



Her Majesty's  
Inspectorate of  
Probation

# **A thematic review of the Exceptional Delivery Model arrangements in probation services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

A review by HM Inspectorate of Probation

November 2020

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Foreword

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COVID-19 has had an unparalleled effect on all areas of modern society. Globally, over one million people have lost their lives and the economic and social impact of the pandemic is leading to unprecedented challenges.


Like every public service, providers of probation services have had to respond to these challenges at pace and play their part in keeping the public safe. Our review examines the work of five Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and six divisional areas in the National Probation Service (NPS) delivering against their Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) during the period late March to July 2020.

Probation providers are to be applauded for the compassion and professionalism they have shown in quickly and effectively changing their working methods. This has been true at all levels of the probation system. Delivery models have been redesigned to comply with government social distancing guidelines while retaining a primary focus on public protection. Contact with individuals on probation supervision has largely been carried out remotely by phone and has been commensurate with assessed levels of risk and need. We have found that work to manage immediate risk of harm is generally good. Practitioners told us that the enhanced focus on effective risk management had sharpened their practice, and we noted increased participation at the virtual multi-agency meetings which replaced face-to-face case discussions. However, not all staff and agencies involved in public protection and safeguarding work have access to the same digital technology. This problem needs to be resolved urgently so that all partners can engage equally.

Lockdown has led to a reduction in a number of support services that probation relies on, including mental health and drug and alcohol provision. While we found some encouraging innovations in work with and support for individuals with complex needs, the most vulnerable experienced a deterioration in their emotional wellbeing. Service users whose personal circumstances were relatively stable before lockdown adjusted well to the new supervisory arrangements. However, others felt lonely, disconnected and anxious about their futures. For them, remote contact by itself was insufficient to meet their needs. Immediate housing outcomes were good because of the effective mobilisation of partnership working and the additional funding that was made available by government to prevent homelessness. But this temporary accommodation will need to be followed by more permanent provision and there is now a deep concern among probation providers that, as society returns to a new normal, the current emergency housing provision will disappear.

Most staff felt supported by their leaders and managers. They had frequent contact from them and had established healthy mechanisms for peer support. This had created a sense of togetherness. Some organisations had made hardship grants available to staff, and staff had taken part in virtual events to raise money for charities. Home working did not suit everyone. Those who had access to designated work space and wider support from family members coped well. However, many others struggled with juggling home schooling, caring for vulnerable relatives, managing complex personal relationships and delivering probation services.

Overall, we were encouraged by our findings, but there are some important lessons to be learned. We hope that the accounts in this report will help guide probation providers as they move to a new recovery phase. They will need to collaborate with others in the criminal justice system to consolidate what has worked well and to deal strategically with the significant backlogs of work, including accredited programmes, enforcement and unpaid work, that have now built up.



**Justin Russell**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Contextual facts

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### Timeline of COVID-19 and probation services

<b>23 March 2020</b>	Prime Minister Boris Johnson announces partial lockdown of the United Kingdom to contain the spread of COVID-19.
<b>24 March 2020</b>	HMPPS issues Exceptional Delivery Model guidance to NPS and CRCs.
<b>05 June 2020</b>	HMPPS asks probation providers to start planning for the recovery of probation services.
<b>11 June 2020</b>	Secretary of State for Justice Robert Buckland announces that unpaid work and key rehabilitation programmes will also be taken back into public ownership along with offender management.
<b>30 July 2020</b>	A further 1,000 trainee probation officers in 2020/2021 announced. In addition, new IT systems are to be developed, aiming to give staff more time to focus on working directly with service users.

## Contextual information

<b>224,587</b>	Probation service users (court orders and prison licences) as at 30 June 2020. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Around 2,000</b>	NPS staff during the beginning of lockdown, (about 20% of the total) were self-isolating due to COVID-19 each day, of whom around 1,100 were able to work from home (as reported to the Justice Committee in July 2020). <sup>2</sup>
<b>77%</b>	service users in our sample were contacted at least once a week by probation services (our sample focused mostly on high and medium risk of serious harm cases).
<b>12%</b>	decrease in overall caseload since the end June 2019.
<b>72%</b>	decrease in commencements compared to April to June 2019.
<b>76%</b>	decrease in PSRs compared to April to June 2019.
<b>40</b>	NPS staff had tested positive for COVID-19 up to 31 July 2020. <sup>3</sup>
<b>02</b>	NPS staff have died where COVID-19 was the suspected cause (this is up to 31 July 2020). <sup>3</sup> There is no equivalent figure for CRCs.
<b>15</b>	NPS service users have died up to 30 September 2020 where COVID-19 was the suspected cause.
<b>07</b>	CRC service users have died up to 30 September 2020 where COVID-19 was the suspected cause.
<b>60</b>	Cases inspected for this Exceptional Delivery Model thematic review.

<sup>1</sup> Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (2020). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2020. London: Ministry of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Justice Committee (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): The impact on probation systems*. (15 July 2020). London: House of Commons.

<sup>3</sup> Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (2020). *HMPPS COVID-19 experimental statistics annex: October 2020 tables*. London: Ministry of Justice.

# Executive summary

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## Introduction

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on many areas of work, home and wider society. This global pandemic has taken the lives of thousands of people, and new infections continue. The criminal justice system, like other major public institutions, has had to respond at pace.

On 24 March 2020, probation providers moved to an Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM), prioritising the management of risk of harm to others. This dramatically altered the way in which probation services were delivered. Gold, silver and bronze command structures were launched to oversee this major change. Many offices were closed, with staff working from home. The risk of harm each current service user presented was reviewed and the type and frequency of contact determined in line with the operating models. Most face-to-face supervision was suspended except for those individuals assessed as posing a very high risk of harm to others. These included people released from prison for Terrorism Act (TACT) offences and those assessed as presenting very a high risk of harm to actual and potential victims. All service users released from custody for their initial appointment, and those who did not have access to a telephone, were also seen face-to-face. Where door-step visiting was not deemed necessary, staff contacted service users via phone calls.

All unpaid work requirements and the delivery of new accredited programmes were suspended. Staff working in courts were required to work remotely from home. Approved premises implemented strict social distancing guidelines, and some approved premises, for example in London, were closed.

The report that follows summarises the results of a thematic review of the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of probation services within the context of government social distancing guidelines. It focuses on the work of five Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and six divisional areas in the National Probation Service (NPS) as they delivered services against agreed national EDMs in June and July of 2020. Our qualitative review draws upon the findings from a small sample (60) of pre- and post-lockdown cases, as well as 85 interviews and focus groups with a range of staff and senior leaders and interviews with 33 service users during that period. The review provides a slice of the picture of probation delivery at an extraordinary time (more detail on our approach can be found in Appendix 2: methodology).

## Leadership and staffing

Probation leaders at a local and national level, and staff delivering probation services, are to be commended for their compassionate and professional response to COVID-19. Gold, silver and bronze command structures were put in place immediately to ensure clear lines of communication. Exceptional delivery plans prioritising effective safeguarding and public protection were prepared at speed. A national 'probation tracker' for monitoring progress was used to help understand performance. Additionally, other management information was gathered, and samples of cases were audited on a regular basis by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) internal quality assurance team. Senior leaders from HMPPS, CRCs and the NPS generally worked well together under difficult circumstances to develop EDMs. The command structures supporting accountability were largely effective, although the volume of information being cascaded to local areas at the beginning of lockdown was overwhelming, with guidance often changing very quickly.

While the CRCs we inspected had working mechanisms in place to gather the views of service users about their experiences of supervision during the pandemic, this was not the case in all the NPS divisions. Both organisations could have done more to engage with individuals under supervision more systematically to help inform service delivery.

During lockdown, the death of George Floyd in the USA and the health inequalities that COVID-19 highlighted for black, Asian and minority ethnic people caused fear and re-traumatisation for many

staff. A number of CRCs and NPS divisions responded well by providing space for probation practitioners to talk about these matters, but this was not universal – it should have been.

All staff have had to adjust to working from home and to interacting with colleagues and service users remotely. Initially, some did not have access to the technology required to do so, but all now have laptops and mobile phones. However, the technology available to some staff is not always compatible with the communication tools used by external partners. For example, many operational staff in CRCs do not have access to Microsoft Teams, the communication tool used by children's social care to conduct safeguarding meetings. While practitioners have sought creative ways to overcome this barrier, this situation cannot continue. Attendance at Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and safeguarding meetings by probation and other staff has increased during the pandemic, as the meetings are now held remotely, and no travel is required.

Generally, staff had been well supported by their managers, pastorally and professionally, although this was not the case for all of them. We found several examples where leaders had worked creatively to address problems that individual staff were experiencing. Some organisations had made hardship funds available. Additionally, the level of both formal and informal peer support was outstanding.

Working at home suited some but not all. Some staff welcomed the flexibility that home working provided, but for many, this arrangement was overwhelming as they juggled personal circumstances with the demands of their roles. Some were thriving but others' emotional wellbeing was deteriorating. Staff who had continued working in offices reported that they felt safe. Risk assessments had been carried out and they felt under no pressure to attend offices. The return to greater face-to-face contact in offices was being managed well.

