



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of probation services in:

Norfolk PDU

The Probation Service – East of England region

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2024

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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.

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Foreword

This was the first inspection of Norfolk Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) since it was established after unification of probation services in 2021. Disappointingly, we found serious problems in relation to the leadership and governance of the PDU which were related to poor quality work with people on probation. As a result, the PDU was rated 'Inadequate' overall.


It was a matter of great concern that strategic relationships regarding the safeguarding of children had broken down. Insufficient contributions to the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSP) were linked to deficiencies in the joint management of people on probation who posed a risk to children. That was unacceptable and the issues this inspection identified should be resolved without delay.

The PDU had set high expectations in relation to compliance with timeliness and data recording targets, supported by management systems and reporting. But the degree to which those targets were being prioritised by leaders diverted attention away from what was being delivered with people on probation. In a great deal of cases we inspected, very little, if any, progress had been made. And worryingly, we found that poor quality assessments of risk were being countersigned by Senior Probation Officers (SPOs), sometimes because there was a need to meet performance targets.

There was much to be done in relation to staff confidence and competence. SPOs were well regarded by their teams but lacked insight into the actual skills, knowledge and experience of practitioners they were line managing. And SPOs themselves had not been receiving structured supervision for a considerable length of time, which meant they lacked feedback on their own work and guidance about what to prioritise. It was unsurprising in that context that we found numerous instances of practitioners making poor judgements and not responding to risk appropriately in the casework we inspected.

We were pleased to see that the PDU was supporting the delivery of Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTR) in high numbers. Despite delays to the service starting, people sentenced to those requirements were getting help with their emotional wellbeing that would previously have been unavailable. The picture across other services was much less positive. Women's services were underdeveloped and services such as those for substance misuse and accommodation were stretched and generally ineffective.

But despite all of that, there were reasons to be hopeful for the future of Norfolk PDU. There were enough SPOs in post and as leaders they were experienced, reflective and motivated. Staff generally felt well supported and part of the team. Integrated Offender Management (IOM), led by an experienced and dedicated police sergeant who was embedded into the probation team, showed that working together between agencies was possible and could be effective. And there were resources the PDU could draw upon to support practitioner confidence and competence. With an adjusted focus on quality delivery rather than predominantly on performance targets, there was a clear path towards improving outcomes for people on probation in Norfolk and reducing the harm caused by reoffending.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Norfolk PDU

Fieldwork started: 26 February 2024

Score **2/21**

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1 Leadership

Inadequate



P 1.2 Staffing

Inadequate



P 1.3 Services

Requires improvement



2. Service delivery

P 2.1 Assessment

Inadequate



P 2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



P 2.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



P 2.4 Reviewing

Inadequate



Recommendations

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

Norfolk PDU should:

1. implement arrangements for discharging its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding children, including by contributing fully to the LSP and re-establishing functional relations with Norfolk children's services to ensure that practitioners are working together with other professionals to protect children who are at risk from people on probation
2. devise and implement arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of sentence management work delivered by practitioners with people on probation
3. conduct an analysis of skills, knowledge and experience within the practitioner group and implement a system for checking that learning has been consolidated in practice
4. work with providers of commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) and other partner organisations to improve the volume and quality of referrals.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Norfolk PDU over the period of two weeks, beginning 26 February 2023. We inspected 34 community orders and 10 releases on licence from custody where sentences and licences had commenced during two separate weeks, between 10 July 2023 and 16 July 2023, and 07 July 2023 and 13 July 2023. We also conducted 35 interviews with probation practitioners.

Norfolk is one of eight PDUs in the East of England region of The Probation Service. People on probation either report to offices in Kings Lynn or Norwich. The PDU provides pre-sentence reports to Crown and magistrates' courts in Kings Lynn, Norwich and Great Yarmouth. There is one approved premises in Norfolk (John Boag House), which is not managed by the PDU. HM Prison (HMP) Bure, HMP Norwich and HMP Wayland are all in Norfolk but probation staff in those prisons are not part of the team at Norfolk PDU.

