as low. We also assessed 11 oral reports with a written record on file. Of these, 10 were assessed as medium risk of harm and one as low.

Work in the following areas was the strongest that we saw. Firstly, in 89 per cent of the cases we reviewed, the individual was involved meaningfully in the preparation of the report, and their views were considered. Secondly, in 83 per cent of the cases we reviewed, the advice considered factors related to the likelihood of reoffending and related to risk of harm. Finally, we found that in 83 per cent of the cases we reviewed, there was a sufficient record of the advice given, and the reasons for it.

However, we do have concerns about safeguarding and police checks in court work. In 56 per cent of the cases we assessed, the information and advice provided did not sufficiently draw on available sources of information, including child safeguarding and domestic abuse information. Further, in 44 per cent of the cases we assessed, there was evidence that enquiries were not made to children's services when they should have been. In 53 per cent of cases, domestic abuse checks were not made.

Despite this, we were encouraged by the number of cases (83 per cent) in which we assessed that the advice did consider factors related to risk of harm. At the time of

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band.

the inspection, questions relating to police and safeguarding checks fall into the 'information only' category of our assessment and as such, the impact of this has not necessarily been reflected in the scores related to court work. Nonetheless, it is critical that work is done across the PDU to ensure police and safeguarding checks are undertaken as a matter of routine, and that information is appropriately used to inform court work, assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing.

2.2. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating⁷ for assessment is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	63%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	61%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	47%

The lowest score for the key questions was 47 per cent; this relates to whether assessment focuses sufficiently on keeping other people safe. As a result, the score falls within the 'Inadequate' ratings band and the PDU has been rated as 'Inadequate' overall for assessment.

A good risk assessment is evidence based and uses statistical evidence, informed by research, into likely risk factors for the type of offending. It is also individualised. In terms of engaging the person on probation, and linking offending to desistance, the domain two data indicated that over 60 per cent were satisfactory. However, assessment is a critical element of being able to keep people safe and forms the foundations of a risk management plan that uses supportive and restrictive processes to reduce the risk and impact of further harm. Therefore, it is critically important that a risk assessment sufficiently focuses on keeping other people safe.

The cases that scored higher in this area were those assessments that identified the strengths and protective factors of the person on probation and those assessments in which the person on probation was meaningfully involved in their assessment and their views taken into account. Reassuringly, safeguarding checks and domestic abuse checks were regularly being undertaken. For domestic abuse checks, these

⁷ 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.

were sought in 73 per cent of the cases we looked at. For children’s safeguarding, checks were made in 67 per cent of cases.

Our primary concern regarding assessment of risk relates to those cases assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm. In our 2020 Thematic Inspection regarding serious further offences (SFOs), we identified that in 2018/19, the majority of SFO notifications for murder were being managed at a medium level of risk of serious harm. It is therefore concerning that, in all three of the summary judgement questions relating to assessment, cases assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm scored lower than those assessed as low or high risk.

2.3. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the person on probation.	Inadequate
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Our rating⁸ for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	57%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	63%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	43%

The lowest score for the key questions was 43 per cent and this again relates to whether planning focuses sufficiently on keeping people safe. As a result, the score falls within the 'Inadequate' ratings band and the PDU has been rated as 'Inadequate' overall for planning.

Concerningly, in our review of cases, we found that the focus on sufficiently engaging individuals on probation in planning only happened in just over half of cases. However, we were pleased to see that in 69 per cent of cases, planning took sufficient account of the personal circumstances of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance. Also, in 65 per cent of cases, planning took sufficient account of the readiness and motivation of the person on probation to change.

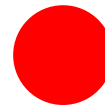
Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the concerns raised in assessment, risk of harm was an area of concern in terms of planning. We found that only 41 per cent of cases sufficiently addressed risk of harm factors and prioritised those which were most critical in the plans. This suggests that information being sought from other agencies to inform assessment is not routinely being used to inform planning.

⁸ 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.

Plans in relation to services most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance in planning was also good. We saw a number of cases where sentence plan objectives were reasonable, achievable and informed by the person on probation. We saw examples of where planning for an unpaid work placement took account of diversity needs and personal circumstances, both in terms of the location of the placement and the frequency of hours, which we highlight as an example of good practice.

