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of Justice

Blended Supervision Model Evaluation

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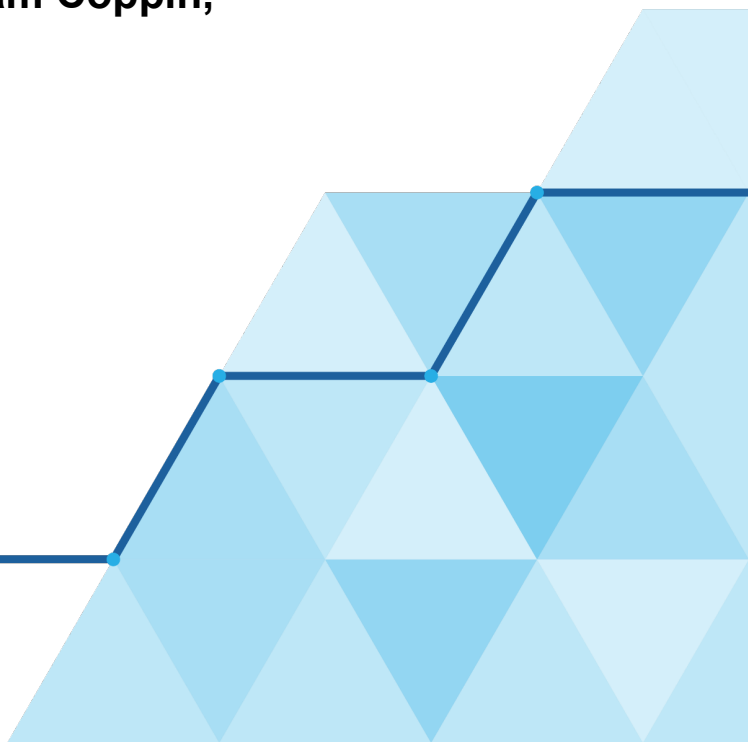
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Glossary

Blended Supervision – An approach to probation supervision that combines in-person and remote interactions with people on probation to effectively address their needs, manage their risks, and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. This model aligns with HM Prison and Probation Service's (HMPPS) Target Operating Model (TOM), which focuses on assessing, protecting, and facilitating change in individuals by understanding their needs, managing their risks, and guiding them towards transformation. The initial guidance for Blended Supervision was published in November 2021, and it was used at a regional level by April 2022.

Breach – A person on probation is said to be in breach of their order or licence conditions if the rules of these have not been followed. This may include doing something their sentence bans them from doing, committing another crime, missing meetings and appointments without a good reason or behaving in an unacceptable way at meetings or appointments. Breaking these rules will prompt action by the probation practitioner, who will begin breach proceedings, resulting in the person on probation being required to attend court.

Change Work – Change work is delivered as part of Rehabilitative Activity Requirement (RAR) days and appointments via interventions that support rehabilitation. Practitioners can utilise a range of activities in isolation or combination to meet the needs of the person on probation via Structured Interventions, Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) and the Probation Practitioner Suite of Toolkits.

Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS) – CRS are part of the probation system and provide flexible, responsive services to help break the cycle of reoffending. They are delivered by expert organisations at a local and regional level to provide tailored support and address areas of need associated with reoffending.

Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) – CRCs were set up in June 2014 to manage offenders who present a low or medium-risk of serious harm. The contracts were terminated in June 2021 when the CRCs were returned to public control and absorbed into the newly named 'Probation Service'.

Compliance – Compliance with probation orders and licences means the extent to which the person on probation is adhering to the sentence's conditions/requirements. These can include attending planned contacts with a probation practitioner, reporting for requirements such as unpaid work or accredited programmes, keeping curfew hours or not entering certain locations.

Enforcement – The term used to refer to action taken if a person on probation fails to comply with the requirements/conditions of their sentence/licence. Actions can include verbal and written warnings, additional restrictions, breach proceedings and potential recall to custody.

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) – From 01 April 2017, HMPPS became the single agency responsible for delivering prison and probation services across England and Wales. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) took on the responsibility of setting standards for overall policy direction, scrutinising prison performance, and commissioning services. These used to fall under the remit of the National Offender Management Service (the agency that has been replaced by HMPPS).

Integrated Offender Management (IOM) – A cross-agency response to local crime and reoffending priorities. The most persistent and problematic offenders are identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together, particularly police and probation.

National Probation Service (NPS) – A single national service that came into being in June 2014. Its role is to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of offenders, including those presenting a high or very high-risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA in England and Wales. Following the termination of CRC contracts on 26th June 2021, the NPS and CRCs unified to form the newly named Probation Service.

NDeIus – National DeIus: the approved case management system used by the Probation Service in England and Wales.

Offender Assessment System (OASys) – Currently used in England and Wales by the Probation Service to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision.

In-Person Planned Contact – In-person National Standard (NS) contacts are an aggregation of the following contact types: Home Visit to Case (NS); Planned Office Visit (NS); Initial Appointment – Home Visit (NS); and Initial Appointment – In office (NS). We use this term in the report when referring to contact data outcomes.

Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) – An operational unit comprising a probation office or offices.

Probation Practitioner (PP) – The term used to denote the formerly-used terms ‘Offender Manager’, ‘Responsible Officer’ and ‘Officer’. It can be used to describe either a Probation Officer (PO) or Probation Services Officer (PSO) who is responsible for the sentence management of people on probation. In this report, where the term PP is used in sample sizes and quote labels, this refers specifically to a Band 4 Probation Officer.

Probation Services Officer (PSO) – A Probation Services Officer is the term for a probation practitioner who was originally recruited with no professional probation qualification (the PQiP). They may access locally determined training to qualify as a probation services officer or 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.

Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) – Qualification required to become a probation practitioner. The PQiP blends theory and practice across classroom and work settings. The qualification at the end is a level 6 Professional Qualification in Probation. This is a combination of a level 5 Diploma in Probation Practice and a Diploma of Community Justice.

Propensity Score Matching (PSM) – A statistical technique used to reduce bias in observational studies by pairing individuals with similar characteristics except for the treatment received. It estimates the effect of a treatment by comparing outcomes between matched groups, thus approximating a randomised controlled trial.

Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) – From February 2015, when the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 was implemented, courts can specify the number of RAR days

within an order; it is for probation services to decide on the precise work to be done during the RAR days awarded.

RAR Days: These refer to the total number of days specified by the court during which the person on probation must engage in rehabilitation activities. The court orders a certain number of RAR days, which set the maximum limit of days the person might need to spend in such activities. The activities during these days can include a range of interventions such as unpaid work, attendance at programs, education, training, and other forms of rehabilitation.

RAR Appointments: These are specific sessions or meetings arranged by the probation practitioner as part of the rehabilitation activities under the RAR. These appointments could be for various purposes, such as attending a course, meeting with a probation officer, or engaging in other rehabilitative programs. The number of appointments might not necessarily match the total number of RAR days.

Remote Check-in – In this report, we use this term to refer to contact that is described by practitioners and people on probation as planned or unplanned, short in nature, and occurs between in-person supervision as a ‘top-up’.

Remote Contact – Contact by a probation practitioner with a person on probation whilst the two are in different locations; by phone or video-call (which will be specified if known). This term is used in the report if it is unclear as to whether the individual is referring to a remote ‘check-in’ or remote structured supervision.

Remote National Standard Contacts – An aggregation of the following contact types: Planned Telephone Contact (NS) and Planned Video Contact (NS).

Senior Probation Officer (SPO) – First line manager within the Probation Service.

Sentence Management Activities – This can include undertaking assessment and planning, enforcement, reviewing progress against the sentence plan, attending to risk concerns, safeguarding, supporting compliance, sustaining and increasing motivation and engagement, providing information/signposting and engaging in change work.

Serious Further Offence (SFO) – Where an individual subject to (or recently subject to) probation commits a serious offence (such as murder, manslaughter or rape). A review is conducted to identify lessons to be learned.

Toolkits – The main vehicle for Probation Service-delivered RARs are through Structured Interventions and Probation Practitioner Toolkits. The available suite of toolkits is ratified through a governance process before being approved. The report makes reference to the term 'off-menu'. This is where practitioners are *not* using a structured toolkit to undertake change work.

Unpaid Work – A court can include an unpaid work requirement as part of a community order. Offenders can be required to work for up to 300 hours on community projects under supervision.

Workload Management Tool – A tool to calculate the overall workload of an individual responsible officer. It takes into account numbers and types of cases.