The PDU covers the county of Norfolk, which has a population of 916,200. Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Constabulary cover the same area. The PDU supervises 1,845 people, of which 933 are subject to Community Orders and 466 are on licence from prison. The proportion of white people on the caseload is 81 per cent, which is higher than the regional average.

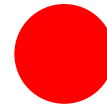
The PDU has 10 SPOs and one deputy head of PDU, all of whom are line managed by the head of PDU. The SPOs lead 21 practitioners in Kings Lynn, 56 practitioners in Norfolk and a team of people providing services to courts. Some 26 staff are in training to become Probation Officers (POs) by completing the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP). There are three Quality Development Officers (QDOs) based in the Norwich office.

CRS for people on probation are available in Norfolk PDU. The providers are Interventions Alliance for accommodation, St Giles Wise Group for women's services and The Forward Trust for personal wellbeing. A grant-funded contract for finance, benefit and debt was awarded to St Giles Wise Group. The PDU is working with St Andrew's Healthcare, who were commissioned by NHS England to deliver primary MHTR. Change Grow Live are contracted to deliver Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) and Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs).

Norfolk PDU was categorised as being 'green' on the prioritisation framework (PF), which means it was operating in a state of business as usual without any mandated alterations to service delivery. The PF is a national document produced by The Probation Service to provide PDUs with clarity about what to pause when there is insufficient capacity to deliver services.

1. Organisational arrangements and activity

P 1.1. Leadership



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

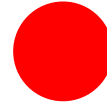
- Most practitioners and administrative staff we spoke to and surveyed felt well supported by their line managers and colleagues. Leaders had strongly promoted staff wellbeing, which was appreciated widely. Practitioners and administrative staff mostly regarded their managers to be visible and approachable.
- The PDU had started to identify people on probation who could contribute towards decisions about how the service was delivered. A person who was previously supervised by the PDU was now employed as a permanent member of staff. Leaders were committed to drawing on the experiences of people on probation to shape and improve future delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- A breakdown in the senior strategic relationships between the PDU and partners involved in safeguarding children had occurred. The PDU had not been carrying out its statutory duties to attend or contribute towards the LSP. It had not completed or submitted an audit of how effectively it was safeguarding children, despite being required to do so under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. We found several examples of fractured relationships between practitioners and social workers. That was troubling, and in practical terms meant that some children were at risk of harm.
- Leaders had paid too much attention to fulfilling performance targets at the expense of quality service delivery. A culture of meeting performance measures as the absolute priority was leading to poor-quality assessments being signed off and far too little focus on the delivery of risk management work. Not enough direction was being given to SPOs in relation to expected levels of service beyond the timeliness of work and data recording.
- The PDU delivery plan was not being implemented in practice. Our inspection of casework found that priorities in relation to protecting the public and reducing reoffending were not being routinely delivered. There was no mechanism for reviewing the plan and it was unclear which leaders would be responsible for doing so. The plan was not mentioned by any staff we spoke to during our fieldwork.
- Some judges had lost confidence in the PDU to deliver services to the Crown Court and manage sentences effectively. Poor communication meant that judges were not briefed soon enough on problems delivering accredited programmes for men convicted of sexual offences. Sentencers were concerned that not enough meaningful work was being delivered by the service for people on probation during their orders.

- Leaders had conducted too little analysis into the characteristics of the caseload and how that might inform service delivery. That was especially relevant to neurodiversity and age. Data on protected characteristics was being consistently gathered, but it was not being reviewed or acted upon. The consequence was that probation practitioners were not routinely taking diversity factors into account when assessing the needs of people on probation.

P 1.2. Staffing



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

- The staff profile was broadly reflective of the local population in Norfolk and of people on probation. Practitioners understood the nature of the communities they worked within.
- Some 26 practitioners were in training to become POs under the PQiP programme. They were generally well supported by operational teams, their line managers, practice tutor assessors and others. Some trainees were expected to stay in the PDU after completing their qualification to increase PO numbers.