During the pandemic, a number of new staff joined the inspected organisations. Induction and a range of core training modules had been delivered well. Existing learners, such as those training to become probation officers (POs), were continuing their learning remotely with little disruption, supported by practice assessors.

At the beginning of lockdown, high infection rates and self-isolation meant there were staff shortages in the delivery of services. However, credible staffing models were set up and staff deployed innovatively into other roles. The organisations were greatly helped by the very low number of new cases coming into the probation system as the courts closed and new trials and sentencing slowed to a trickle. This ensured that the quality of essential work to manage risk of harm was maintained and workloads were kept at a manageable level. However, staff are anxious that, as probation services enter the recovery phase, their workloads will increase. Non-COVID-related absenteeism was low throughout the pandemic, because staff had been empowered to work flexibly from their homes. There was also less COVID-related sickness absence than expected after an initial surge in March and April.

Information on 'lessons learned' was collected and exchanged, not only internally, but externally also.

### **Partnership work**

The CRC and NPS areas that we inspected had established positive working relationships with safeguarding and public protection agencies at a strategic and operational level. At the start of the pandemic, revised protocols had been agreed and bespoke processes put in place to support information exchange and risk management. This had led to safeguarding referrals, for example, being dealt with more efficiently than pre-lockdown. In a number of CRCs, we found that these partnerships had enhanced the profile of public protection work and improved relationships.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), child in need, child protection and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings continued after lockdown but were held 'virtually' by video conference. As a result, responsible officers from both the CRCs and the NPS found it easier to take part and attend more regularly. This enabled them to gain a wider appreciation of the role of other agencies within the pandemic context. Additionally, CRC



practitioners reported that a priority focus on risk of harm to others had allowed them greater time to understand how to keep actual and potential victims safe.

For those on probation supervision, suitable housing is key to supporting wellbeing, desistance and public protection. Collaborative working with local authorities during the pandemic had led to positive outcomes. Emergency accommodation was largely provided for all service users who needed it, under the government 'everyone in' initiative to tackle street homelessness. This mobilisation worked well, but there remains a deep concern among CRC and NPS staff that provision will be stopped as infection rates fall, and conditions return to a 'new normal'.

The pandemic had led to the closure of many courts, resulting in inevitable backlogs of trials and of probation enforcement cases. Higher volumes of community and custodial orders will be made as courts enter the recovery phase and work their way through the backlogs. This will be challenging for probation, and partners in the criminal justice system will need to work together to achieve equal justice for victims and perpetrators. We were satisfied that this challenge was fully understood by senior leaders. It did, however, require action.

Multi-agency partnership arrangements to manage the risk of harm presented by individuals residing in approved premises were good. Approved premises had been made safe and staff had shown remarkable resilience in supporting vulnerable adults.

Probation partners have largely delivered services remotely, which has reduced the services that service users can access. In particular, mental health provision has varied considerably, and this has had a negative impact on those struggling with their emotional wellbeing. Equally, there has been reduced access to drug and alcohol services, with very little drug testing. Therefore, the extent of drug use has been difficult to assess or address. However, we noted that those with complex needs were being given practical support to collect their medication or arrange delivery.

A number of innovations have been introduced during the pandemic. One of the inspected areas had established a 'live chat' service for victims of domestic abuse, which enabled victims to have live text conversations with trained counsellors. In addition, we found that some partners had begun using the Zoom communication tool to hold virtual support meetings. These had been accessed by service users who were self-isolating or lonely. They provided essential support. This was confirmed by a number of service users interviewed during this thematic review.

A notable example of partnership working was found in some Integrated Offender Management (IOM) teams. Not only did police officers, for example, support welfare and other visits, partners worked well to provide food parcels to vulnerable service users. Often staff from these teams were deployed to enhance frontline services. In addition, information-sharing was very good, and this supported public protection.

### **Service delivery**

Changes in supervisory requirements for service users during lockdown were largely communicated well, and this was confirmed by service users themselves. Arrangements were made to provide a mobile phone for those service users who did not have one. This was critical at a time when most of the contact was over the phone.

Senior leaders told us that contact requirements with service users in the initial EDMs were too prescriptive and stringent and did not allow practitioners enough authority to exercise professional judgement. We agreed. Initial targets that each service user should be contacted twice as frequently by phone as they had been seen face to face pre-lockdown were not met, and at a national level, for both NPS and CRCs, the number of actual contacts was consistently less than planned. These rigid targets were later changed and in practice we found that 77 per cent of the service users in our sample were contacted at least once a week by probation services.

Service users' experience of probation supervision varied. Those whose personal circumstances were relatively stable coped well, but the more vulnerable and those with complex needs struggled. Some service users reported that during the pandemic their contact with responsible officers had become more frequent. This was appreciated and was helping to build a healthier professional

relationship. Although, in a small number of the NPS divisions that we inspected, we came across examples of consultations that were taking place with service users, disappointingly, we did not find any notable evidence of a systematic approach to gauging service users' views about the services they had been receiving during the pandemic. This needs to change.

Although new accredited programme commencements stopped following lockdown, we were pleased to find evidence of efforts being made to complete sessions on a one-to-one basis with existing orders – in particular those close to completion. In one suspended sentence order we inspected, which included an Accredited Programme Requirement to address sexual offending, the additional elements were completed during lockdown. Work was delivered by programme tutors and, in some probation areas, these tutors had also been able to deliver rehabilitation activity requirements (RARs) remotely. Given that this work was ongoing, it was difficult to judge how effective the interventions had been in supporting change.

Overall, effective work was carried out by responsible officers and other practitioners, including court staff, partner link workers and victim liaison workers. Services to manage the risk of harm that individuals presented were largely being delivered well, although there are lessons to be learned. More service user involvement in sentence planning and better attention to individuals' diversity would enhance service delivery. Furthermore, the reviews of work to keep people safe, undertaken on current cases as lockdown was imposed, should have been more comprehensive.

Responsible officers had used different methods of communicating with those they were supervising. These included telephone contact, text messaging, WhatsApp video calls, emails, Microsoft Teams, office visits and FaceTime. Contact levels offered were commensurate with the assessed level of risk of harm and need. Door-step visiting was evolving and, when used well, was supporting effective risk management work.

Enforcement decisions were generally taken as required, although the closure of courts meant that only urgent public protection breaches were dealt with and others were put on hold. Of the 48 eligible CRC and NPS cases we inspected, six should, in our opinion, have been breached but hadn't been. Resettlement work focusing on and addressing the immediate needs of those about to be released was undertaken in all relevant cases.

Work delivered by key workers and other staff in approved premises was very good in the nine cases sampled. Considerable care had been shown in delivering important services to vulnerable people who had found themselves largely isolated from their immediate family members.

## Recommendations

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### **Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:**

1. work with probation providers and partners in the criminal justice system to manage backlogs so that there is fair justice for perpetrators and victims of crime
2. ensure that CRCs are included in key decision-making during the recovery phase to support collegial working
3. work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in England and the Welsh Government in Wales to make sure that service users have suitable accommodation that will support desistance and effective public protection, once the temporary arrangements end.

### **Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, together with Community Rehabilitation Companies, should:**

4. ensure that the digital technology used by probation services is compatible with that used by key partners to improve remote working to support effective public protection
5. ensure that, where necessary, resulting actions from the reviewing of risk of harm are fully implemented so that actual and potential victims are protected
6. improve engagement with service users to develop remote service delivery options to support face-to-face contact.

### **Key learning points were as follows:**

- Door-step visiting, when used well, can provide vital insights and information on risk of harm to keep other people safe.
- Home working has provided staff with flexibility and given them some economic gains. In addition, less travel has had environmental benefits and supported emotional wellbeing. However, working at home has caused considerable anxiety for many. On balance, there is an opportunity to review flexible working arrangements for staff.
- During the pandemic, staff have needed to draw on their professional judgement more than ever. There is potential to include this learning more explicitly in future probation officer training and practice.
- Remote supervision, through different communication platforms, requires further attention to ensure it is effective and leads to positive outcomes.

# 1. What we found

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## 1.1 Leadership and staffing

### Initial response

The response of senior leaders in HMPPS to the pandemic has been timely and measured. It was accepted at a very early stage that probation business could not continue as usual and that an Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) would be required. Decisions had to be made at pace. Senior leaders spent long hours creating a proportionate model that had public protection and safeguarding at its core. While early collaboration between the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) could have been better, as the situation has evolved, a healthier collegial approach has developed.

A command structure, comprising bronze, silver and gold levels, was quickly established following the announcement of the national lockdown on 23 March 2020. However, the dissemination of information to regions and areas could have been managed better. Staff told us that guidance frequently changed and the volume and frequency of information were overwhelming. This caused considerable frustration.

### Communication with staff and management information

At a local level, staff reported that, at the beginning of lockdown, their senior leaders were far more visible than previously because they gave daily briefings using digital technology. This was very much welcomed and created a sense of unity and closeness to their leaders. They felt leaders were genuinely listening to them, their ideas and needs. One staff member commented:

*"You can engage and speak to senior managers now; we see who they are, and they get to see us on the ground; they want to know more about our opinions and our views and that had not happened before".*

Staff were kept fully updated about local and national developments. Senior leaders, however, acknowledge that the information for staff could at times have been more concise and delivered sequentially. Contact was made with trade unions to ensure proper care of staff and those subject to probation supervision.