Executive Summary

The Blended Supervision Model (BSM) in probation combines in-person and remote interactions, such as phone calls and video conferencing, to address the needs and manage the risks of individuals on probation. The BSM allows for a mix of in-person and remote supervision based on the Target Operating Model (TOM) tiering framework, which assesses individuals' criminogenic needs, risk of harm and likelihood of reoffending. Higher-risk individuals receive more frequent in-person interactions, especially during the initial weeks of their sentence, with the balance between in-person and remote supervision, in the main, left to practitioners' discretion.

This report presents the findings from a process evaluation of the BSM in England and Wales. The evaluation sought to fill knowledge gaps by exploring:

- **Guidance and Practitioner Support:** Understanding how the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) could support probation practitioners with clear, useful guidance on the use of Blended Supervision while allowing for professional discretion.
- **Impact on Sentence Management:** Evaluating the perceived impact of different contact modes on sentence management.
- **Technological Solutions:** Assessing the benefits, challenges, and effectiveness of remote supervision technologies.

The evaluation was conducted in two phases, from October 2022 to February 2024, and focused on five probation regions – East of England, Greater Manchester, North West, Wales, and West Midlands.

Key findings

Implementation of Blended Supervision

- The BSM allowed practitioners to address supervision tasks through remote supervision sessions. By the end of the evaluation, remote supervision was described by people on probation and practitioners as being more in line with 'telephone contact'. This form of remote contact also appeared to supplement

rather than replace in-person supervision; especially for high-risk and high-need cases.

- There was a high awareness of the Blended Supervision Guidance across probation regions, though it was described as ‘prescriptive’ and restricted professional judgement. It was common for practitioners to refer to the tiering system and the ‘aide memoir’ to assist in Blended Supervision decision making for their cases.

Who got a blended approach?

- Women and individuals with complex needs tended to receive more remote contacts than other groups. Women benefited from the flexibility to manage caregiving responsibilities, having more frequent contact with their probation practitioner, and avoiding appointments in mixed-gender facilities. Individuals with complex needs also benefited from the flexibility to visit probation offices due to health-related issues such as disabilities or social anxiety.
- Practitioners and people on probation agreed that Blended Supervision was also beneficial for those who are employed, live outside the probation area, or face risks in visiting the office (e.g., gang-affiliated individuals).

What could be addressed in Blended Supervision?

- Practitioners were prepared to use remote contact for various tasks, such as providing information, reviewing progress, and encouraging compliance. In-person contact was preferred for handling more complex and in-depth tasks.
- Despite general confidence among probation practitioners in delivering Blended Supervision, concerns about the quality and effectiveness of remote supervision persisted. Many practitioners found it challenging to implement formal supervision remotely, and some people on probation felt they received inadequate support and information during remote supervision. Instances of self-harm during remote contact and the lack of immediate support for practitioners working from home highlighted limitations.

What enabled effective Blended Supervision?

- People on probation and practitioners reported that Blended Supervision was possible once a relationship was established, as described in the BSM guidance.
- Supplementary remote contact between in-person appointments could build rapport and improve relationships. This type of ‘top up’ contact and having a direct line to probation practitioners improved communication. People on probation appreciated practitioners using remote contact to demonstrate a degree of trust and progress.
- A small number of practitioners expressed value in having some specific training about delivering supervision remotely (notwithstanding the fact that this was usually more in line with a remote ‘check-in’).

Were Blended Supervision contacts attended?

- Attendance rates were higher for remote contacts compared to in-person ones. Data from April 2022 to December 2023 showed that 86% of remote contacts were attended versus 70% of in-person contacts, and higher attendance was reported across tier groups. However, attendance definitions for remote contacts appeared more lenient, with a notable difference in how non-attendance was interpreted and managed across regions.
- Probation practitioners reported that acknowledging good behaviour through the greater use of remote contact potentially enhanced attendance. Despite this, there was uncertainty among staff about whether overall compliance was improved through remote contact. Additionally, issues such as lack of confidentiality during remote appointments and challenges in enforcing remote supervision were raised.

Conclusions

- The evaluation revealed that probation practitioners and people on probation value the Blended Supervision approach, which combines in-person and remote

interactions. The implementation of remote supervision¹ was most likely to be used for check-ins rather than comprehensive supervision sessions. By Phase 2 of the evaluation, remote supervision was primarily used for those unable to attend in person due to work, health, or childcare reasons. This arrangement was generally satisfactory to practitioners and people on probation. It reflected a learnt understanding of what can be achieved in person and remotely, even though more ambition for remote contact was tested by practitioners.

- Practitioners and individuals on probation preferred in-person supervision for its benefits in relationship building, body language reading, and addressing complex issues, which are crucial for fostering compliance and engagement. Although remote supervision offered flexibility and supported specific needs, concerns about its overall quality, particularly regarding confidentiality and meaningful engagement, were noted. Going forward, the model is considered sustainable but strengthened remote supervision training and updated guidelines could enhance its effectiveness and consistency.

¹ Structured supervision in probation practice refers to a systematic and evidence-based approach to managing and rehabilitating offenders, involving tailored interventions and regular monitoring to reduce reoffending and support reintegration into society.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 What is Blended Supervision, and why was it introduced?

The Blended Supervision Model (BSM) represents an approach to probation supervision that combines in-person and remote interactions, such as telephone calls and video conferencing, with people on probation to address their needs and manage their risks. The BSM aims to deliver user-centric probation by adjusting the contact mode to accommodate individual needs and risk, as explained in approaches such as ‘Risk, Need and Responsivity’ (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Probation supervision has traditionally been a face-to-face activity, however a number of factors in recent years have changed this model. Several Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) supported the use of telephone contact for people on probation assessed as having a low risk of harm, but such practice was met with criticism of being an inadequate way of working (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic then forced regions to rely on remote forms of supervision, with the Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) expanding use of telephone and video-call technology, along with socially distanced home visits. In response to previous challenges and ahead of the probation services’ reunification in June 2021, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) introduced the Target Operating Model (TOM), which proposed “a blended approach to contact applying learning from COVID-19 delivery arrangements” (HMPPS, 2021, p.52). The BSM was subsequently developed to enhance probation services while addressing previous concerns.

1.1.2 What does the model look like in practice?

Under the BSM, people on probation can be supervised in person and remotely. The TOM tiering framework determines the extent of each type of supervision. The framework evaluates individuals based on their criminogenic needs (ranging from tier 0 ‘low’ to tier 3 ‘high’) and the risk they pose in terms of harm or reoffending, which is measured through

the use of appropriate risk assessment tools such as the Offender Assessment System (OASys) (ranging from tier D ‘low’ to tier A ‘high’).

The National BSM Guidance 2021 (hereafter referred to as ‘the guidance’)² recommends that those with higher levels of risk and need (e.g., A3 and B3) should receive more frequent in-person interactions (and more contact overall), particularly in the first four weeks of a sentence. All delivery, however, must remain consistent with the sentence management policy framework. The balance between in-person and remote supervision contact is left to the practitioner’s professional judgment alongside the recommendations in the guidance.

The guidance also considers other elements of sentence management, such as home visits and Rehabilitation Activity Requirements (RARs). Practitioners should consider these when deciding whether or not to supervise someone remotely.

Greater Manchester developed a Blended Supervision approach consistent with the 2021 National BSM Guidance but it also featured more detailed contact protocols by probation tier. It detailed early engagement timelines and strongly emphasised evidence-based decision making. In 2023, the National BSM Guidance was aligned closer to Greater Manchester’s approach.

1.1.3 What is the evidence base for Blended Supervision?

A few recent studies have attempted to explore the impact of the EDM on staff and their practice. They found that there was a “consensus that supervising service-users remotely was inadequate” (Phillips et al., 2021, p8), noting both the limitations of phone-based supervision but also the opportunities it created for more casual and sympathetic conversations (Casey et al., 2021). As such, the existing evidence suggests that a balance between remote and face-to-face supervision is required (Dominey et al., 2021).

In light of these findings, Kemshall (2021) advocated for a blended sentence management approach that emphasises managing risk and enhancing desistance, aiming to safely

² This document is for all probation staff and outlines expectations for when the undertaking of in-person (face-to-face) contact must occur and where professional judgement can be applied to undertake a blended approach, both in terms of mode and frequency of contact.

reintegrate service users into the community while addressing public safety concerns. She argued that risk management has dominated probation practice, driven by policy, media attention, and high-profile management failures. However, by the mid-2000s, there was a growing recognition of the limitations of control and containment strategies, leading to a shift towards incorporating desistance-focused approaches. Desistance research highlights the importance of supportive authority, reframing choices, building strengths, utilising social and recovery capital, and enhancing resilience to support the transition to non-offending lifestyles.