Areas for improvement:

- The PDU had too few qualified POs in post, particularly in Norwich. This meant they often felt overwhelmed and unable to carry out their duties effectively. Some temporary arrangements had been made for practitioners in Kings Lynn to provide support, but these were not having an impact on the quality of practice and had mostly been wound down.
- Concerningly, there were fewer POs in post in 2023 than there were in 2022. Exit interviews with people leaving the PDU showed that more than half were dissatisfied with leadership in the PDU and almost all were dissatisfied with staffing levels.
- SPOs had not been receiving structured supervision, in some cases for around two years. As a result, they were not being given sufficient feedback on their performance or having one-to-one conversations about the delivery of strategy in the PDU.
- Leaders had too little insight into practitioner confidence and competence. Too few staff were being observed routinely by SPOs or receiving useful feedback on the quality of their work. Leaders placed too much reliance on staff attending briefings, which were typically online, with no coordinated activity to check that they were applying knowledge to their work with people on probation. This was evident in the findings from our inspection of casework, where we found numerous instances of poor practice, particularly in relation to risk.
- The communication of learning and updates in relation to practice was generally insufficient. Practitioners often missed updates circulated by leaders. We found several instances of practitioners being unclear about administrative processes and how to respond to changes in risk appropriately.
- The PDU did not have complete training records for practitioners expected to undertake drug testing. Practitioners undertaking drug testing lacked objective information relating to infectious diseases and the activity had not been locally risk assessed. That meant staff were at risk of harm.

- A team of QDOs were not being used to their full potential by senior and middle managers. Not enough consideration had been given to implementing and following up QDO findings or to integrating them with practitioners to support professional development.
- Administrative staff had high workloads which was related to chronic vacancies and high turnover. That was having an impact on staff morale. Staff shortages meant administrators were unable to fully support practitioners, including in relation to accessing the Violent and Sex Offender Register System.

P 1.3. Services



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- IOM with the police was well established. Communication between police officers and probation practitioners was generally regular and effective in the casework we inspected. The scheme was being applied to children transitioning into the PDU from the local Youth Justice Service (YJS). People managed under the IOM scheme were managed collaboratively, which enabled the probation service to monitor relevant people more closely and enforce orders more swiftly where necessary.
- The Norwich office was well located and accessible for both people on probation and staff. It was spacious enough to enable collaborative working with agencies including the police and other partners together on site.
- Practitioners were making appropriate and accurate referrals to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) level two and three meetings. Attendance from probation practitioners and their managers in MAPPA meetings was generally consistent.
- There was high use of MHTRs, supported by good relationships with the provider organisation. Evidence gathered by the provider indicated that people who completed the sessions almost always felt that their emotional wellbeing had improved. Referrals to the personal wellbeing CRS were high, especially in Norwich, and we found instances of good practice in the casework we inspected. That was underpinned by workers from the provider being embedded with the team in Norwich in particular.

Areas for improvement:

- The delivery of services for people on probation to support needs relevant to their offending was often insufficient. Not enough referrals were being made for example to the work coaches supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions, despite an impressive service being on offer. The absence of a CRS contract for substance misuse meant many people were not getting sufficient support. Not enough specialist staff were available to deliver DRRs and ATRs effectively, which led to people receiving insufficient levels of challenge and support.
- Services for women on probation were especially concerning. Women were not always assigned to female practitioners, there was no protected time for women to report into the two offices and not enough referrals to the women's CRS were being converted into actual work starting. Only one of the female cases we inspected included sufficient support in relation to desistance from crime during their sentences and none were sufficient in relation to risk of harm.

- Arrangements for reviewing MAPPA level one cases were ineffective. Management reviews on these cases were too infrequent and insufficiently inquisitive to meaningfully enhance the management of risk. We found no evidence from the casework we inspected of reviews having any positive impact.
- The Kings Lynn office was not fit for purpose. It was inaccessible for people with mobility issues, was in a poor state of repair and lacked facilities conducive to co-working with other agencies. Ambiguity about the continuation of the lease on the building was creating uncertainty for staff, some of whom felt unsettled and less valued than their colleagues in Norwich.

Feedback from people on probation

User Voice, working with HM Inspectorate of Probation, had contact with 71 people on probation as part of this inspection.