Despite the priorities of the PDU set out in the prioritising probation framework, we saw a number of cases in which no initial sentence plan had been undertaken. This is likely to be a consequence of the workload pressures for staff and the frequency of staff changes, although this could be a contributing factor in all elements of domain two and is not limited to planning. It is also likely that timeliness for an initial appointment is having an impact here; for community sentences in January 2022, timeliness of the initial appointment was 65 per cent. The result was that, according to the same performance data, in January 2022 only 70 per cent of cases had a timely sentence plan.

2.4. Implementation and delivery



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

Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	77%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	58%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	39%

The lowest score for the key questions was 39 per cent; this relates to implementation and delivery supporting desistance and keeping other people safe. As a result, the PDU has been rated as 'Inadequate' overall for implementation and delivery.

We recognise that there are a number of external factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, unification and the significant staffing issues across West Sussex PDU that will have undoubtedly had an impact on the service's ability to implement and deliver. However, the introduction of the prioritising probation framework is

⁹ 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.

intended to emphasise the importance of sticking to the fundamentals of probation service delivery. That, combined with using partner agencies to assist in promoting desistance and managing risk of harm, should see implementation and delivery maintained, even in the most challenging circumstances. We heard probation practitioners reporting insufficient time to deliver any meaningful one-to-one work themselves. Add to that the 11-week wait for commencement of rehabilitation activity requirement work due to the huge number of referrals to commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS) providers, the cumulative effect is that little to no meaningful work is being delivered.

Cases that scored higher in implementation and delivery were those where positive engagement with people on probation was undertaken. We assessed that in 77 per cent of cases, the sentence or post-custody period was implemented effectively in relation to engagement with the person on probation. Additionally, in 84 per cent of cases, sufficient focus was given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation, taking into account their diversity needs. Even more encouragingly, in 94 per cent of cases, sufficient efforts were made to enable the individual to complete their sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances. This is further evidence of the desire of probation practitioners in West Sussex to remain focused on engaging people on probation and reflects what they told us in interview, that quality work is important to them.

There were three main areas of concern within implementation and delivery – home visits, coordination of agencies involved in managing and minimising harm and victim work. In 49 per cent of cases, home visits were not undertaken where necessary to support the effective management of risk of harm. In 45 per cent of cases, involvement of agencies in managing and minimising the risk of harm was not sufficiently coordinated. In 47 per cent of cases sufficient attention was not given to protecting actual and potential victims. These areas have all contributed to 61 per cent of cases we inspected not having implementation and delivery of services to effectively support the safety of other people.

Again, it is likely that the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic will have impacted upon the frequency of home visiting and engagement with victims. However, these areas are both fundamental to the ability of the PDU to keep people safe and, as such, when considered alongside the quality of assessment, raises concerns about whether the work of the PDU is adequate to effectively manage risk of harm and keep people safe.

In many of the cases we reviewed we found that there had been insufficient contact with the person on probation. This was particularly stark for pre-release contact. In cases where the level of contact had been sufficient, often the nature of the contact was lacking structure and impact, and while we accept there are reasons for this, there has inevitably been an impact on implementation and delivery.

2.5. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating¹⁰ for reviewing is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	62%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	56%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	54%

The lowest score for the key questions was 54 per cent; this relates to whether reviewing focuses sufficiently on keeping other people safe. As a result, the score falls within the 'Requires improvement' ratings band and the PDU has been rated as 'Requires improvement' overall for reviewing.

The overall picture in reviewing is better than in assessment, planning and implementation and delivery. A case should be reviewed following a significant change in circumstances or a significant event. This currently does not feature in the prioritising probation framework being adhered to by West Sussex PDU. As such, in many of the cases we reviewed, we found that while no formal review had been undertaken in OASys, ongoing reviews had been undertaken dynamically and appropriately recorded elsewhere. Cases that scored highly in reviewing had also taken account of input from other agencies (such as police and CRS providers) who were also involved in supporting the person on probation, as demonstrated in this good practice example:

Good practice example

Information regarding Simon's progress and the subsequent reviews are informed by regular feedback from the Integrated Offender Management Officer. The substance misuse service – Change Grow Live – also provides regular updates regarding Simon's progress with addressing his substance misuse. Simon is provided with positive reinforcement by his probation practitioner when progress has been made and this is clearly recorded.

¹⁰ 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.

2.6. Outcomes

Early outcomes are positive, demonstrating reasonable progress for the person on probation.