The global pandemic has highlighted health inequalities for black, Asian and minority ethnic people. This, combined with the death of George Floyd in the USA, has generated considerable fear, vulnerability, anxiety and re-traumatisation. One black staff member told us:

*"In a narrative of worry, threat, fear and hatred from many in our community, we still get up, log on and do our work".*

We found that the response of probation providers varied.

London CRC, for example, scheduled three interactive forums for staff to speak about the death of George Floyd and how this had impacted on individuals, and to encourage ongoing conversations. Additionally, a working group was set up to consider how best to respond to the evolving findings about the pandemic's disproportionate impact on black, Asian and minority ethnic people. One NPS manager told us that he contacted all the black, Asian and ethnic minority staff he was responsible for managing. Webinars and team meetings were set up to allow staff to enter conversations about how structural inequality, prejudice and discrimination impacted on their lives and work.

Regrettably, not all leaders across the probation community proactively engaged their staff in these critical issues. This was disappointing. Senior leaders we spoke to admitted that more could and should have been done. It is essential that the impact of these issues on staff and service users are fully understood and that there is tangible change. Staff and people on probation supervision need

to see ongoing consultation, better outcomes for them and evidence of what is going to be done differently.

Regular management information on service delivery during the EDM period is being gathered by HMPPS headquarters via 'probation trackers', which are used to monitor actual offender management contacts against EDM expectations. In addition, we were pleased to find that quality assurance activity had continued, albeit in a reduced form. In a number of CRC and NPS divisions that we inspected, we found that staff attached to performance and quality departments had made themselves available to provide remote support to improve performance. Furthermore, audits of individual and themed work were taking place more frequently. Staff were provided with feedback on their performance and given examples of good practice. This was very much appreciated and was contributing to effective work. The experience of a new probation services officer (PSO) in an NPS division is highlighted below:

### Good practice example

I am relatively new to the role of PSO. While working at home, I received a phone call from a colleague in the performance and quality team. She asked me how I was getting on and whether there was anything she could do to support me. Given that I had just completed an assessment on a post-lockdown case which I had been allocated, I asked if she could give me some feedback on the quality of my work. She agreed and within 24 hours I received some written feedback and a follow-up phone call. The feedback provided some developmental points as well as telling me what I had done well.

### Service user communication and engagement

Senior leaders told us that contact requirements with service users in the initial EDMs were far too prescriptive and stringent and did not allow practitioners enough authority to exercise professional judgement. We agreed. They were later changed.

Initial communication to notify service users about the changes in supervisory arrangements occurred in different ways. Some were contacted directly by practitioners via text messages or phone calls, some through third parties such as family members, and some through written correspondence. Generally, the service users who were interviewed for this thematic review said that they had been contacted by their responsible officers and that they understood what was expected of them. The NPS and CRCs made arrangements for those service users without a mobile phone to have one. By 05 June, the NPS had allocated 1,138 mobile phones to service users in the community and on release from prison<sup>4</sup>. This included people being released from custody, those who were vulnerable and a number who were homeless. The extent of this undertaking was significant and, following some teething issues, service users needing mobile phones received them. This ensured that remote contact was possible. One practitioner told us:

*"The provision of mobile phones (to service users) was a gamechanger for the better; those people were at risk of being disenfranchised".*

Across the inspected CRCs and NPS divisions, the majority of offices were closed. Initially, this caused confusion for some service users who had not communicated with their responsible officers. The closure of offices meant that some of those who required face-to-face meetings, either due to custodial releases or because of the risk of harm they presented, needed to report to other offices. This was particularly true in London. The change was managed well and after free public transport in London ended, probation providers in London issued travel warrants where necessary.

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<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary question, 12 June 2020.

We were pleased to learn that, in a number of CRCs, senior leaders had continued to use their service user councils to engage service users. Remote contact through virtual surgeries had been established, and service users were contributing to discussions on how RARs could be delivered. There was evidence of peer mentors being used to consult with those on probation supervision, as demonstrated in the examples below:

### **Good practice example**

In the Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland CRC, peer mentors are being used to engage service users during the EDM period. This work has largely been carried out remotely, but the feedback has been very useful. Service users have expressed their views about moving into the recovery phase, reopening offices, how there will need to be clear communication about face-to-face reporting, and recommencing unpaid work. Leaders in this CRC continue to engage dynamically with the feedback they are receiving.

In the South Yorkshire CRC, leaders have worked with User Voice, a charity collecting feedback, to gather service users' views on how Rethink, a non-accredited offending behaviour programme, could be delivered virtually through Microsoft Teams. The programme has been piloted, and at the end of each session (there are six), feedback on service users' experience is gathered. This is then used to inform the next session and future groups. Staff carry out a comprehensive assessment before a service user joins the programme to ensure that they are suitable. For example, they consider whether there is a designated space from where the individual can participate safely, and whether the individual has access to adequate broadband.

Although, in a small number of the NPS divisions that we inspected, we came across examples of consultations that were taking place with service users, disappointingly, we did not find any notable evidence of a systematic approach to gauging service users' views about the services they had been receiving during the pandemic. This needs to change.

The CRCs and NPS were gathering 'lessons learned' information, and learning was exchanged in an open way, both internally and externally, and applied to evolving situations. One such example related to initial contact after release from custody, with people being provided with an information pack when they were released from custody.

### **Remote working and information technology**

CRC and NPS staff have had to adjust to remote working very quickly. Overall, most staff who required information technology equipment immediately to carry out their work either had or were given access to laptops and mobile phones. In addition, staff received training to make better use of the various technology they had access to, including different communication tools. However, this was not universal in either CRCs or the NPS. Those who did not have access found it more difficult to supervise service users. To their credit, however, in compliance with information assurance policies, they were able to put short-term contingency arrangements in place, such as using bespoke SIM cards in mobile phones.

As key workers, staff could attend offices in the initial stages of the pandemic, in compliance with government social distancing guidelines and other restrictions. Organisations paid for any additional costs incurred by staff. We were pleased to see several examples of staff who were not directly delivering services being given access to laptops and communication tools. Now all staff delivering services have access to laptops and mobile phones.

Some staff have experienced difficulties with connectivity because of the low broadband speeds available to them. We did not find an excessively worrying level of problems with laptops and mobile phones not working. Where problems were reported, these were generally fixed quite quickly. We were pleased to find that staff who required adjustments to enable them to work at home, for example special chairs and laptop risers, were provided with this equipment.

We saw several examples of organisations working creatively to support staff who found themselves in difficult situations. In one example, a staff member had moved home, and advised her employer that she would not have access to the internet for two weeks. This matter was dealt with promptly and temporary arrangements were put in place so that there was no disruption to her ability to carry out her role. There have been challenges for staff working from home, but we have also heard heartening stories of care, compassion and a sense of togetherness. The latter has been echoed by service users, as expressed in the following two examples:

*"It's brought out the humanity in people. We're all just humans, some of us are scared, some of us are at risk, they can see where there's vulnerability".*

*"They're doing the best they can given the circumstances, we're in this together".*

In Cleveland, NPS staff produced a video in which they showed that, although they were apart during the pandemic, they were still together because of what bound them together. It was a powerful image of hope and unity.

Staff continue to face considerable challenges given the different types and range of information technology used by the NPS, CRCs and partners. For example, the NPS staff are able to use Microsoft Teams, which is the communication platform used by children's services. However, the vast majority of staff in the CRCs are not able to access this platform. While we heard about some creative workarounds that CRC staff had used, including calling a social worker on a Microsoft Teams call and listening in to the conference call, these are not sustainable or appropriate. In the situation described, for example, there is a significant risk that important safeguarding information could be misheard or missed altogether. We believe that there are plans to rectify this discrepancy and would urge a swift resolution.

### **Staff wellbeing**

For the majority of staff, the flexibility that remote working has provided has been welcomed. Those with access to designated work areas and supportive home environments have been able to adjust well. Many staff told us that they hoped this flexibility would remain when the 'new normal' is established, as they would find it difficult to return to full-time office-based working. Many also told us that their emotional wellbeing was the best that it had ever been. They could take breaks, go for a daily walk, eat more healthily and spend quality time with family members. For them, remote working had provided a positive work-life balance. They were able to discipline themselves and contain their work.

However, this experience was not shared by everyone. We came across some worrying situations.

A number of staff we met in focus groups spoke about their desperation as a result of home working. The kitchen table had become the schooling desk, the place to eat meals, the place to discuss personal matters and the area to hold sensitive supervisory and professional conversations. One member of staff said:

*"I feel as if I am always at work, I don't enjoy it and I don't want to continue like this. The impact on my family has almost destroyed us. It's not been just me working at home, I don't have the space, my dining table is from where I eat, from where I teach my children and from where I take very sensitive calls".*

For some staff, their partners had either been furloughed, made redundant or were unemployed. The prospects for employment during the pandemic were poor, and this had added severe tensions in their relationships.

In addition, some staff were also caring for vulnerable family members. One member of staff told us about her young son who is autistic and was being taught at home. His behaviour was erratic, and he would often become physically violent towards his mother. This member of staff had very little support and felt she was failing her son and her employer.