Strengths:

- People on probation were positive about the working relationships with their practitioners. Most (80 per cent) said they had a good relationship. That reflected our inspection of casework, where we found that in almost all (89 per cent) cases, sufficient focus was given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation.
- Most (81 per cent) people felt the offices were well located and within reasonable travel distances. When they arrived at the offices to meet their probation practitioners, most people (77 per cent) felt safe doing so.
- Respondents generally felt they had been treated fairly by their probation practitioners. Only five per cent of people felt they had been treated unfairly.

Areas for improvement:

- Less than half (48 per cent) of respondents felt their probation appointments were useful. One person said:

“Like everything else in this system, everything is very poor. The service provides nothing to help and support. I would rather be in prison and have no worries re bills money, housing, as I would have my own pad, meals, warmth and company.”

- Some people reported long waiting times for mental health support. Of those who said they needed help with their mental health, only 18 per cent felt the service they received was good or very good.
- Some women on probation with childcare responsibilities reported problems with accessibility. One woman, for example, said:

“When I have to come here, I have to get childcare which is not always easy. If there was a women’s place perhaps there would be childcare facilities. They need to be more understanding of a single mums’ need.”

Diversity and inclusion

Strengths:

- Almost all the cases we inspected involved clear recording of protected characteristics. That was underpinned by clear processes, expectations and monitoring from leaders. Comprehensive data on diversity had the potential to be used to explore whether additional support was necessary for groups within the caseload.

Areas for improvement:

- The PDU had not supplied a seconded PO to the local YJS for several years, despite the issue being escalated to senior leaders. That meant the YJS lacked the insight and skills of a PO when preparing children to transition into adult supervision.
- The quality of assessments and plans created by practitioners was being hampered by poor analysis of how individual characteristics could affect compliance and engagement with their sentences. As a result, difficulties faced by individuals in relation to accessing services were not always being identified.
- Despite most people on probation in Norfolk declaring themselves to be disabled, leaders had not reviewed whether adaptations could improve the effectiveness of work with people on probation. That was particularly relevant to people with neurodiverse conditions.

2. Service delivery

P 2.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating¹ for assessment is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	50%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and desistance?	70%
Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	39%

- In most of the cases we inspected (73 per cent), sufficient intelligence was obtained from the police in relation to domestic abuse. That was related to effective administrative systems which enabled probation practitioners to access intelligence reasonably swiftly.
- Almost all assessments (95 per cent) accurately analysed factors related to people's strengths. Practitioners were meeting with people on probation and making appropriate enquiries to understand what was linked to their offending.
- The recording of protected characteristics, which was directly linked to a performance measure, was very high (84 per cent) in the cases we inspected. But practitioners were not analysing how individual characteristics might affect the person's ability to comply with the sentence often enough.
- Sufficient information about the safeguarding of children from harm was only received in 27 of 40 relevant cases we inspected. Practitioners were not always making requests for information or sharing information with children's services when writing assessments. And professionals from social services sometimes told probation practitioners that they were unable to share information. This reflected the degree to which the PDU had not been working as an essential partner in the safeguarding of children.

¹ The rating for the standard is driven by the score for the key question, which is placed in a rating band. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

P 2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

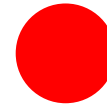
Our rating² for planning is based on the percentage of cases we inspected being judged satisfactory against three key questions and is driven by the lowest score:

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	55%
Does planning focus sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance?	68%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	59%

- Most of the sentence planning we inspected (68 per cent) considered the readiness of the person on probation to change. Practitioners were thinking through how the sentence would be successfully delivered in most cases (68 per cent). That meant planning was generally realistic about what could be achieved and how.
- Practitioners understood what support people on probation needed to change. Plans were largely focused on what was likely to reduce the likelihood of reoffending, with only a small number of exceptions. Sentence plans commonly set out the services which could address issues related to offending.
- Too few plans (57 per cent) gave sufficient regard to protected characteristics and how to make reasonable adjustments to the sentence delivery. This was concerning because 75 per cent of the people on probation whose cases we inspected declared themselves to be disabled. Planning was not being used often enough to identify what barriers those people may face during the completion of their sentences.
- Contingency planning was not sufficiently robust in enough cases. That was because other agencies involved in the control of risk presented by people on probation to others were not always referenced in the plans we inspected. As a result, risk management plans were sometimes not sufficiently focused on keeping previous and potential victims safe from harm.