Outcomes	Percentage 'Yes'
Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	43%

We do not currently rate the outcomes standard but provide this data for information and benchmarking purposes only. Clearly, where services and interventions are not being delivered, outcomes will not be seen, and that has been the case in this inspection. Further data on outcomes can be found at annexe three, page 41.

In some of the cases we reviewed, service delivery and the resulting progress was being made because of the involvement of CRS providers. This was not due to an unwillingness of probation practitioners to complete the work, rather pressures on their time. However, CRS providers had in the region of 150-200 per cent more referrals than they were resourced for, the result being, in many of the cases we reviewed, there having been no interventions delivered at all.

Undoubtedly, this is a result of unification, the restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the underestimation of the required resources for CRS providers and widespread staffing issues. As such, while this may not be a West Sussex-specific issue, it must be recognised that the rate and scale of change being felt by The Probation Service currently, is having a catastrophic effect on what is being delivered to people on probation. In West Sussex, we saw that the practitioners themselves were disheartened and disappointed by this. They described the meaningful interactions with people on probation as the reason they joined the service and, in many cases, the hope of an eventual return to having these, was the reason they stayed.

Nine months on from unification, there remains a significant amount of work to do in continuing to address unpaid work backlogs and waiting lists for accredited programmes, upskilling staff so that they feel confident in delivering toolkits themselves, and managing the number and quality of referrals to CRS providers. There is, among other things, a necessity for the centre to consider whether CRS providers are adequately resourced to deliver the volume of services required by the PDUs.

Annexe one – Progress against previous recommendations

HM Inspectorate of Probation has made recommendations for the former Community Rehabilitation Services and National Probation Service divisions in Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) region, arising from core and thematic inspections. Since the unification of The Probation Service, we have expected The Probation Service to continue to implement these recommendations. Below are our findings from the inspection of West Sussex PDU in respect of the relevant recommendations:

Recommendation from an inspection of KSS CRC, June 2019:

Improve the quality of assessment, planning, service delivery and reviewing to help keep actual and potential victims safe

In our review of cases, the domain two data clearly demonstrates that work around planning to address risk of harm and safeguarding is poor. Whilst we were encouraged to see a high number of checks being undertaken for domestic abuse and children's safeguarding, the information from these checks were not routinely being utilised to properly inform assessments or plans. This has not been helped by the suspension of quality assurance work in the PDU.

Inspection findings: No progress

Recommendation from an inspection of KSS CRC, June 2019:

Equip all staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out effective work to keep other people safe.

Since this recommendation was made, The Probation Service has undergone reunification and, in doing so, West Sussex PDU has been newly formed. As a result, there is a focus on ensuring all staff undertake relevant training to allow 'mixed' caseloads. It is estimated that around one third of the staff in the PDU have completed this training. Concerningly, we heard instances of staff not understanding how to use the Offender Assessment System, and other examples where staff were unsure of how to assess risk. This was demonstrated, in places, by poor assessments being completed. Staff have reported being too busy to prioritise any training, and also feeling fatigued by both e-learning and training facilitated using [Microsoft] Teams. Many staff that we spoke to report a desire to return to both face-to-face training, and back to offices more frequently, so that training could be more engaging and shared across colleagues within an office environment.

Inspection findings: Some progress

Recommendation from an inspection of KSS CRC, June 2019:

Make sure that management oversight and supervision are consistent and effective in supporting responsible officers to manage public protection and safeguarding concerns. Workloads for middle managers are concerning.

We heard examples of middle managers holding high numbers of cases in their name, conducting supervision appointments with people on probation and undertaking breach reports in the evenings. This, in addition to managing their staff and undertaking all of the tasks associated with this. We were encouraged to hear the workload of middle managers is accepted to be one of the most pressing concerns and regular 'huddle' meetings are taking place to ensure middle managers

feel supported in their work. As a consequence of workloads and staff shortages, there has been a local suspension to quality assurance work, in West Sussex, this is exacerbated by their being only 2.8 quality development officers shared across the entire KSS region. Managers we spoke to did not feel they have sufficient oversight of practice and expressed anxiety about the potential for things to be missed.

Inspection findings: No progress

Recommendation from an inspection of KSS CRC, June 2019:

Enhance the delivery and coordination of resettlement activity provided to those released from custody.