We heard of another example where a member of staff, a sole carer, was speaking with a service user while her young children were present in the same room. The service user was shouting as the staff member tried to bring calm to the situation. Eventually, the call was terminated, and the young child was heard saying, *"Mummy is he going to come and get us?"* This caused considerable upset. Stories such as these highlighted how *"work had come home"* and how much of a challenge it had become to separate the two. Not only were staff feeling the impact of working at home, their family members were being directly and indirectly affected too.

In many circumstances, staff were starting work early in the morning and working well into late evenings. Some said that it was *"hard to mark the end of a day"* and that this was affecting their emotional health. To the credit of the NPS and CRCs, remote support services, employee helplines, mental health first aiders and access to direct support from line managers have been made available, but they are not always taken up. Without exception, staff reported that they were missing *"connecting with colleagues"* and that *"cross-talk over the desk"* had been lost as a result of the pandemic.

Alongside the various accounts we heard, we were also impressed with stories of care shown by staff to colleagues and those on probation supervision. We were told of several examples where staff had delivered food parcels to vulnerable colleagues, paid socially distanced visits and written letters to each other. Managers had used their personal vehicles to transport equipment to support remote working, and staff had taken part in fundraising events (Kent, Surrey, Sussex CRC raised £1,300 for a local charity).

To maintain regular contact, virtual coffee and catch-up morning meetings had been held via Skype and Microsoft Teams. Quizzes were run and buddy systems set up. Managers visited vulnerable colleagues, and yoga and nutrition sessions were held to support emotional wellbeing. Additionally, some organisations had provided training in emotional resilience, and this had been welcomed. A range of communication tools had also been used to maintain regular contact. These included video calling, text messaging, WhatsApp and FaceTime.

### **Management support**

We were impressed with the way in which middle managers in the NPS and CRCs had created their own support mechanism. They used both formal and informal conversations to learn from one another and make decisions. This bond had given them strength, confidence and security. As one middle manager said:

*"As a relatively new manager, I recognise how important it is for me to have healthy relationships with my peers. I am so grateful for their support in both personal and professional matters".*

The nature, frequency and type of management oversight needed by middle managers in casework had changed during the pandemic. From the inspected sample, we found that there were some gaps in the effectiveness of management oversight. Middle managers were busy but reported that they felt their workload was manageable.

Almost without exception, staff across all grades and roles reported that they had been well supported by their own managers, who had gone above and beyond their duties. Contact was regular and combined pastoral care with case supervision. A number reported that they had received clinical supervision and had had one-to-one sessions with a psychologist to support their emotional wellbeing. The quotes below provide a flavour of what staff told us:

*"My line manager has been fantastic. He has kept in touch with me weekly. I'm actually receiving more supervision than I ever have; it's really helping me with my public protection work".*

*"Managers have stepped up to the mark".*



*"I work in a residential unit; pretty much straight away I was allocated a laptop so that I could work from home. This was great".*

*"The quality of advice I have been receiving from my line manager has been excellent. She encouraged me to do a door-stop visit; so glad I did it. This led to a safeguarding referral".*

*"I work as part of a court team. My manager has always kept me up to date with developments. I had a very difficult home situation. She handled this so sensitively. I was very grateful".*

*"My CEO has been nothing but outstanding".*

*"Communication is a lot better than pre-COVID-19; managers are more in contact with staff and there is an enhanced attention to wellbeing. I feel a lot more supported now than I ever have been. This needs to be maintained. Managers are conscious of our needs; there are weekly updates. I can get hold of my manager at any time".*

We came across a small number of staff who did not have a positive or supportive experience with their line managers. One said:

*"I was really struggling to work at home. I had two children and was trying to home school while juggling my caseload. My partner had returned to work. I asked my manager to support me in managing my workload. Perhaps, some of my cases could be re-allocated. I was told that this was not possible and that if I wanted help with my child care, I should request unpaid leave. This upset me so much".*

Another commented:

*"I had been working at home for some time like my other colleagues. I really valued the flexibility but was struggling to keep up with all the phone calls, door-stop visits and record keeping. I was also worried about my health. I'd got myself in a mess. Despite my reaching out for support, I didn't get any. I simply carried on".*

We were encouraged to learn that a number of organisations had set aside 'hardship grants', with no need to pay them back, for their staff. In one case, the CRC had been approached by a member of staff who had a vulnerable child being taught from home. The child had no access to a personal computer to carry out their school work because the old one was no longer working. The staff member applied for a small amount of money towards the purchase of a new one. The CRC in fact covered the entire cost and the child received a personal computer. In another case, prior to lockdown, a member of staff used public transport to travel to and from work. Given that they felt uncomfortable using public transport during the pandemic due to their vulnerability, the organisation paid for their travel costs. The member of staff said:

*"The support from my manager has been amazing. I was apprehensive about getting on public transport. I was given the option of using a taxi and I really appreciate that. I was also given PPE, shields, gloves, face coverings and hand sanitiser".*

## **Learning and development**

Across the NPS and CRCs, there have been a large number of Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) learners training to become probation officers during the pandemic. The disruption caused to their training, which requires them to be assessed in different environments and with different service users, has meant they have had to adjust. This has been done well, with the support of the organisations and individual assessors who have arranged remote observations. We did not come across any significant hurdles that were preventing these learners from completing their training as

planned. Indeed, the PQiP learners we spoke to said that their training had not been adversely affected and they were satisfied with the support, advice and guidance they were receiving.

Some new staff had joined the CRCs and NPS during the pandemic, and we were encouraged to find that induction arrangements were being followed, and online training and remote face-to-face supervision were being provided. A number of new staff we spoke to were positive about their experiences, as highlighted below:

*"I didn't really know what to expect, but I've had great support".*

*"The online training has provided a good foundation. It's not ideal but the cases I have been allocated are within my capability".*

*"I feel I can ask for help whenever I need it. My supervisor is really knowledgeable".*

### **Staff compassion**

Staff in both the NPS and CRCs have shown considerable resilience in responding to the pandemic. Their positivity and 'can do' approaches were evident in our meetings with them across all grades. They had invested heavily in changing their working patterns to ensure that they completed the tasks they had been set. Many had made personal sacrifices to make best use of the space they could find to carry out their work. Some were working from their bedrooms, some in garden sheds and others in confined spaces.

We repeatedly heard about how proud the NPS and CRCs were of their staff, and the two examples below show this to be true.

### **Good practice example**

A PSO from the NPS based in Kent was responsible for supervising a vulnerable service user. The PSO called the service user on Maundy Thursday but there was no reply. As a result, he requested a welfare check to be completed by the police. When he learned the following day, Good Friday, that the check had not been carried out, he paid a home visit on his non-working day because of his concern for the service user's wellbeing. On arrival, he discovered that the service user had overdosed. He called the emergency services and the service user was taken to hospital. He stayed in hospital for over five weeks. Had it not been for the compassion of the PSO, the service user might have lost his life.

During the pandemic, a service user reported to an NPS office in Yorkshire. While waiting for his appointment, he began to have an epileptic fit. Two members of staff rushed to help him. While the paramedics were being called, they administered close first aid. They acted on instinct and attended to the service user's needs. The paramedics praised the actions of the two members of staff in very difficult circumstances.

### **Workforce and workloads**

At the beginning of the pandemic, the NPS initially lost 2,000 staff (around 20 per cent) to COVID-related absences – including staff who were unwell, self-isolating or shielding. The NPS has developed a new staffing model which allows it to operate in a longer-term steady state, with 1,200 staff working full-time at home. The challenge now facing the NPS and CRCs is ensuring that sufficient numbers of staff are working from offices during recovery (currently mainly on a rota basis). Absenteeism has been low throughout the pandemic, as staff have been able to work more flexibly from home.

During the pandemic, CRCs and the NPS have effectively redeployed staff from unpaid work supervision and prison offender management in custody (OMiC) and interventions teams into other operational roles. For example, programme tutors and practitioners in IOM teams have supported home visiting; staff have supported colleagues in approved premises; and unpaid work supervisors

have transported office furniture, delivered mobile phones to service users and taken personal protective equipment to approved premises. In several instances, we found that unpaid work placement coordinators had used their skills to support community groups. In one case, a coordinator had used his personal knowledge and skills to help a charity use social media to reach out to others in the community. In another example, unpaid work supervisors had delivered Age UK meals to vulnerable people and collected medicines from pharmacies. Other staff were covering some newly established service user helplines. Many of these have been available seven days a week. One staff member who had been assigned to this resource said:

*"It's not an onerous responsibility, it's good for service users to have someone to talk to. It's great that it's geographically targeted, you can signpost people to other areas and services. The people I have spoken to have really appreciated it".*

In addition, some CRCs have introduced a transport shuttle service to take service users to face-to-face office appointments using 'unpaid work vans', and have resourced these vans with appropriate protective equipment, following health and safety risk assessments.

### Good practice examples

In Sheffield, unpaid work supervisors were deployed to deliver office furniture to the homes of NPS staff. They also went to supermarkets daily to collect food and sundries to be packed and delivered to vulnerable service users and other community members. Additionally, we found examples where CRC senior leaders had offered human resources to the NPS and vice versa. This was an excellent use of staff deployment and cross-agency working. It was making a real difference for many in showing togetherness.