There is wider literature which can inform the use of Blended Supervision, particularly around the importance of tailored and proportionate probation supervision and taking a case-by-case approach to decision making rather than defaulting to 'remote' (Peplow & Phillips, 2023). Low risk individuals might benefit most from the BSM (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2004; Lowenkamp et al., 2006), as demonstrated by Barnes et al. (2010) who found that low-risk offenders could be effectively monitored with fewer mandatory office visits without increasing their reoffending rates.

Evidence of remote contact in different professional contexts points towards the importance of ensuring probation practitioners can develop additional capabilities to deliver remote supervision effectively. Previous evaluations have highlighted the importance of counselling and coaching skills in remote settings (Kilfedder et al., 2011; Härter et al., 2016). Effective telephone counselling requires active listening, conversation structuring, and addressing practical and emotional concerns (Bobevski et al., 1997; Wright, 2002). Similarly, telephone coaching should focus on future-oriented strategies and enhance motivational communication (Rosenfield, 1997; Tiede et al., 2017).

As the current evidence is limited, this research is needed to explore how the BSM can be effective because existing studies highlight both the limitations and potential benefits of remote supervision in probation practices. Understanding better how to balance remote and in-person interactions while ensuring probation practitioners are equipped with the necessary skills is crucial for developing tailored and effective supervision strategies.

1.2 Evaluation aims and research questions

Given the current evidence gaps, this evaluation aimed to increase understanding of:

- How the MoJ can support probation practitioners with guidance that helps them do their job, and how they apply discretion within a mandated set of principles for blending remote and in-person contact;
- The perceived impact of using different modes of contact on sentence management, including risk assessment and risk management; and,
- The benefits, challenges, and effectiveness of technological solutions to remote supervision, including telephony and video conferencing.

The evidence in this report highlights whether the BSM was implemented and delivered as required and identifies factors that helped or hindered its effectiveness. If appropriate, this information can inform policy decisions on the continuation and design of the model and the content of the BSM guidance.

The evaluation's objectives were to:

Objective 1: Gather evidence that explores the benefits and drawbacks of the BSM.

Understand the model's implementation, communication strategies, and influence on current supervision practices. This included a review of its adoption by various stakeholders and any challenges faced in its application.

Objective 2: Examine the effect of the BSM on probation practitioners and service delivery. Consider staff perspectives on the model's benefits and challenges, the applicability of the technology involved, and the model's integration into existing casework. Look at the model's influence on sentence management and the adaptability of practitioners' skills across different modes of contact.

Objective 3: Use of technology. This objective assesses the suitability and potential of various technologies in delivering rehabilitative work.

The evaluation's original list of objectives included estimating the impact of the BSM on people on probation, which was to be addressed using a quasi-experiment. However, after

extensive feasibility testing, a suitably robust design could not be implemented, and the objective could not be met. See Appendix B for more information.

2. Approach

The evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach and two phases of data collection, allowing changes to be identified over time. Phase 1 lasted from October 2022 to February 2023, and Phase 2 lasted from November 2023 to February 2024.

Table 1: Summary of the evaluation’s research methods

Method	Objective		
	1	2	3
Longitudinal, cross-sectional survey with probation practitioners (Phase 1 and 2)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interviews and focus groups with probation practitioners (Phase 1 and 2)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey with people on probation (Phase 1 and 2)	Yes	No	No
Interviews and focus groups with people on probation (Phase 1 and 2)	Yes	No	No
Analysis of administrative data	Yes	No	No

2.1 Methods

The evaluation focused on five case study regions: the East of England, Greater Manchester, North West, Wales, and West Midlands. These regions were chosen because they had a large throughput of cases and provided a suitable mix of rural and urban Probation Delivery Units (PDUs). The evaluation utilised a mix of surveys, interviews, and focus groups for data collection. There was no evidence of more socially desirable responses in the focus groups than in interviews. No incentives were offered to people participating in the evaluation.

2.1.1 Interviews and focus groups with probation practitioners

The interviews and focus groups with practitioners explored supervision practices, compliance, use of technology, RARs and home visits. Phase 1 mixed in-person and virtual methods, while Phase 2 used only virtual techniques. In Phase 1, the study team

completed 50 interviews and 25 focus groups. In Phase 2, the team completed 75 interviews and six focus groups (see Appendix A).

2.1.2 Online survey with probation practitioners

The staff survey measured the use and perceptions of Blended Supervision, including staff confidence, perceived quality, management support, training needs, RAR change work, and benefits to people on probation. The two-phase design enabled longitudinal analysis. In Phase 1, 2,267 responses were received (a 23% response rate). In Phase 2, 2,841 responses were received (a 22% response rate; see Appendix C).

2.1.3 Interviews and focus groups with people on probation

The interviews and focus groups with people on probation explored the impact of Blended Supervision, relationship quality, compliance, remote RAR work and technology use. In Phase 1, the team completed 31 interviews and nine focus groups. In Phase 2, they completed 74 interviews and two focus groups (see Appendix A).

2.1.4 Survey with people on probation

The survey with people on probation mirrored the questions asked in the qualitative interviews. Phases 1 and 2 gained 365 responses and 448 responses respectively (see Appendix A). Responses from people on probation from the North West were overrepresented, and the reader should be aware of that when interpreting the results. Survey weighting was not possible as a sampling frame was unavailable.

2.1.5 Administrative data

The MoJ shared administrative data that described order and licence commencements (i.e., those in the community), termination reasons and what contacts were planned and attended for all supervised people on probation between April 2022 and December 2023. Appendix D describes how these data were processed for the evaluation.

2.2 Data analysis

2.2.1 Qualitative data analysis

For phases 1 and 2, all interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and uploaded onto a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis package for analysis. The

evaluation interviewers created a qualitative coding framework based on experience and re-reading the transcripts, using an inductive method under the thematic analysis paradigm from Braun and Clarke (2006). In the findings section, the terms ‘many’ and ‘most’ mean that a view was widespread; ‘a few’ indicates that a finding applied to a small handful; and ‘some’ or ‘several’ indicate a middle ground. This should, however, be considered indicative.

2.2.2 Quantitative data analysis

All administrative and survey data were processed and analysed in *R*. The *R* package *ggplot2* generated the charts in this report. All data were fully described, and appropriate statistical tests were completed to provide confidence in the findings. All differences highlighted in this report are statistically significant unless otherwise stated. Survey data were weighted before analysis (see Appendix C). Logistic regression (ordinal and binomial) was predominantly used to compare independent samples and identify significant subgroups in one or two samples. Chi-squared was used for a small number of categorical data tests within one sample.

2.2.3 Data triangulation

After the initial analysis, data triangulation was completed. Through iterative rounds, the team compared themes and patterns across each data source, identifying consistencies and variances. Discrepancies prompted further investigation, leading to refined results. This process was facilitated by regular team meetings, where results were debated and combined, reinforcing the study’s validity and increasing the conclusions’ comprehensiveness.

2.3 Ethical considerations

The following ethical considerations were made:

- The project underwent a full ethics review by MoJ’s internal Ethics Advisory Group.
- To ensure data protection, confidentiality, and privacy, all collected data were anonymised and stored securely, with access limited to the evaluation team. Identifiable information was encrypted, and personal identifiers were removed from reporting.

- Consent procedures were thorough, with all participants—staff and people on probation—providing informed consent. Peer researchers with similar lived experiences interviewed people on probation to respect their vulnerabilities and address potential power imbalances.
- The research was designed with trauma-informed principles to minimise harm and bias while fostering participant safety, trust, and empowerment.

2.4 Research limitations

The following limitations apply to this study:

- The term ‘Blended Supervision’ could mean both remote supervision and check-ins (scheduled and unscheduled) to staff, leading to confusion over what was being referenced in some discussions. Researchers sought to clarify these references where possible to mitigate misunderstanding.
- The study faced challenges in ensuring a representative qualitative sample due to participants’ self-selecting and staff participation limitations, potentially affecting the breadth of perspectives gathered – triangulation with survey data aimed to offset sample limitations.
- Due to the method of recruiting people on probation for the survey and the qualitative interviews (a text message sent by the five probation regions to all people on probation managed under blended supervision), there is a possibility that more compliant and engaged people are overrepresented.
- The administrative data, sourced from NDelius, have several key caveats, such as missing data fields necessitating the exclusion of records, changes to a person’s supervision tier during their license or order are not captured; and the lack of detail in contact records means all sessions are assumed to be relevant supervision. Analysis based on this data must be interpreted with the caveat that it has been extracted from systems designed to administer or monitor an operational service rather than for research purposes. Data are, therefore, subject to clerical and input errors, which has implications on the quality of the data, linking and deduplication of records. The findings in this report are not comparable to other published statistics or research, due to different units of data, processing and analysis.