In our review of cases, the domain two data highlights the deficits in coordination of resettlement activity. This is not helped by the prioritising probation framework that is currently in place across the PDU as resettlement activity does not feature as a priority.

Inspection findings: No progress

Recommendation from an inspection of KSS CRC, June 2019:

Reassure itself that the range of interventions, both accredited and non-accredited, are consistently available and are being provided to individuals subject to supervision by the CRC.

Since this recommendation was made, The Probation Service has undergone reunification and, in doing so, West Sussex PDU has been newly formed and CRCs superseded by the new national Probation Service. In addition to this, restrictions associated with the global Covid-19 pandemic have severely hampered the availability of both accredited and non-accredited interventions.

Inspection findings: No progress

Recommendation from an inspection of NPS South East & Eastern, September 2019:

Ensure that risk of serious harm screening is undertaken at court and identifies all known risk factors and potential victims.

There remain concerns about safeguarding and police checks in court work. In 56 per cent of the cases we assessed, the information and advice provided did not sufficiently draw on available sources of information, including child safeguarding and domestic abuse information. Further, in 44 per cent of the cases we assessed, there was evidence that enquiries were not made to children's services when they should have been. In 53 per cent of cases, domestic abuse checks were not made.

Inspection findings: Some progress.

Annexe two – Staffing and workload data

Data in this section is largely provided by The Probation Service. We cannot confirm its reliability, although where possible it has been verified using internal workforce planning information.

Key staffing data¹¹

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent) (FTE))	126
Total number of senior probation officers (SPOs)	11
Vacancy rate of SPO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required SPO posts)	43%
Staff attrition SPO grade only (percentage of all SPO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period)	Not known
Total number of probation officers (POs) (FTE)	39
Vacancy rate of PO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required PO posts)	22%
Staff attrition PO grade only (percentage of all PO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period)	Not known
Total number of probation service officers (PSOs) (FTE)	41
Vacancy rate of PSO grade only (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total number of required PSO posts)	44%
Staff attrition PSO grade only (percentage of all PSO-grade staff leaving in 12-month period)	Not known
Vacancy rate (total number of unfilled posts as a percentage of total staff headcount)	0%
Sickness absence rate (average days lost in previous 12 months for all staff)	Not known
Staff attrition (percentage of all staff leaving in 12-month period)	10%

¹¹ Data supplied by The Probation Service.

Caseload and workload data¹¹

Average caseload per PO (FTE)	39
Average caseload per PSO (FTE)	52
Workload management tool (WMT) average per PO	124%
WMT average per PSO	124%

Inspection workload data¹²

Proportion of POs (or equivalent) in this PDU describing workload as unmanageable	69%
Proportion of PSOs (or equivalent) in this PDU describing workload as unmanageable	88%

¹² HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection data.

Annexe three – Inspection data

In this section, questions marked * do not apply in unpaid work only cases, and questions marked ** do not apply in every case. Only the positive answers are reported in these tables, which do not include cases where the question is not applicable.

2.1 Court work	% "Yes"
Is the pre-sentence information and advice provided to court sufficiently analytical and personalised to the individual, supporting the court's decision-making?¹³	
Does the information and advice draw sufficiently on available sources of information including child safeguarding and domestic abuse information?	44%
Is the individual meaningfully involved in the preparation of the report, and are their views considered?	89%
Does the advice consider factors related to the likelihood of reoffending?	83%
Does the advice consider factors related to risk of harm? **	83%
Does the advice consider the individual's motivation and readiness to change?	72%
Does the advice consider the individual's diversity and personal circumstances?	78%
Does the advice consider the impact of the offence on known or identifiable victims?	61%
Is an appropriate proposal made to court? **	72%
Is there a sufficient record of the advice given, and the reasons for it?	83%

Questions marked ** do not apply in every case. Only positive answers are reported in this data.

¹³ This question is only answered where the PDU has prepared a court report in the 12 month period before the inspection fieldwork.