At the beginning of lockdown, staff had to complete risk assessments, at pace, on all their current cases and categorise them as low, medium or high risk. This determined the level and type of intervention that would be delivered. This was a challenging task, which was largely, but not completely, coordinated well by the NPS and CRCs. Given that the number of new cases entering the probation system has fallen significantly, frontline practitioners believe that their current workload is manageable. They are, however, concerned that their workloads will increase as probation providers enter the recovery phase and courts begin to list cases. Senior leaders will need to manage these changes carefully to ensure a positive outcome.

### Transition to recovery

There are real challenges relating to recovery to more normal service delivery from EDM arrangements, and all staff will need to work together effectively to achieve positive outcomes. We were pleased to find that the return to more face-to-face contact was being managed well. For example, staff were having individual risk assessments to determine whether they could safely return to an office setting. Factors such as age and health needs were being considered. Leaders were implementing a phased reopening of offices to comply with government social distancing guidelines and ensure staff safety. In our focus groups, staff said that they were not being forced to return to office working until they personally felt safe to do so. In one NPS region we inspected, a business manager had produced a video showing the revised layout of an office, so that staff working in that office could picture what to expect on their return. This was helpful. There were open discussions taking place, especially with those who had been self-isolating or were particularly vulnerable. Genuine concern among many staff still remains regarding their safety and emotional wellbeing when they return to an office environment.

## 1.2 Partnership work

Effective service delivery relies on good partnership working. During the pandemic, probation providers have invested heavily in maintaining positive relationships with the other agencies supporting safeguarding and public protection, notably police and children's services. This has been a clear strength in both the NPS and CRCs we inspected and has ensured that immediate risk of harm to others has been managed well.

We found evidence that relationships had been consolidated at all levels, and at the operational level they had improved. Senior leaders had worked well with their counterparts in public protection to strengthen the work that needed to be done through the EDMs to keep others safe from harm. While the volume of information travelling between agencies was considerable, this process was necessary to ensure all agencies were clear about what they needed to do, and to support public confidence.

We found that senior leaders were proactive in sharing their EDM plans. Many had established revised local public protection and safeguarding procedures and protocols. These included named points of contact in their area or locality. This enabled closer working and the timely resolution of any problems that arose. Specifically, closer partnership relationships led to safeguarding referrals from the NPS and CRCs being dealt with more swiftly. Furthermore, newly formed working arrangements with the police allowed for better information exchange to support public protection. A number of NPS divisions had set up central referral units in which probation practitioners were based. They worked alongside social workers and were able to provide specialist knowledge. In addition, they could deal with probation-specific cases and queries. They all had access to police and social care databases. In Cleveland, the NPS's arrangements for requesting timely information from the police about arrests and domestic abuse call-outs were strengthened.

In addition, staff identified cases where there were concerns shared by other agencies and put integrated plans in place to manage the risk. This process was making a difference in providing protection for vulnerable children and adults.

### **Attendance at safeguarding and public protection meetings**

At a practitioner level, we were pleased to learn that, as a result of lockdown, risk of harm and public protection work had become the overriding focus. Responsible officers were attending 'virtual' MARAC and MAPPAs more frequently, for example. This had enabled them to build better relationships with social workers, housing workers, police officers and others working to protect the public. However, most CRC responsible officers did not have access to Microsoft Teams, the communication tool used by children's social care to facilitate a number of different child protection, children in need and other risk management meetings. This meant that engagement was problematic, as highlighted in the comments below from practitioners across different CRCs:

*"It's not acceptable that we cannot use Microsoft Teams to support safeguarding".*

*"When I have used my phone to listen in, I sometimes can't hear everything".*

*"You feel second class".*

For MAPPAs meetings, a number of police forces did not have access to Microsoft Teams and meetings were held through teleconferencing. This was adequate, but staff told us that it would have been helpful if all agencies had had access to the same communication platform. We learned from those we interviewed that attendance at MAPPAs meetings facilitated through Microsoft Teams worked very efficiently. The burden of lengthy journeys had been removed and group members were able to access the same information at the same time.

Many staff across the CRCs and NPS reported that their relationships with safeguarding and public protection agencies had improved:

*"I now attend many more child protection meetings. I get invites. I don't need to travel. It's done remotely".*

*"I don't have to wait for the notes from the meeting. I hear everything first hand. This has helped me to be much more proactive".*

*"My relationship with the service user's social worker has got better and we are on the same page about managing the risks he presents".*

We also found that, as a result of the notable improvements in these relationships, information-sharing was not only taking place more often, but it was relevant and supporting public protection. In our core inspections, we have regularly reported our concerns about the quality and effectiveness of these relationships. Therefore, it is pleasing to see that the pandemic has created fresh opportunities for staff to learn from each other, consolidate relationships and work effectively together to support public protection.

## Good practice examples

### Kent resilience forum

The establishment of a 'resilience forum' in the Kent NPS division, where over 40 organisations had been mobilised to strengthen effective joint working, was impressive. The forum included staff from local authorities, the ports, and the police. This represented good resilience planning on a partnership basis and made effective use of resources.

### All Wales Criminal Justice Board

There was an active All Wales Criminal Justice Board at which the NPS was a valued member. It was well connected at strategic and operational levels. The board met regularly, and partners engaged well to resolve challenges they were facing.

### Work with the Mayor's Office

In London, both the NPS and CRC had liaised well with the Mayor's Office to explain how probation providers would be delivering services during the pandemic, under their EDMs. This was appreciated as it allowed an early opportunity for comment and discussion.

## Housing and approved premises

Suitable housing is critical to the wellbeing of those on probation supervision, and essential in supporting desistance and public protection.

As part of its COVID-19 response, HMPPS set up seven Homelessness Prevention Taskforces (HPTs) to work with local authorities and other partners to find accommodation for individuals released from prison. As of 26 August, HPTs had secured settled accommodation for a total of 420 individuals who had no pre-existing accommodation. This included individuals' own accommodation, local authority sourced accommodation, private rented sector, approved premises, and voluntary sector places. These figures are calculated from management information data provided by regional HPTs and should be considered as indicative and subject to change as the scheme progresses<sup>5</sup>. The longer-term operation of these taskforces is under review.

The response of local authorities in providing emergency housing for homeless and vulnerable service users during the pandemic has been welcomed by probation providers. Without exception, staff in both the CRCs and NPS we spoke to during this review reported that this housing had greatly enhanced their ability to provide effective supervision. Partnership working was excellent,

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<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary question, 09 September 2020.

and all the organisations had worked together to facilitate access to emergency accommodation. The mobilisation of additional resources and establishment of homeless prevention taskforce teams have had a significant impact on protecting vulnerable individuals and preventing crime. One practitioner told us:

*"This housing provision has been a lifeline in so many ways".*

Another said:

*"Managed to get everyone housed, a really good feeling! If they've engaged, we've managed to get them accommodation".*

The collaboration of different partners working together during lockdown to achieve the provision of emergency accommodation demonstrates what is possible. This must not be lost as HMPPS moves into the recovery phase if the vulnerable are to be protected and given the opportunity to re-establish themselves in the community.

The partnership arrangements to manage risk of harm presented by individuals residing in approved premises have remained strong. There are good local contacts with police forces and adult social care. Effective multi-agency working has been maintained. Approved premises have been made safe for staff and residents to work and live in.

### **Court work**

During the pandemic, many courts have been shut and the backlog of probation cases is increasing. This has included not only new cases but also those listed for enforcement. This will be a massive challenge for partners in the criminal justice system and leaders will need to ensure that there is effective collaboration to ensure fairness for victims and perpetrators. As one partner link worker told us:

*"The victim I'm working with is really worried that her perpetrator has not completed the building better relationships (BBR) programme and may get away with not having to do it. He's a dangerous bloke and I'm worried".*

We found several examples of good practice where prison staff had worked well with probation court staff to use video conferencing facilities to prepare court reports. Additionally, we found evidence of good pre-release work where the two agencies had worked well together. Some courts were using video-enabled justice systems and cloud platforms to process prioritised cases. It was encouraging to find that, where relevant, probation staff had been actively engaged.

### **Impact on partners delivering services**

The pandemic has resulted in probation partners having to deliver most services remotely. For many on probation supervision, this approach has led to a significant reduction in the services they can access. For example, access to mental health services has been a particular problem for many, though not all. Probation practitioners have made referrals for mental health services, but there have either been lengthy delays or no response at all. This has had a negative impact on emotional wellbeing, especially for those who are vulnerable and living by themselves. The example below demonstrates the benefits of a partnership approach to support mental health.

## Good practice example

The NPS in Cleveland held a multi-agency professionals' meeting to discuss how to support an individual whose mental health had deteriorated due to COVID-19. This involved adult social care, an IOM practitioner and a health worker. As a result, the individual was admitted to hospital. He was subsequently discharged and weekly multi-agency support from a community psychiatric nurse and social worker was put in place. In addition, the individual's progress was monitored at a weekly professionals' meeting.