3. Findings

3.1 Implementation of Blended Supervision

Section Overview: This section considers the implementation process and how the probation context interacts with Blended Supervision. The original intention of the BSM was that remote supervision sessions could allow practitioners to address supervision tasks, much like in-person supervision. In Phase 1, staff explored this, but in Phase 2, remote supervision was described as more in line with ‘telephone contact’ rather than ‘supervision.’ The term ‘check-in’ was used by practitioners and people on probation, and sessions were often described as shorter and less structured when conducted remotely. This form of remote contact also appeared to supplement rather than replace in-person supervision; especially for high-risk and high-need cases (unless high-need cases could not attend in person, for example, for health-related reasons). The drivers for this could be adherence to the tiering framework (e.g., seeing high-risk cases in person), lower use of professional judgement to deviate from this, and the broader probation context, e.g., fear of serious further offences (SFOs). It is unclear whether telephone contact was being recorded in the same way as telephone supervision, even if it was short and unstructured, and how contact was differentiated from supervision.

3.1.1 The term ‘Blended Supervision’

Since its inception and initial implementation, the concept of Blended Supervision has evolved. In Phase 1 of the evaluation, staff described their ambition for completing supervision tasks such as reviewing goals, considering needs and risks, and monitoring the sentence plan through remote methods. However, in Phase 2 of the evaluation, the interviews with staff indicated an overall preference from practitioners across all bands and regions to undertake supervision in person. This feedback was supported by contact data, which indicated the proportion of people on probation who received no remote contact rose from around a third in 2022 to two-thirds in 2023. As will be explored throughout this

report, in-person supervision was often said to be supplemented by remote contact, particularly if cases had complex needs.

“...if I’ve got a medium-risk case, but they’re on monthly reporting they will always have that planned office appointment every 4 weeks. Then in the interim, I’d just do a quick check in call. It’s not that it will take away from a face-to-face appointment, it’s just an additional ‘Are you okay, do you need anything?’”

(Probation Practitioner Interview)

Interviews with staff indicated that when referring to ‘remote supervision’, this was often used interchangeably with the term ‘remote check-ins’. However, it appeared that when practitioners referred to ‘remote contact’, they rarely indicated the delivery of structured interventions or planned supervision sessions. This is a potential divergence from the idea that Blended Supervision would allow practitioners to undertake structured supervision remotely and in person.

Where remote contact was used to supplement in-person contact, practitioners remarked that a blended approach was ‘no different’ to business as usual, where they would have previously conducted ‘check-ins’ between supervision sessions over the phone. Those who had experienced working in a CRC before the reunification were especially used to having remote contact. The contact data examined for the evaluation indicated that between April 2022 and December 2023, 11% of all recorded contacts were planned telephone supervision contacts, and 9% were unplanned telephone contacts. The remaining 80% of recorded contacts were made up of scheduled office visits (65%), initial office appointments (8%), and home visits (5%).

Practitioners who carried a high-risk caseload also stated there was little divergence to ‘usual practice’ as they still saw their cases in person, as per the Blended Supervision tiering system, and had check-in calls in between by way of follow-up.

“...if somebody’s got a high dependency on certain aspects of everyday life, they don’t have communication with anybody else, that helps them because you can have a face-to-face and then you can do follow up via Blended Supervision.”

(Probation Practitioner Interview)

People on probation were confused about whether Blended Supervision pertained to check-ins between in-person appointments. This confusion was caused by remote contacts being usually shorter and less structured than in-person appointments.

“She doesn’t do the full hour when she’s on the phone. It’s just literally checking I’m alive, I think, and that’s it.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Practitioners stated that in-person contact (including supervision sessions) could still be brief, and for people where this was likely to be the case, being able to conduct this remotely was beneficial or convenient for them and the person on probation.

“I’m talking less than 10 minutes for our chats when I sit face-to-face. To drive there, to park up, to go there, it is far more economical, convenient, than going in. So, I prefer doing the video calls.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Overall, interviews with practitioners and people on probation for Phase 2 of the evaluation indicated that Blended Supervision had largely become synonymous with remote check-ins, which may be used interchangeably with ‘remote supervision’.

“I’ve seen it myself, to make what’s supposed to be a supervision appointment on the telephone, a pointless call... it’s even more important, particularly doing it over the phone to ensure that you’re asking the right questions and hitting the points that are specific to your case... otherwise, I think it just becomes too easy to say ‘Hiya, how are you? What are you up to?’. I hear it, it almost becomes just like you’re talking to somebody off the street. That’s not supervision.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

3.1.2 Guidance

When Blended Supervision was first introduced, each region had the discretion to use the National BSM Guidance or to write and follow its own guidelines. Most regions that formed the focus for this evaluation opted to use the National BSM Guidance, as they typically perceived this to be a helpful baseline (although the East of England reduced the first month of contact for low-risk and low-need individuals). Greater Manchester, however, created its own regional framework. This more prescriptive framework emerged from the

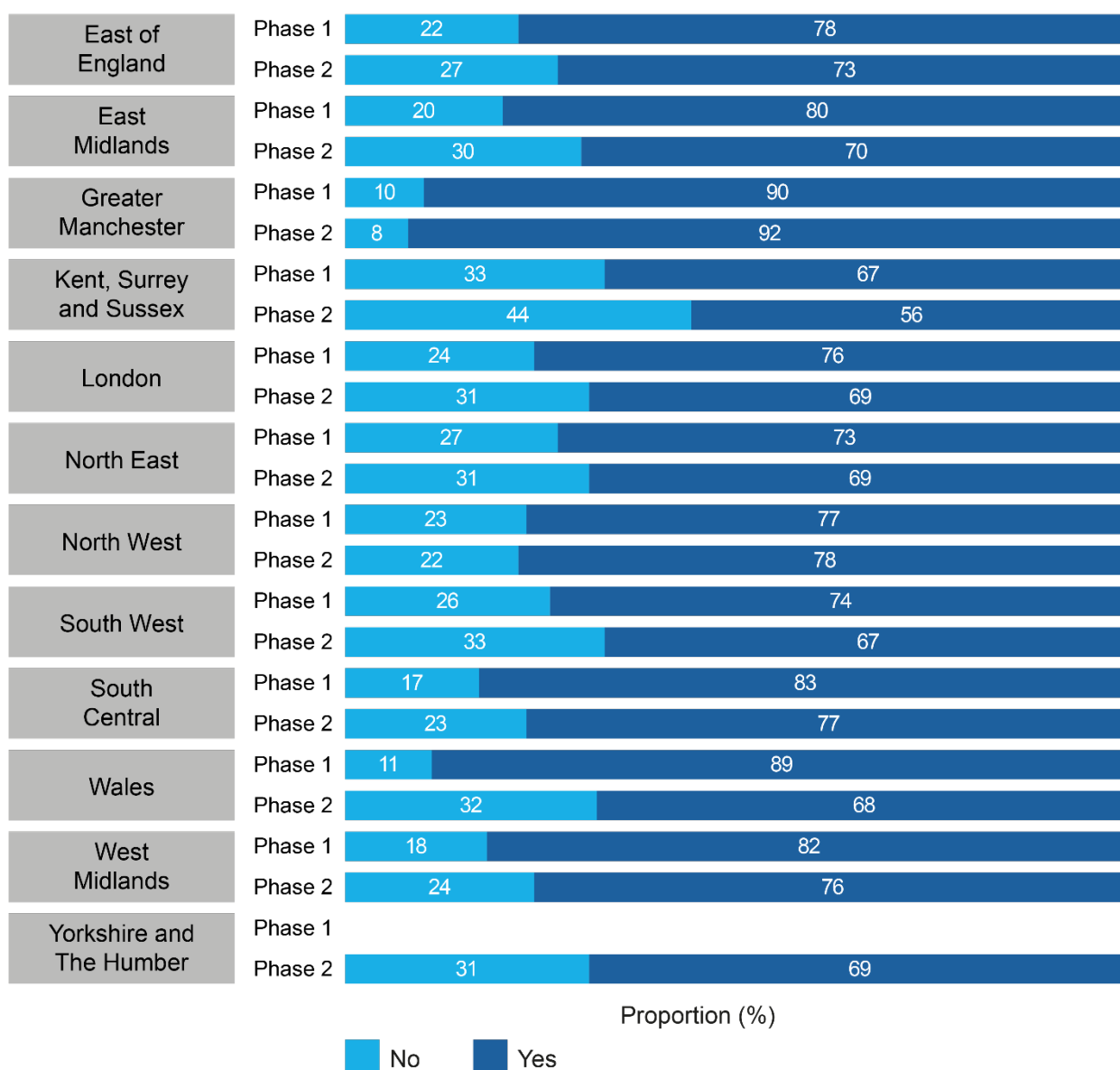
perception that the National BSM Guidelines were not 'specific enough' for practitioners, particularly considering Greater Manchester's complex organised crime context. This region, therefore, aimed to provide practitioners with more clarity on managing and assessing risk when designing Blended Supervision. The National BSM Guidance was updated in March 2023 and showed more symmetry with Greater Manchester's more specific guidance, especially for high-risk cases.