2.2. Assessment	% 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	
Does assessment analyse the motivation and readiness of the person on probation to engage and comply with the sentence?	67%
Does assessment analyse the protected characteristics of the individual and consider the impact these have on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery?	57%
Does assessment analyse the personal circumstances of the individual, and consider the impact these have on their ability to comply and engage with service delivery?	71%
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	61%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	
Does assessment identify and analyse offending-related factors?	67%
Does assessment identify the strengths and protective factors of the person on probation? **	53%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information?	67%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	57%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	51%
Does assessment analyse any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims? **	47%

2.3. Planning	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	57%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity factors of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance? **	39%
Does planning take sufficient account of the personal circumstances of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance? **	69%
Does planning take sufficient account of the readiness and motivation of the person on probation to change which may affect engagement and compliance?	65%
Does planning set out how all the requirements of the sentence or licence/post-sentence supervision will be delivered within the available timescales?	53%
Does planning set a level, pattern and type of contact sufficient to engage the individual and to support the effectiveness of specific interventions?	59%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	
Does planning sufficiently reflect offending-related factors and prioritise those which are most critical? *	47%
Does planning build on the individual's strengths and protective factors, utilising potential sources of support? **	49%
Does planning set out the services most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance?	61%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does planning sufficiently address risk of harm factors and prioritise those which are most critical? **	41%
Does planning set out the necessary constructive and/or restrictive interventions to manage the risk of harm? **	39%
Does planning make appropriate links to the work of other agencies involved with the person on probation and any multi-agency plans? **	45%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified? **	37%

2.4 Implementation and delivery	% 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	
Do the requirements of the sentence start promptly, or at an appropriate time?	67%
Is sufficient focus given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation, taking into account their diversity needs?	84%
Are sufficient efforts made to enable the individual to complete their sentence, including flexibility to take appropriate account of their personal circumstances?	94%
Are risks of non-compliance identified and addressed in a timely fashion to reduce the need for enforcement actions? **	58%
Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate? **	43%
Are sufficient efforts made to re-engage the individual after enforcement actions or recall? **	46%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	
Are the delivered services those most likely to reduce reoffending and support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	48%
Wherever possible, does the delivery of services build upon the individual's strengths and enhance protective factors? **	58%
Is the involvement of other organisations in the delivery of services sufficiently well-coordinated? * **	42%
Are key individuals in the life of the person on probation engaged where appropriate to support their desistance? * **	31%
Is the level and nature of contact sufficient to reduce reoffending and support desistance?	62%
Are local services engaged to support and sustain desistance during the sentence and beyond? * **	42%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	
Is the level and nature of contact offered sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm? **	55%
Is sufficient attention given to protecting actual and potential victims? **	39%
Is the involvement of other agencies in managing and minimising the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated? * **	35%
Are key individuals in the life of the person on probation engaged where appropriate to support the effective management of risk of harm? * **	25%
Are home visits undertaken where necessary to support the effective management of risk of harm? * **	29%

Prompts relevant to post-custody cases only:	
Post-custody cases only: Did the community offender manager ensure a proportionate level of contact with the prisoner before release?	12%
Post-custody cases only: Did the community offender manager address the key resettlement or desistance needs before release?	20%
Post-custody cases only: Did the community offender manager address key risk of harm needs before release?	12%

2.5 Reviewing	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	
Does reviewing consider compliance and engagement levels and any relevant barriers, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? **	65%
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement?	44%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of actions to implement the sentence? **	55%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	
Does reviewing identify and address changes in factors linked to offending behaviour, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? *	38%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building on the strengths and enhancing the protective factors of the person on probation? **	50%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies working with the person on probation? **	46%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of the progress towards desistance? **	46%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does reviewing identify and address changes in factors related to risk of harm, with the necessary adjustments being made to the ongoing plan of work? **	37%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm? **	44%
Is the person on probation (and, where appropriate, are key individuals in their life) meaningfully involved in reviewing the risk of harm? * **	25%
Are written reviews completed as appropriate as a formal record of the management of the risk of harm? **	46%

2.6 Outcomes	% 'Yes'
Do early outcomes demonstrate that reasonable progress has been made, in line with the personalised needs of the person on probation?	
Have there been improvements in those factors most closely linked to offending both in developing strengths and addressing needs?	23%
Has there been a reduction in factors most closely related to risk of harm to others? **	17%
Has there been a reduction in offending?	6%

Annexe four – Web links

Further information about the methodology used to conduct this inspection is available on our website, using the following link:

[Our work \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectors.gov.uk)

A glossary of terms used in this report is available on our website, using the following link:

[Glossary \(justiceinspectors.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectors.gov.uk)