Agencies providing drug and alcohol services have also changed the way they work. While we found some good examples of partnership work to coordinate contact and improve access to medication, the absence of drug testing in most cases made it difficult to assess the level of drug misuse. This hindered staff from carrying out comprehensive assessments and reviews of the risk of harm that individuals presented. In a small number of cases in the sample for this thematic review, we found evidence of probation practitioners being able to access mentoring support for service users. Much of this was practical, for example collecting and delivering a methadone prescription or a food parcel. This support was appreciated by those receiving it.

### Innovation

With regard to innovation during lockdown, we were pleased to discover that the Durham Tees Valley CRC had partnered with a commissioned provider, Harbour Support Services, to develop and establish a 'live chat' for victims of domestic abuse. Similarly, Nottinghamshire Women's Aid set up an instant messaging service. Partner link workers had reported that it was often difficult for victims to speak with workers when their abusers were still living in the same house as them. This facility allowed victims to have a digital conversation with specially trained workers. Partner link workers told us that those who had used this service valued it. In addition, a number of organisations had provided financial contributions so that outreach services to vulnerable women and men could continue.

We were introduced to a number of schemes where partners who were providing services for women had begun to use Zoom as a communication tool to provide peer support. From our findings in these cases, it was clear that this additional support was making a difference for women who were self-isolating.

We found particularly effective partnership working in IOM teams, which bring together probation and police to manage the most prolific or high-risk individuals. While these teams were not newly created as a result of the pandemic, we found many examples where good engagement had led to good pastoral and practical care and risk of harm being managed well. IOM teams deal with the most vulnerable and high-risk individuals. In the circumstances, effective coordination and communication are essential. We found evidence of joint welfare visits being undertaken, food parcels being distributed and information on risk being shared in a timely way to support public protection.

### Interface relationships

At the time of our inspection, the interface arrangements between the CRCs and NPS were generally working well. Relationships had been strained early on, with CRCs experiencing delays in getting their EDM plans signed off and a lack of consultation around unpaid work. Relationships are now improved, with greater collegial working with HMPPS. At an operational level, risk escalation procedures between the NPS and CRCs were being used appropriately. Out of the 14 new community orders we inspected that were made during the inspection period, all the cases had been allocated appropriately.

Given the implications of the government's announcement, during the pandemic, that it intends to cancel the Probation Delivery Partner procurement process and bring the delivery of unpaid work and accredited programmes into the public sector, we were pleased to find that relationships between probation contract managers from HMPPS and leaders in the CRCs remained healthy.

Performance targets and service credit penalties were suspended for April to June 2020. This was welcomed by the CRCs, and we believe it helped the CRCs to concentrate on designing and delivering their commitments through the EDMs. Furthermore, contract managers appreciated the burden they were putting on CRCs and were aware that their approach was very much influenced by the NPS perspective.

### **1.3 Service delivery**

Following the announcement of a national lockdown on 24 March 2020, probation providers introduced EDMs, prioritising the management of risk of harm to others. This radically changed the way in which probation services were delivered. Gold, silver and bronze command structures were established to oversee this major change. Most offices were closed, and staff advised to work from home. The risk of harm posed by each service user currently being supervised was reviewed, and the frequency and type of contact determined in line with the operating models. Most face-to-face supervision was suspended except for those individuals assessed as posing a very high risk of harm to others. This applied to people released from custody for Terrorism Act (TACT) offences and those assessed as presenting a very high risk of harm to actual and potential victims. All service users released from prison for their initial appointment, and those who did not have access to a telephone, were also seen face-to-face. Where door-step visiting was not deemed necessary, staff contacted service users by phone, initially twice a week.

All unpaid work requirements and the delivery of new accredited programmes were suspended. Staff working in courts were instructed to work remotely from their homes. Approved premises implemented strict social distancing guidelines, with some closing to comply with government guidelines.

Our review focused on the impact of the changes in supervisory arrangements for those on probation community sentences and on licence from prison. We reviewed a sample of cases that had begun before lockdown (pre-lockdown sample) to assess the impact on ongoing supervision and a sample of cases that started once lockdown had been imposed (post-lockdown sample) to see what was being delivered for new cases.

#### **Court reports: post-lockdown cases**

Pre-sentence information provided to courts to support sentencing decisions was good in the small number of court reports we inspected for this thematic review. There were no immediate barriers to accessing public protection and safeguarding information. While some safeguarding checks were undertaken after sentencing, these were carried out in a timely manner and did not place others at risk of harm. We were pleased to find that a number of reports, though not all, included how the pandemic had affected the individual's offending.

#### **EDM implementation**

##### **Assessment work: post-lockdown cases**

In 28 out of 31 post-lockdown cases inspected across the CRCs and NPS, we found that service users had played an active part in the assessment process. Their views had been sought to help them understand the reasons for their most recent offending and the links with past behaviours and life experiences. They had completed self-assessment questionnaires, and that information had been integrated into the supervisory process. Remote contact by phone had been used well to support information exchange between practitioners and service users. Some practitioners reported that decision-making was more difficult when they had not met the service user. However, we saw encouraging signs that practitioners were making appropriate use of their professional judgement, which some had linked back to the relaxing of targets during the pandemic, describing their practice as less of a tick-box exercise.

We found positive examples of more but shorter conversations taking place between individuals and practitioners. Additionally, a number of responsible officers had used texting to ask, clarify or gather



relevant information. This led to the main offending factors being identified in almost all relevant cases. Inspectors commented:

*"The assessment provides offending information as well as information the service user has shared/disclosed. Taking into consideration the current COVID-19 circumstances, the responsible officer engaged positively with the service user and took his views into account".*

*"Contact log entries show clear evidence of involvement in the assessment by the service user, including his attitude towards his offences".*

*"The responsible officer engaged the service user and ascertained his views, particularly in relation to how motivated he was to address his offending behaviour".*

We found that the profile of risk of harm and public protection work for practitioners had increased in the CRCs. The focus on risk of harm in the EDMs has allowed responsible officers and other practitioners an opportunity to develop and consolidate their risk management work. In work relating to assessments, 11 out of the 12 relevant CRC cases had the appropriate level of focus on keeping other people safe. When combined with the inspected NPS cases, a total of 28 out of 31 cases had properly considered risk of harm issues in assessments.

### **Planning: post-lockdown cases**

The involvement of those on probation in planning of work to reduce their likelihood of further offending and keep other people safe was better in the NPS than CRCs. Service users had been sufficiently engaged in this work in 18 out of the 19 NPS cases we inspected. For the CRCs, the figure was 8 out of 12. The latter was disappointing, especially given the positive engagement at the assessment stage. In too many cases, responsible officers missed opportunities to empower service users to develop their own ideas and objectives. Instead, too often the targets set in plans were driven by the responsible officer. On a more positive note, across both CRCs and the NPS, 28 out of the 31 sentence plans inspected included clear actions that supported good public protection and safeguarding.

### **Good practice example**

Julie was convicted of breaching a restraining order, which resulted in her being sent to prison for six months. The victim was an immediate relative, and the offence involved attending the victim's home and causing considerable distress through verbal and physical violence. At the time, Julie was also subject to a suspended sentence order. During the assessment and planning processes, Julie maintained that she was not a risk to anyone and did not feel she should be prevented from seeing her relative. However, in a victim impact statement, the victim had made it clear that she feared for her safety and wellbeing. Julie had a number of previous convictions linked to the index offence and was correctly assessed as posing a medium risk of harm to the known victim.

The responsible officer had been in contact with the resettlement worker from the prison from which Julie had been released to assess the level of empathy she had shown towards the victim. The responsible officer used information from a housing worker and adult social care, the victim impact statement, and probation case records to produce a sentence plan to protect Julie's relative and reduce the likelihood of contact. The non-contact restrictions were clearly explained to Julie, along with the possible consequences of failing to comply. Planning also involved referrals to relevant public protection agencies. The responsible officer obtained Julie's agreement to complying with the objectives set in the plan.

## **Reviewing of work: pre-lockdown cases**

Reviewing of risk of harm and work required to keep other people safe in the pre-lockdown sample could have been better. In 2 out of the 13 CRC cases that we inspected, we found that a review had not been completed, and in 5 out of the 13 cases the review was either not thorough enough or was only partly sufficient. This was unsatisfactory and improvements could have been made if management oversight had been more effective. While the volume of cases that required reviewing at the point of lockdown was significant, we noticed that some very basic information had been missed. This included potential victims living at the same address, irregular appointment-keeping before lockdown, outstanding offences, and deteriorating emotional wellbeing. Reviews carried out by the NPS were better but not always comprehensive. We found that 4 out of the 16 NPS cases that we inspected had not been given a full and robust review.