In Phase 1, there was a high level of awareness of the Blended Supervision regional guidelines. At the time of the first survey, 78% (n = 1,690) of respondents who were aware of Blended Supervision were aware of their regional guidance, with awareness increasing with seniority. Awareness of regional guidance was highest in Greater Manchester, where 90% (n = 144) of respondents were aware of the region's guidelines, perhaps reflecting the region's leadership decision to promote a specific framework. In Phase 2, the quantitative data indicated that awareness of guidelines had slightly reduced to 72% (n = 1,711). Greater Manchester maintained their high awareness rate, with 92% (n = 128) of practitioners stating they were aware of the regional guidance.

This finding was echoed in qualitative data from Greater Manchester in Phase 2. During interviews across regions, practitioners mainly reported the guidance was clear and easy to follow, particularly the use of the tiers. Several practitioners had this printed out as a 'quick reference' guide and 'aide memoir' and showed it during interviews. Practitioners liked that when they got a new case, the Blended Supervision approach they could take was included in the notes. However, some practitioners reflected that there is a proliferation of information, guidance, and emails, which can sometimes make it difficult to read guidance thoroughly. This was echoed in the feedback in Phase 1 pertaining to communication on the BSM when first introduced.

"We get bombarded. I can't tell you how many emails we get on any given day, and I think the majority of people, depending on the kind of day they're having, but the majority of people will probably just delete them." (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Figure 1: Proportion of probation practitioners aware of their regional guidance disaggregated by phase and region



Source: Phase 1 and 2 probation staff survey

Whilst practitioners reported that the tier system made it clear when people could be seen remotely, some felt that this was over-simplified decision-making and reduced individuals to risk, need or reoffending category. This was raised most commonly about high-risk of harm cases where there was perceived to be little flexibility in being able to undertake remote supervision, even if a meeting with a manager was scheduled to discuss this. Practitioners gave examples of how some of their high-risk cases who were considered to

be 'stable' and in employment could benefit from a Blended Supervision approach, but it was reportedly difficult to negotiate and deviate from the guidance.

"It would be nice that we could have a little bit more discretion and professional judgement, because that used to be a thing in the past. That seems to have gone away again, a little bit, especially with high-risk, it must be face-to-face. It must be weekly." (Probation Practitioner Interview)

A few practitioners, therefore, reflected that the tier system predominantly focused on 'risk' (reflected in the letter system on the tiers, e.g., 'A' for high-risk) and that this overrode everything else. People on probation supported this reflection.

"I'm young, I'm married, I've got a young baby at home, and I'm trying to get on with my life the best way I can. So, once a week I think is a bit harsh after 9 months, but I don't know if that's because I'm high-risk." (Person on Probation Interview)

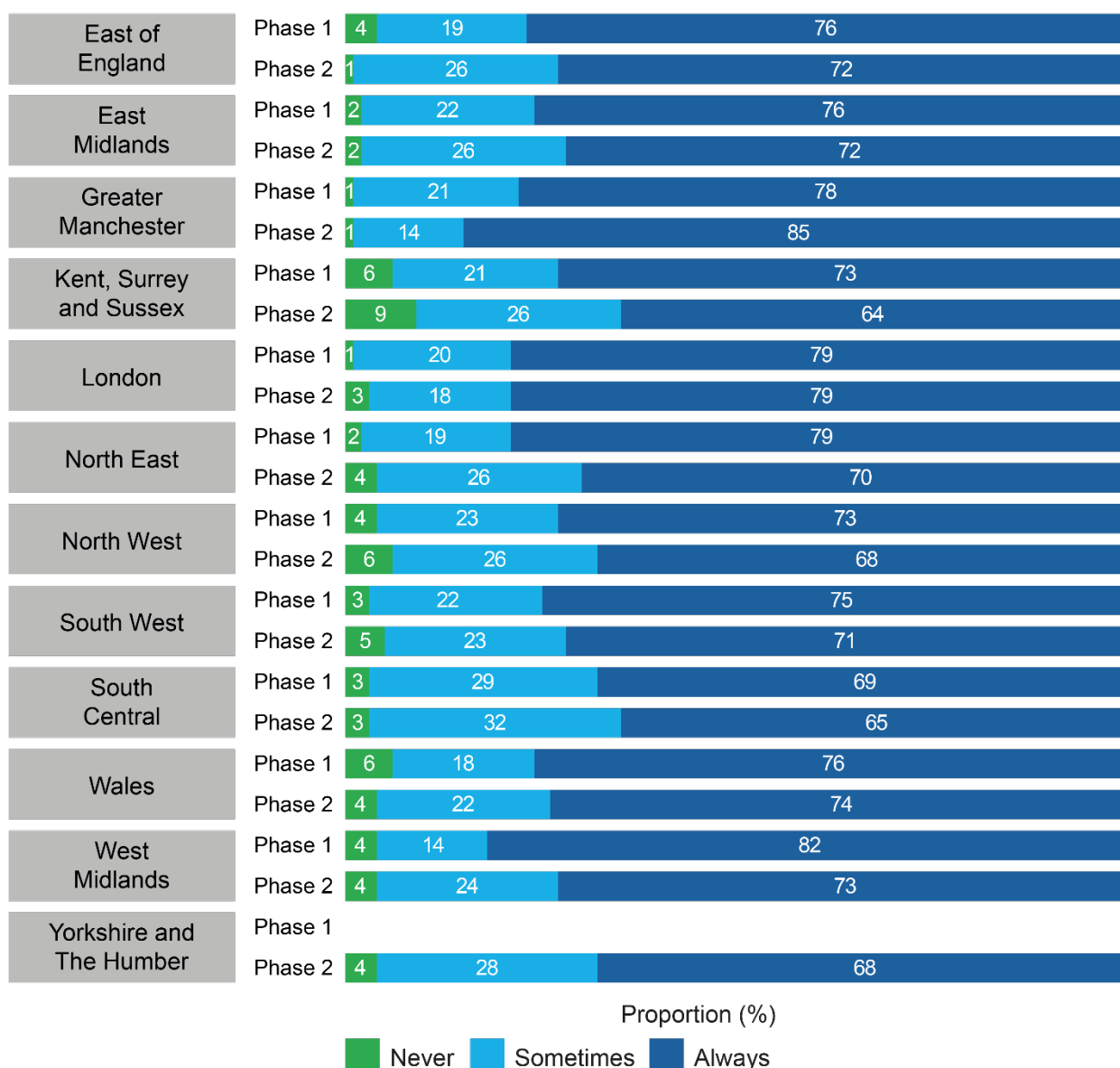
It was acknowledged that the guidance did consider 'need' but it was seen to lack full appreciation of responsivity and reduced practitioners' ability to work in a 'person-centred' way.

"I think risk and need are also very crucial... but I think there is something about... at the minute I think, as a service, we sometimes forget the person. So, it's very much around risk management and managing this person, but forgetting who they are... what is their journey to sitting in front of me? I think that we can be almost like too number crunchy... I'm not anti-risk management, but I feel like do we actually always remember who is sitting in front of us in all of this?" (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Therefore, although Blended Supervision afforded flexibility for some cases, several practitioners reported that the guidance stifled professional judgement. Some experienced probation practitioners described the impact this had on them, making them feel their knowledge and experience were not trusted by senior staff, and they had to default to the guidance. The staff survey data indicated regional guidelines mainly influenced decision making around Blended Supervision. Most respondents (73%, n = 1,400) believed that the regions' guidelines enabled suitable Blended Supervision in a way that allowed them to meet the diverse needs of people on probation. However, the interview data would suggest this was limited to high-risk cases. In Phase 2, fewer practitioners reported always using their professional judgement, from 68% in Phase 1 (n = 1,160) to 53% (n = 923) in Phase 2. While people deferred to the guidance and felt it allowed some flexibility, interviews with staff indicated this was not because they did not want to use their professional judgement, but instead, they felt constrained by the guidance (hence using their professional judgement less).

Some regional differences were noted in the use (rather than awareness) of the guidance. Staff from Greater Manchester were more likely to use their region's guidance (85%, n = 91), which showed an increase since the Phase 1 survey (although not statistically significant).