² The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

P 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Inadequate

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

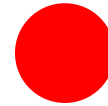
Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Is the sentence or post-custody period implemented effectively with a focus on engaging the person on probation?	70%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support desistance?	55%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	32%

- Practitioners were maintaining suitable levels of contact with people on probation in most cases (70 per cent). They were regularly building good working relationships and engaging with people on probation.
- Almost all (91 per cent) people on probation had been supervised by one or two practitioners. This meant people on probation had consistency in relation to their reporting expectations and practitioners were able to gain greater insight into their cases and the issues they faced.
- The delivery of services to help people on probation resolve problems related to their offending was poor. In the cases we inspected, only a handful of people had received enough support in relation to education, training and employment, finance, benefits and debts, and drug and alcohol misuse. This was associated with too few professionals being available to deliver support in relation to substance misuse, an almost complete absence of support in relation to personal finances and too little focus on referring people on probation into support for education and job searching.
- Worryingly, insufficient attention was given to protecting victims in 26 out of 42 relevant cases we inspected. Home visits were only undertaken in half of the relevant cases, which meant probation practitioners lacked crucial insight into the lives of people on probation.
- Ineffective partnership working between probation practitioners, police and social workers was a feature of too many cases. Practitioners had not sufficiently shared information relating to the safeguarding of children in 17

³ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [Full data and further information about inspection methodology is available in the data workbook for this inspection on our website.](#)

out of 32 cases. This included instances where the person on probation had been arrested for new offences. Likewise, intelligence sharing with the police in relation to domestic abuse was insufficient in 11 out of 23 relevant cases, which meant that risks to women in relationships with men on probation were not always fully understood or managed.

P 2.4. Reviewing



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

Inadequate

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

Key question	Percentage 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the compliance and engagement of the person on probation?	73%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting desistance?	57%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	45%

- In the cases we inspected, most people on probation (66 per cent) were meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress. This included examples of practitioners holding reflective discussions with people on probation about their progress and challenging them appropriately. Practitioners were making meaningful attempts to re-engage with people following recall to prison and enforcement of community orders in several cases.
- Information from third-party organisations involved in supporting people to change was not being requested often enough by practitioners. Only 23 out of 41 relevant cases had reviews which were informed by updates, including in relation to substance misuse engagement, support in relation to education and employment, and progress with personal wellbeing services.
- Concerningly, changes in risk had not been fully identified in 23 out of 36 relevant cases. Just four out of 11 high-risk cases we inspected had been reviewed with a sufficient focus on risk of harm. This meant risk management plans were not always being reviewed, including in cases involving further violent behaviour, contact with victims and concerns about substance misuse.
- Management oversight of casework was sufficient in only 13 out of 39 relevant cases we inspected. SPOs had not been involved in decision-making on numerous cases, including when people on probation had been convicted of further offences, where complexity had increased and where there were concerns about ongoing domestic abuse.

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

Outcomes

Strengths:

- Practitioners had been focused reasonably consistently on engaging people on probation, including after progress had been set back following recalls to custody and breaches of community orders. As a result, sufficient compliance with orders and licences was found in 61 per cent of cases we inspected.

Areas for improvement:

- None of the people on probation whose cases we inspected had experienced fully sufficient work to reduce their risk of harm or address factors relating to their offending. This was related to the poor-quality delivery of sentences, where not enough meaningful work with partner agencies to support factors relating to offending and the management of risk was taking place.
- Disappointingly, 41 per cent (18 out of 44) of cases had been charged or convicted with another offence during their time on probation.
- There were no significant improvements in the number of people on probation who were in settled accommodation or employment. This echoed our findings from inspection of casework where accommodation support was poor and not enough referrals were being made to specialist practitioners from the Department for Work and Pensions and elsewhere.

Annexe one – Web links

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

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