## **Delivery of services: pre- and post-lockdown cases**

### **Telephone contact**

The type of contact used during the EDM period has largely and unsurprisingly been via telephone by responsible officers working from their own homes. NPS practitioners were carrying out more face-to-face and door-step visits than their CRC colleagues. Overwhelmingly, service users who were in stable personal circumstances welcomed telephone contact arrangements rather than face-to-face meetings. However, this was not the case for those whose circumstances were complex, those who were self-isolating or shielding, and those who were vulnerable and had no or limited contact with others. These differing opinions are reflected in the following comments from service users:

*"Telephone calls varied, some of them were about ten minutes, just to check that I was fine and there were no concerns. Some were slightly longer, if I'd got stuff to tell her about work".*

*"I don't like change. I like that it was always the same day and time before lockdown. Then it was changed and it's now not the same each week. I know my probation officer is covering for other people, but it would have been good for him to take account of my mental health when changing things".*

*"I was touched by the fact she telephoned me on my birthday to wish me well, and on the anniversary of my child being taken into local authority care".*

*"The calls do help in some ways, but I need more support than a 5- to 10-minute nice chat over the phone".*

*"I am stranded, I have no way to complete what is required of me".*

*"I prefer the phone 100 per cent and feel it is possible to build and maintain relationships this way. Looking ahead, I think calls will make employment much easier, as I often have to take afternoons off, which were changed last minute, which made me feel uncomfortable at work".*

*"Every day is a Sunday these days. With lockdown and a new baby, I don't know what day it is and sometimes I worry I will miss the call and it will be a problem. My new probation officer recognises this and has given a number for me to call back on, which is better".*

## Attendance at offices

Within the sample of service users who were interviewed for this thematic review, two were required to attend an office, given the risk of harm they presented coupled with their complex needs. Neither objected to attending the office. One explained that he was frustrated because his appointments were only 15 minutes long, to allow social distancing between service users using the reception area. Given that he had various complex needs, including psychopathic disorder and borderline personality disorder, he was 'finding it tough' at the current time. As such, his weekly supervision was too short to fully address his needs. He found the strictly timed meetings to be a challenge in terms of opening up. Therefore, not all the issues were covered, creating potential gaps in risk management information.

## Door-step visiting

Door-step visiting was initially introduced to monitor whether a service user was living at the address they had specified – it was largely an administrative tool where, during the first lockdown period, two practitioners, not necessarily ones supervising the case, would attend an address and, from their vehicle, speak to the service user, who would present themselves at a door or window. Basic questions were asked about compliance with government social distancing guidelines, changes in personal circumstances, and welfare. At first it was viewed as an administrative tool, with service users feeling neither positive nor negative about the experience, as expressed by one service user:

*"I don't see the point. I understand they need to confirm I'm where I say I am, but I have this home drive and it's done by another probation officer who I don't even know so didn't see the point".*

However, over recent months, door-step visiting has been used more creatively by practitioners to support public protection and keep others safe from harm. This type of visiting seems to have reconnected some practitioners with the benefit of seeing individuals in their home circumstances, which our previous local inspections have found had become increasingly less common. We heard examples of meaningful conversations taking place on door steps, in open spaces and gardens, as opposed to 'drive-by' visits where practitioners sat in their car and had a conversation with an individual looking at them through a doorway or window. From our various focus group meetings with responsible officers, it was clear that many, for the first time, were beginning to think about home visiting as a tool to support risk assessment and public protection work.

## Levels of contact

In the cases we inspected, the frequency of contact had been set as below:

What was the frequency of contact set during EDM?	
Twice weekly	8
Weekly	38
Fortnightly	7
Monthly	5
Other	2

We considered this to be appropriate, and we were pleased to find frequency levels increased where significant changes had been identified.

## Good practice example

Tony was subject to a suspended sentence order for breaching a restraining order. His compliance had been poor. The responsible officer was worried that Tony had not responded to her calls. She had left several text messages, and had also sent a letter and a WhatsApp video message. Given her concerns (his excessive use of alcohol, history of domestic abuse, and a young child at the property), she consulted with her line manager and it was agreed that a door-step visit was needed. A colleague from the IOM team was contacted and a visit carried out. On arrival, Tony was at his home. There was a garden area where a socially distanced meeting could take place. The responsible officer spoke to Tony about his non-compliance. She noticed that there were a considerable number of empty cans and bottles of alcohol in the garden. Additionally, his partner and child remained indoors while the meeting was taking place. This troubled the responsible officer, who explained that she was unhappy with what she had seen. This led to a referral to the local MASH, with a child in need meeting following shortly afterwards. Actions were agreed and meetings were now taking place with the service user's partner and child. The service user was issued with a final warning.

### Communication tools

Practitioners had used a range of communication tools to carry out their work. These included WhatsApp messaging, online courses, workbooks, voice calls, Microsoft Teams, Skype, video conferencing and emails. We were impressed with the creativity shown in delivering services using these tools. Service users largely favoured non face-to-face reporting, but its effectiveness needs much more analysis. Remote communication has been necessary during the pandemic and can add value to service delivery in its various formats, but it cannot totally replace face-to-face contact in the long term. We found good evidence of some RARs either being delivered virtually or piloted virtually. While this method may suit some learning styles, it is dependent on effective information technology, compatibility and internet connectivity. Not all service users have access to this.

### Enforcement

Enforcement decisions were usually well informed and taken in a timely manner. Of the 48 eligible CRC and NPS cases we inspected, six should, in our opinion, have been breached but hadn't been. Services delivered to manage risk of harm to others were generally good. We found evidence of timely safeguarding and public protection referrals being made, door-step (drive-through) visits being carried out and risk levels being increased following significant changes in circumstances.

### Work to address diversity needs

The quality of assessment, planning and delivery of community-based case supervision work that properly took account of diversity factors was equally variable in both the CRCs and NPS. We found that, out of the 60 cases inspected for this review, practitioners had not fully met the service user's personal needs in 28. In too many cases where protected characteristics such as race and age were clearly evident, these were not fully assessed and explored, and service delivery adjusted where necessary. Attention to health, both physical and mental, was inconsistent. When work in this area was done well, it was done very well, as identified below.

## Good practice example

Jaswinder is an Asian man subject to a suspended sentence order for an assault on a police officer following a call-out to his place of work. Jaswinder had struggled with his mental health for many years. This was appropriately acknowledged by the responsible officer. She had liaised with his mental health social worker by phone and on Microsoft Teams. Jaswinder's mental health was reviewed at every remote telephone call meeting. Additionally, the responsible officer had also arranged for Jaswinder's medication to be collected from a pharmacy because he was vulnerable due to the coronavirus.

We found that several service users who were interviewed for this thematic review reported that they had received considerably more contact post-lockdown. One said about his responsible officer:

*"We've talked so much; she understands my background more than what she might read in a file. Up to an hour and 20 mins. We would never have had the time to do that if it was a 15-minute conversation in the office once a week".*

This type of frequency, regularity and volume of contact was welcomed and seen as helping to support change and personal needs.

Several service users spoke positively about the interventions they had received:

*"I get to do stuff about my thinking (CBT) by video WhatsApp, it's my first time on probation so didn't really know what to expect. I've been quite impressed. I had the impression it wouldn't work well but it does, and I've found them to be flexible around my job".*

*"I do the drugs and alcohol fellowship meeting on Zoom".*

## Approved premises

Work carried out by key workers and other staff working in approved premises was impressive. In order to comply with government social distancing guidelines, capacity in some approved premises had been reduced. Some had been shut, and most had to have modifications. Relocation of residents had been managed well and a range of staff had been deployed to support this transition. Travel and relocation costs were covered by the organisation.

Key workers were allocated technology to work remotely, and this had increased the speed with which they could respond to queries and requests for information. This supported effective public protection. Risk assessments of premises and the needs of staff and residents have been thorough. The pandemic has inevitably reduced the number of community resources that service users can access. This has resulted in keyworkers providing much more in terms of one-to-one interventions and helping service users to make use of other remote services. Lockdown has been a challenge for many, as visiting was initially not permitted. This meant that many new residents did not have any family contact. More recently, televisions have been provided in bedrooms and there is more contact with field staff and family members. Those service users who have needed to self-isolate due to becoming infected by the coronavirus have received good care.

Purposeful activity has generally decreased for those residing in approved premises, but we discovered an example of innovative work in Wales. Here, an old sailing boat (a landlocked boat) had been refurbished after the pandemic started and seating spaces formed. At each end, raised garden beds had been designed with seating and a small table had been assembled in between them. This could be used by people to rest before continuing their walk. This provided purposeful activity for residents and produced a new community space.

## **Work with victims**

During this thematic review, we spoke with a number of victim liaison officers and partner link workers. As a group, they told us that remote contact with victims they were already working with was productive. However, it was much harder to establish effective relationships with those they had not yet personally met. Our findings from the cases where these practitioners had been involved showed that, while contact was being made, this did not always result in effective engagement. We suspect that victims may have felt uncomfortable speaking about sensitive matters over the phone. In those cases where there was active involvement, we found evidence that victim liaison officers were providing updates to victims, as agreed.

Before lockdown, a number of partner link workers reported that their roles in their organisations had not been fully understood. During lockdown, many found that their managers were taking a closer interest in their work. This was reassuring and it is hoped that as organisations transition to recovery from lockdown, their work will be recognised, and its profile increased.

At an operational level, a number of partner link workers reported that remote working in lockdown had provided them with considerable flexibility in their work with victims of domestic abuse. They said they could now arrange phone calls in the evening or even at weekends – often this was far more convenient for victims. At the same time, it was acknowledged that this way of working did not suit everyone, given their own personal circumstances, and no one was instructed to work in this way. WhatsApp video calls were often used to carry out face-to-face interaction. Often, perpetrators of domestic abuse were still living in the same home as partners. This made it difficult and sometimes impossible to have a comprehensive discussion. Not being able to meet with victims away from the home had been problematic at the beginning. While we found evidence of some door-step contact beginning, it was remote contact that remained the main communication tool.