Figure 2: The proportion of practitioners that use their regional guidance when making decisions around Blended Supervision disaggregated by region and phase



Source: Phase 2 probation staff survey (the values might not total 100% due to rounding)

During interviews, East of England practitioners were more likely to report a lack of clarity about how Blended Supervision fits with national standards and statutory duties. Greater Manchester practitioners were more likely to indicate the guidelines were clear but were also more likely to state they were overly prescriptive. In the staff survey, opinions were divided on the role of probation managers in deciding the supervision mode. Of the respondents, 39% (n = 713) agreed that probation managers played a significant role, 27% (n = 480) disagreed, and 34% (n = 614) neither agreed nor disagreed. There was

also split opinion on the impact of workloads on the operation of Blended Supervision. For example, 30% (n = 553) agreed that the current workload and available staff resources reduced managers'³ oversight of Blended Supervision, while 33% (n = 595) disagreed, and 37% (n = 664) neither agreed nor disagreed. Again, this echoed qualitative interview data where the guidelines had become a key driver in decision making rather than making appointments with management or using professional discretion.

“I think the guidelines have helped a lot. Definitely, I’ve referred to them when deciding what sort of supervision to do.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

The reasons for this varied across each PDU; some practitioners felt risk outweighed any professional discretion and there was no value in seeking line management support, whereas others described the challenges in accessing senior management. This is explored in further detail below.

3.1.3 Influences on decision making

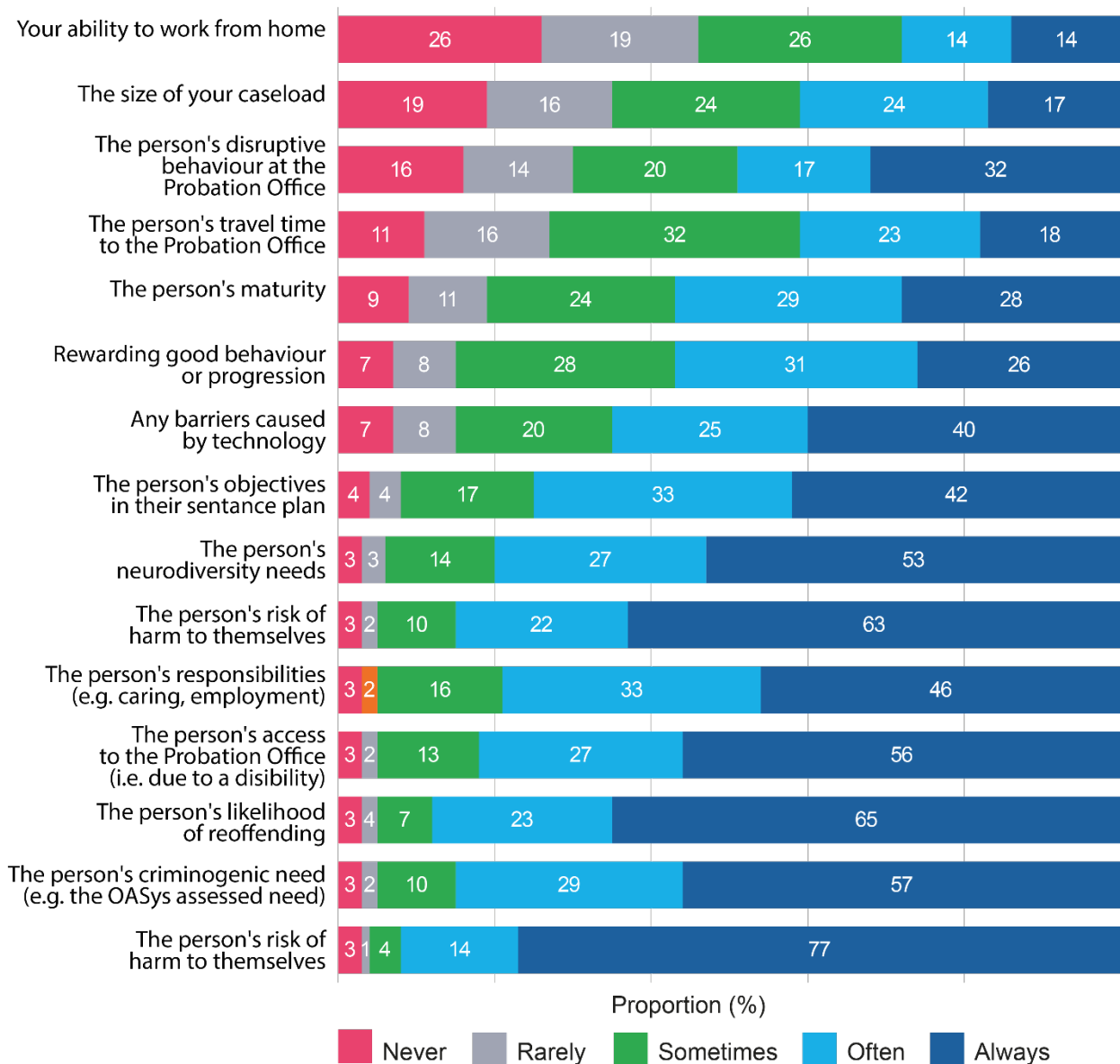
The staff survey and interviews considered what influences decision making around the use of Blended Supervision. The staff survey indicated that the majority ‘always’ consider risk of harm (77%, n = 1,332), likelihood of reoffending (65%, n = 1,115), risk of harm to themselves (63%, n = 1,082), criminogenic need (57%, n = 970), physical access to probation office (56%, n = 955), and neurodiversity needs (53%, n = 912) (see Figure 3). The majority of staff also considered sentence plan objectives (75%, n = 1,273). There were some nuances worth noting:

- PSOs were more likely to consider the person’s disruptive behaviour at the probation office. A majority of PSOs (56%, n = 518) ‘often’ or ‘always’ consider disruptive behaviour compared to 42% (n = 319) of band 4 probation officers and 43% (n = 13) of SPOs.
- Greater Manchester practitioners were less likely to consider any barriers to technology. Overall, 65% (n = 1,109) of probation practitioners ‘often’ or ‘always’ considered barriers to technology, while 52% (n = 62) of practitioners in Greater Manchester ‘often’ or ‘always’ consider this.

³ This would be the line manager of the respondent.

- Greater Manchester and Wales respondents were less likely to consider their caseload size. Twenty-nine per cent (n = 36) of Greater Manchester practitioners and 34% (n = 36) of Wales 'often' or 'always' consider the size of their caseload. Overall, 41% (n = 695) of practitioners 'often' or 'always' consider their caseload.
- Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Yorkshire & the Humber respondents were less likely to consider 'rewarding' good behaviour through remote supervision. Overall, 57% (n = 978) of practitioners 'often' or 'always' consider rewarding good behaviour, compared to 49% (n = 50) of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and 51% (n = 75) of Yorkshire & the Humber.

Figure 3: Practitioners' considerations for determining suitability for Blended Supervision



Source: Phase 2 probation staff survey (the values might not total 100% due to rounding)

Regarding convenience, the staff survey indicated that the ability to work from home, caseload size, and travel time are less important considerations relative to risk and need. However, 41% (n = 695) of practitioners still stated they 'often' or 'always' consider the size of their caseload compared to 35% (n = 597) who 'never' or 'rarely' consider this. Forty-one per cent (n = 704) of staff considered travel time 'often' or 'always' compared to 27% (n = 461) who chose 'never' or 'rarely'. Only 'working from home' received a greater number of respondents selecting 'never' or 'rarely' (45%, n = 774) compared to 'often' and 'always' (28%, n = 489).

High caseload sizes were raised by staff during interviews as important context and conditions for their work. Several practitioners referred to their 'work management tool' (WMT) as a proxy for how 'stretched' they were. In this way, remote contact was sometimes described as supporting their workload and giving them greater flexibility to see their cases and work from home. This was particularly, but not exclusively, for PSOs with high volumes of low-risk cases.

"...in terms of me working from home or in the office, I think it's the right balance now. But if that was to happen [coming into the office], it could be a bit unmanageable, just because, especially a PSO, I'm possibly going to get up to about 50–60 cases and being in the office to see them every day, would that be too much like I'd probably have to do extra hours...because you don't know how long you're really going to spend in a room with one person, it might be an hour, an hour and a half. So, to see all of them in the day, to me, that would be impossible." (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Some practitioners mentioned that a remote contact was often shorter than an in-person contact, which was advantageous when managing high caseloads. The survey data would indicate that this only affected decision making after considering other factors, such as risk.