## **Resettlement work**

Resettlement work focusing on meeting the immediate needs of people about to be released from custody was generally good. This was supported by measures that HMPPS had put in place post-lockdown. These included the establishment of homelessness prevention taskforce teams and the provision of new funding by government for emergency housing, to local authorities and probation providers. In addition, those being released from custody benefited from the receipt of an enhanced payment and a mobile phone if they did not have access to one.

We found that, in all the resettlement cases we inspected (22), housing and financial needs were addressed well. Suitable housing with emergency accommodation providers, housing associations or family members had been secured. Furthermore, release addresses had been approved following police and children's services checks. Access to practical support was provided through referrals for food vouchers, and several people received additional financial support through local charity groups. In a number of cases, where required, people being released were provided with photographic identification.

## **Good practice example**

Adam was due to be released homeless from custody, following a last-minute decision by the Home Office not to activate a deportation order. His resettlement worker secured an emergency bed at an approved premises. His stay was subsequently extended to allow 12 weeks' residency. The responsible officer was tenacious in liaising with the Home Office to eventually secure proof that Adam had been given leave of residence, and this entitled him to universal credit. Once he had received universal credit, Adam was able to pay rent to secure his stay at the approved premises and to apply for local authority housing support. This had previously been denied due to him having 'no status'.

The coordination of resettlement activity was purposeful. We found that there had been good liaison between resettlement workers and community responsible officers. This ensured that the

licence period began well – an aspect of supervision that is crucial in supporting desistance and public protection. In a small number of cases, however, service users reported that, following release from custody, they did not have a named responsible officer to report to for several weeks. They were seen by a duty officer on release and had telephone contact from different staff each week. This irritated them, as they felt they were repeating the same information several times over to different staff. A named worker attached to a case is more likely to achieve better engagement and trust. The latter was described as essential by many service users who were interviewed for this thematic review.

## **1.4 Conclusion and implications**

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the landscape of probation service delivery. Senior leaders and staff in HMPPS, the CRCs and the NPS have worked at pace to implement EDMs which, at their core, were designed with public safety in mind. Immediate risk of harm has been managed well. Relationships with public protection agencies have improved and probation practitioners have become more confident in delivering effective risk of harm work. Lockdown has triggered remote working and, for staff, working from home. While flexible arrangements have largely been welcomed, many staff have found remote working problematic. Unsurprisingly, service users with complex needs have struggled to cope, with many experiencing a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. There remain many challenges ahead. Some of these include: addressing the gaps in services, mental health and suitable housing; the compatibility of communication tools to deliver and receive effective services; the inevitable increase in workloads as probation services move into recovery; and staff wellbeing. The resilience that has been shown by providers of probation services must now be used to inform and design a new normal.

# Annexe 1: Methodology

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## Introduction

Following the Prime Minister's 23 March 2020 announcement of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HMPPS agreed Exceptional Delivery Models (EDMs) with the NPS and with each of the CRC owners. While these EDMs were in force, business as usual performance management and assurance regimes were paused to reduce pressure on frontline work.

HMI Probation paused inspections but undertook this qualitative thematic review of EDM arrangements in probation services to assure the quality of essential public protection, child safeguarding and compliance work. It is also hoped that there will be longer-term learning from the EDM experience, especially in the use of technology for supervising service users remotely and remote working with partners in the voluntary and statutory sectors. The fieldwork took place between June and July 2020.

## Approach

A qualitative review approach was adopted, both to protect frontline services from the burden of a wider inspection, and to allow HMI Probation to focus on the essential components of probation supervision during this extraordinary time. Although this approach does not generate data that is generalisable, we are able to map processes and gain richer insights into the detail of how probation services were faring in the EDM mode.

## Evidence gathered

**Case reviews:** We undertook case reviews with the aim of generating case studies. Our web-based data collection tool (InfoPath) comprised largely open questions to capture the story of the case rather than produce performance data.

Inspectors remotely examined 60 cases across six probation areas (coterminous to both CRCs and the NPS). The responsible officers were not interviewed about their individual cases; we were mindful of the imperative to protect the frontline, although such interviews are very useful in explaining the dynamics of a case.

Thirty of the inspected cases began before the EDMs were introduced and thirty cases began after the EDMs were reviewed. This was intended to allow us to generate insights into the effects of the new mode of operation on existing and new cases.

We selected cases non-randomly to capture riskier and more complex cases; we wanted to review the 'sharp end of probation'. We especially wanted to focus on the following service user profiles (many of which intersect):

- high risk of serious harm cases
- person convicted of sexual offences
- person convicted of violent offences being managed under MAPPA Level 2 or 3
- domestic abuse perpetrators
- approved premises residents
- those who were subject to offender management in custody
- diversity characteristics, especially black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and women.

**Staff interviews:** We conducted 85 interviews and focus groups with:

- Senior leaders in HMPPS, NPS and CRCs
- Probation officers and probation service officers
- Middle managers managing frontline staff and services
- Approved premises staff
- Court staff



- Victim liaison officers/partner link workers
- Public protection and safeguarding specialists.

At the request of some inspected bodies, we also spoke with a small number of staff delivering non-accredited programmes and unpaid work supervisors who were supporting service delivery.

***Service users:*** we commissioned EP:IC (Empowering People: Inspiring Change) to undertake interviews with probation service users. EP:IC consultants interviewed 33 people.

Included in the sample were:

- Service users aged between 24 and 60 years
- One woman
- Eight service users from non-white ethnic minorities
- Five service users who were on life licences
- Service users on community orders (around half of the sample).

## **Analysis**

These three sources – case reviews, interviews with staff, managers and leaders, and interviews with probation service users – combine to provide a detailed picture of how probation services were delivered during the EDM.

The analysis of the evidence has produced a number of key themes which emerge from the narratives. From these themes we offer recommendations and insights for probation services as they recover and develop from this unique moment.

## Annexe 2: Glossary

<b>Accredited programme</b>	A programme of work delivered to service users in groups or individually through a requirement in a community order or a suspended sentence order, or part of a custodial sentence or a condition in a prison licence. Accredited programmes are accredited by the Correctional Services Accredited Panel as being effective in reducing the likelihood of reoffending
<b>Allocation</b>	The process by which a decision is made about whether a service user will be supervised by the NPS or a CRC
<b>Building Better Relationships (BBR)</b>	BBR is a nationally accredited groupwork programme designed to reduce reoffending by adult male perpetrators of intimate partner violence
<b>Child protection</b>	Work to make sure that that all reasonable action has been taken to keep to a minimum the risk of a child coming to harm
<b>CBT</b>	Cognitive behavioural therapy helps individuals manage their problems by changing the way they think and behave. It is used to treat anxiety and depression, and can be useful for other mental and physical health problems
<b>CPN</b>	Community psychiatric nurse – a nurse providing a mental health service in the community
<b>CRC</b>	Community Rehabilitation Company
<b>EDM</b>	Exceptional Delivery Model – an organisational operating model designed to show how and what probation services will be delivered during COVID-19
<b>HMPPS</b>	Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service: the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services
<b>Integrated Offender Management (IOM)</b>	Integrated Offender Management brings a cross-agency response to the crime and reoffending threats faced by local communities. The most persistent and problematic service users are identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together
<b>MAPPA</b>	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage service users who pose a higher risk of harm to others. Level 1 is ordinary agency management, where the risks posed by the service user can be managed by the agency responsible for the supervision or case management of the service user. This compares with levels 2 and 3, which require active multi-agency management

<b>MASH</b>	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs act as the first point of contact for new safeguarding concerns or enquiries. They usually include representatives from the local authority (children and adult social care services), the police, health bodies, probation and other agencies
<b>NPS</b>	National Probation Service: a single national service which came into being in June 2014. Its role is to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of service users, including those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA
<b>OMiC</b>	Offender management in custody: a department in a prison supporting resettlement
<b>Partner Link worker</b>	Specialist practitioner who works with victims of domestic abuse
<b>Partners</b>	Partners include statutory and non-statutory organisations, working with the participant/service user through a partnership agreement with the NPS or CRC
<b>Providers</b>	Providers deliver a service or input commissioned by and provided under contract to the NPS or CRC. This includes the staff and services provided under the contract, even when they are integrated or located within the NPS or CRC
<b>PSR</b>	Pre-sentence report. This refers to any report prepared for a court, whether delivered orally or in a written format
<b>PO</b>	Probation officer: this is the term for a 'qualified' responsible officer who has undertaken a higher education-based course for two years. The name of the qualification and content of the training varies depending on when it was undertaken. They manage more complex cases
<b>PSO</b>	Probation services officer: this is the term for a responsible officer who was originally recruited with no qualification. They may access locally determined training to 'qualify' as a probation services officer or to build on this to qualify as a probation officer. They may manage all but the most complex cases depending on their level of training and experience. Some PSOs work within the court setting, where their duties include the writing of pre-sentence reports
<b>Rethink</b>	A non-accredited, usually group, programme aimed at examining and changing thinking in offending behaviour
<b>User voice</b>	A charitable organisation commissioned to collect the views of those on probation supervision



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