“...the benefits of using the remote supervision in the blended format is that it allows me more time to get on with other things that I need to do. So, a face-to-face appointment might be 30–40 minutes, whereas a phone appointment could be anywhere between kind of 15 and 20. So it halves the appointment time, which allows me to then get on with [and] do the tasks that I need to do...” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

The staff interviews explored the availability of rooms for in-person supervision. Some practitioners remarked on the challenges of getting quiet or private spaces for in-person supervision and the challenges of working in ‘open plan’ offices more generally.

“...for most of us as POs [Probation Officers] our cases will be predominantly high-risk cases. That’s a statement of fact. I work in an office now, where there isn’t the space for all our offenders to be seen weekly, there simply isn’t. And for someone to suggest that that’s what we should be doing, and that’s what we actually have to do, after spending four years moving us into a much smaller building, given us all this technology, to allow that frequency of contact, and, well certainly 9–5 contact, to then turn round and wheel it back and go oh, you need to see all your high-risk offenders weekly in the office. It just strikes me, I don’t know if the right hand actually knows what the left hand is doing, which wouldn’t come as a surprise would it?” (Staff Focus Group)

In both phases of the research, practitioners expressed some concerns about a scenario where they would have to see all their cases in person. They described that this would not be possible based on the current footprint of the estate and indicated that this factored into decision making regarding in-person contacts. During interviews, there was agreement amongst the majority of practitioners (and people on probation) that they should see a case in person for several weeks before any remote contact was initiated.

“So, in my mind at the start of an order or licence, you’d have that face to face to start with to put the groundwork in, and then you would move to Blended Supervision as they progressed.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

The overarching focus on risk in decision making also related to discussions in practitioner interviews about the broader context of the probation service, which is, understandably, risk conscious.

“People are going to start saying, well should this person be high risk, which is a legitimate argument we should have about all of our cases, because we’re not very good at downgrading risk, as a rule, they’re too risk averse.” (Staff Focus Group)

However, when reflecting on their decision making regarding who gets a blended approach, several practitioners raised the organisational and individual fear of Serious Further Offences (SFOs). An overarching awareness of SFOs was said to impact decision making around Blended Supervision, and a number of senior probation officers noted they would much rather have ‘eyes on’ their high-risk cases, even if they were stable, because of concerns related to this.

“I think SFO’s have a much more high profile and the rhetoric around SFOs are, ‘We know, we don’t want you to panic. This is just about you showing you’ve done your job’ and all that sort of stuff, and the service will have your back. I’m not sure that I 100% entirely believe that.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Several practitioners also reflected that their time was taken up by performance monitoring and recording pressures, alongside administrative burdens, which they felt affected their ability to do ‘quality’ in-person supervision.

“There’s a thing now that’s encouraging practitioners to take your computer laptop in with you to every appointment, so that you put your contacts on at the time you’re seeing the person. I won’t do that. To me taking a laptop in, as soon as you take a laptop in and you place that in front of somebody, you’re trying to have a conversation with, you’re certainly not maintaining eye contact. And you’re not really showing that you’re listening to what I’m saying. You’re just typing. I don’t think that’s a nice way to work. I don’t think it’s a people centred way to work. But that’s what they’re saying for time effectiveness.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

In relation to this, a small number of practitioners described the impact this had on their well-being alongside a new 'working from home' culture, which meant they were more isolated from colleagues.

There were a small number of examples where practitioners described a wish to reduce people's risk to enable more flexibility and support case-load management (e.g., moving someone from high- to medium-risk to allow a more blended approach). However, they simultaneously acknowledged that this could also create further work and result in being given more cases.

"There are other situations where you want to reduce someone down at the lower end of your high-risk cases, and actually you'd like more discretion during those times." (Senior Probation Officer Interview)

Overall, whilst Blended Supervision was said to be clear in how it should be implemented (e.g., the guidance and tiering system was clear), the reality of how it was being implemented lent itself more to 'remote contact' rather than 'remote supervision'. This evolved between phases 1 and 2. This was due to an overarching preference for in-person contact when delivering supervision, sentence management activities or structured change work. Remote contact (referred to as blended or remote supervision by some interviewees) was used as a top up contact between these in-person appointments. Further, from a probation practitioner's perspective, they would value using more professional judgement, especially in stable, high-risk cases. The next section explores who mainly received what method and mode of contact and in what circumstances.

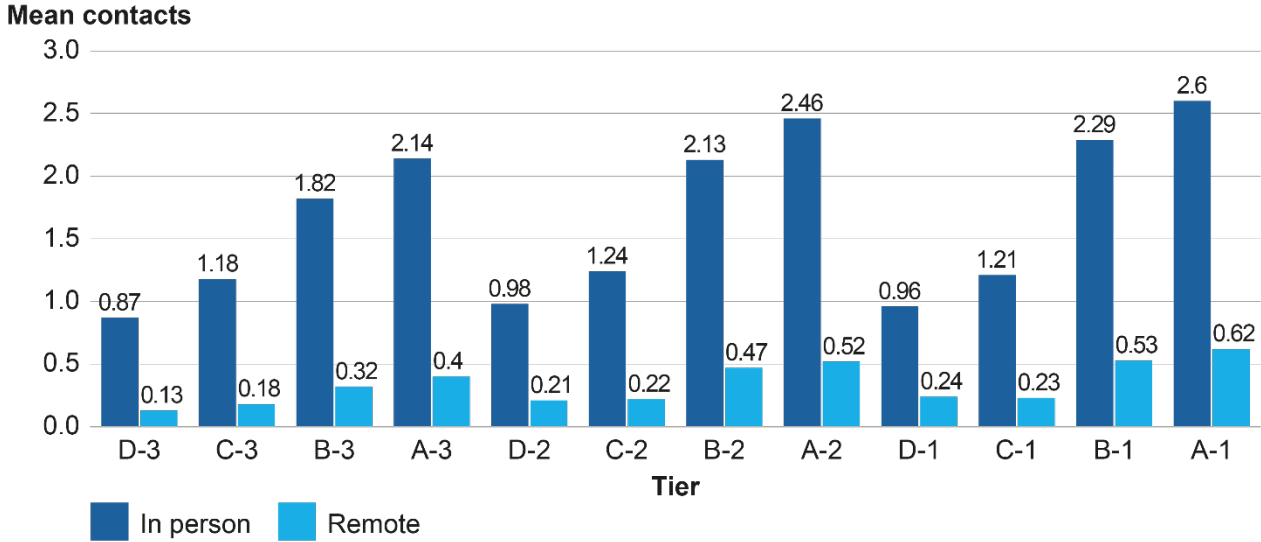
3.2 Who gets a blended approach?

Section Overview: This section explores which cohorts are receiving Blended Supervision, to what extent, and how it impacts the lives of people on probation. All quantitative and qualitative datasets collected in phases 1 and 2 of this evaluation demonstrated that women and people with higher levels of need typically receive more remote contacts than other cohorts. Women benefited from having flexibility around caring responsibilities and being able to contact their probation practitioner more regularly and on an ad-hoc basis. In contrast, people with complex needs benefited from having flexibility around visiting probation offices due to health-related issues such as disability or social anxiety. Furthermore, Blended Supervision was described by probation practitioners and people on probation as helpful for those who are in employment, live outside the probation area, or to whom visiting the local probation office can be a risk. The majority of people on probation agreed that remote supervision had positively impacted their life, particularly concerning mental and physical health, family relations, finances, or employment.

3.2.1 Who is receiving remote supervision?

The quantitative data showed (see Figure 4) that after the first four weeks of supervision, people in higher risk tiers A and B continued to receive high levels of remote and in-person contacts in comparison to people in tiers C and D whose contacts reduced after four weeks regardless of their 'need' levels. This result suggests that risk is the primary driver in decision making regarding Blended Supervision, and it agrees with the survey responses from probation practitioners and the qualitative interview data.

Figure 4: Mean monthly number of in-person and remote National Standard contacts during months 2 to 12 of supervision in April 2022 to December 2023 by tier (see Section 1.1.2 for tier definitions)



Source: NDelius commencements and contacts data

Overall, from April 2022 to December 2023, 55% (n = 58,221) of people in the community received no remote supervision,⁴ 24% (n = 25,329) of people on probation had 1–24% of their supervision remotely, 14% (n = 14,802) had 25–49% of their supervision remotely, 5% (n = 5,825) had 50–74% of their supervision remotely and 2% (n = 1,829) had 75% or more of their supervision remotely.

These data were further explored to understand if any probation cohorts were more likely to receive more of their supervision contacts remotely. Although none of the cohorts predominantly received planned remote contacts, multiple data sources suggested two cohorts, women and those with complex needs, had a slight tendency to receive more remote contact:

- Women: As described in section 3.1, the amount of planned remote contact reduced between 2022 and 2023. However, regression analysis found that the reduction was significantly less for women than for men, meaning that women continued to be more likely to be offered remote contact as part of a Blended Supervision approach (see results in Appendix E). Also, women were

⁴ This only includes data recorded as National Standard remote and in-person supervision (not those recorded as remote contact).

overrepresented among the group with more than 50% of their contact remote. For example, 17% (n = 996) of the group receiving 50–74% remote supervision and 16% (n = 298) receiving more than 75% were women, compared with 14% (n = 3,628) of the 1–24% remote supervision group being women and 14% (n = 7,782) having no remote contact being women (a relative difference of approximately 20%).

- Complex needs: people on probation with level 3 need recorded in their tier were overrepresented in the group with no remote contact and the group with over 75% of their contact remotely. Thirteen per cent and 11% of these groups were in need level 3 compared with 7% of the group with 1–24% of their contact remote and 6% of the group with 25–49% of their contact remote. Regression analysis confirmed these results, showing that the level 3 cohort was most likely to either have no remote contact *or* a majority of remote contact compared to other need levels (see Appendix E).

Interviews with practitioners and people on probation explored the reasons why women and those with complex needs received a higher proportion of remote contact.

3.2.2 Women

Women on probation, completing the Phase 2 survey (n = 81), agreed slightly more than men that remote supervision has had a positive impact on their life, with 59% (n = 40) agreeing and 7% (n = 5) disagreeing. In comparison, 46% (n = 161) of men agreed, and 12% (n = 42) disagreed that remote supervision had a positive impact on their life. Women specifically liked being able to contact their probation practitioners almost any time they wanted.

“On the phone, like I said, I can just call her if there’s anything that I’m struggling with at that particular time. See, I’m a bit of a flapper and I get myself worked up. I’m a very emotional person. ... So, I do love that. I do love the fact that she’s on the end of a phone all the time. I feel a bit sorry for her really.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Some of the interviewed men spoke about how Blended Supervision can negatively impact their life. They felt they do not always get enough support on remote contacts and can

more easily 'fall through the gaps'. Some men talked about how their practitioner cannot see 'if they are not ok' during a remote contact and that having remote contacts can sometimes increase their loneliness because they do not have any reason to go out.

"So, if I'm a bit down, at least the probation officer can see, he can see, sort of, your mental state, if that makes sense? So, he's able to talk it out if that makes sense, but obviously, if it's a phone call, you can't see that as such, you can go, 'Oh yeah, I'm okay.' And he might be able to hear it, sort of thing, in your voice, but he can't actually physically see you, if that makes sense." (Person on Probation Interview)

Thirty-five per cent (n = 28) of surveyed women on probation agreed that Blended Supervision had helped them to better deal with childcare responsibilities (9% disagreed, n = 7). In contrast, 24% (n = 86) of surveyed men on probation agreed and 15% (n = 52) disagreed.

Probation practitioners agreed that women generally have a different set of needs than men and, therefore, particularly benefit from the option of remote contact (including supervision on occasion), especially if they had caregiving responsibilities.

"Women particularly, I think, they definitely need more flexibility around reporting, because they did generally have more stuff going on, because they have a family, they might have a job, they might have, you know, domestic abuse, they might have, you know, other issues going on." (Probation Services Officer Interview)

However, practitioners also acknowledged that women may be at a higher risk of victimisation, and therefore, seeing them in person was important. Where this took place, having sessions in a female only space was said to be valuable in ensuring women's sense of safety and engagement.

"...in my office, we tend to see more women away from the actual office. So, it's in a different location. Mainly because most of them not comfortable coming to the main office where it's like a lot of men, and dv perps and stuff. They just don't feel comfortable there." (Probation Services Officer Interview)

Overall, both qualitative and quantitative data showed that Blended Supervision’s flexibility was especially important and beneficial for women on probation. This finding was also uncovered in the joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024), where the ability to have remote appointments when needed was mentioned as one of the main reasons by women who felt they were getting what they needed from appointments.

3.2.3 Complex needs

Probation practitioners described cases with ‘complex’ or ‘high’ needs as benefitting from a Blended Supervision approach, especially due to the ability to respond to these needs.

“...especially some of our older people as well, but I’ve covered for a case where the gentleman’s suffering from early onset Alzheimer’s. So, in those sorts of situations, it will be good, because you don’t know who’s going to get lost on a bus, or those types of things.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Blended Supervision allowed flexibility for Integrated Offender Management (IOM) cases requiring multiple weekly contacts. Probation practitioners mentioned that there were instances where other agencies could have in-person contact, which provided confidence they had been physically seen, and ‘remote supervision’ could be conducted by probation.

“I would say with the IOM cases, they tend to follow more [of] a blended approach because you may have them face-to-face, but then you may also give them a telephone appointment later in the week, or maybe at the start of the week. Then they’ll be seen maybe in a home visit by their spotlight police officer or joint with yourself. They have vigilance home visits conducted by probation and police. So, they do have a blended approach in IOM cases.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

However, IOM cases were frequently described as being ‘chaotic’ as a cohort, which made remote contact challenging due to regularly changing phone numbers or substance misuse.

People on probation talked about how Blended Supervision was valuable, particularly with managing social isolation and social anxiety issues. People on probation described how an

in-person appointment provided them with a reason to go out and have human interaction, whilst, on other days, a remote appointment gave them a chance to stay home and not risk being breached if they felt unable to leave. This feedback was echoed by probation practitioners who recognised some people on probation required flexibility according to their mental health.

“A phone call could be a lifesaver, because loads of times I’ve been thinking I just can’t go in. Half the time, the reasons you can’t go in you just don’t want to say. Even if you’ve got a good relationship with your probation officer ... Yes, a phone call can save us from going to jail. So, yes, I would say it is a really good thing, I would say. It does help massively, you know?” (Person on Probation Interview)

3.2.4 Other beneficiaries

Although the quantitative analysis could not explore all of the cohorts deemed to require Blended Supervision, including neurodivergent individuals and those in employment, these cohorts were discussed in the qualitative data.⁵ Probation practitioners across all regions gave examples of people on probation with specific conditions (including neurodiversity or social anxieties) who benefitted from a blended approach. This was described by people on probation and probation practitioners as supporting them in building a positive working relationship, supporting compliance and engagement, and fostering understanding and responsivity towards people’s distinctive needs.

⁵ Some characteristics, such as neurodiversity and employment status, were either not recorded or described to the evaluation team as poorly recorded and therefore not used.

“Those with neurodiverse conditions really fixate on the consequences. And I think they feel that, ‘Okay, I can’t attend the office today, I’m going to get in so much trouble. I’m going back to prison’, like, I know that neurodiverse case, he does think I’m going to send him to prison like that, he’s really built that into his head. And so, by having that Blended Supervision where I wrote him, or if give him an opportunity, okay, you can’t attend face to face, let’s kind of have a call or I can write to you or whatever, I think that has added so much to him, because it’s made, it’s kind of helped him form a bit of a trust.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

People on probation who were employed described why Blended Supervision positively impacted their lives. They reported this opportunity reduced stress – they valued not having to explain to employers or customers why they need to take times/days off, and not having to lose a day’s work. Having the option of remote contact decreased frustrations for those whose in-person appointments were usually very short.

“I’d have to take a day off work, right, employer would not be happy when you take some days off work just to go to probation. It’s not a good thing, it’s not good for anybody. It makes your life a lot more difficult to get work, to get employment, because you have to take days off for a five-minute thing.” (Person on Probation Interview)

3.2.5 Visiting Probation Offices

Probation practitioners and people on probation described how Blended Supervision benefits people on probation who are uncomfortable visiting their local probation offices or do not live or work in the area.

Probation practitioners highlighted that when individuals have health or safety concerns, remote supervision offered an opportunity to have some discretion over in-person appointments. During the Phase 2 staff survey, most probation practitioners (56%, n = 955) said that they consider physical access to probation offices when deciding on the suitability of remote supervision.

“Some people find it quite stressful coming into the office, you know, people with anxiety, or people who might be worried about bumping into previous associates.”
(Probation Practitioner Interview)

Several probation practitioners discussed the impact that coming into probation offices had on women’s wellbeing, notably in terms of bumping into associates, perpetrators, or generally exacerbating trauma. The option for remote contact was reviewed favourably by probation practitioners and women on probation.

“A lot of women in the criminal justice system have experienced some kind of trauma, which I do think impacts on them being able to come in so rather than them not coming in and just going down the breach and enforcement rule that blended element can allow you to keep maintaining that contact and work with them without having to get them back in court.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Having the opportunity to utilise Blended Supervision had a positive impact on the lives of those people who said they were not comfortable visiting the probation office because of gang or organised crime affiliation, social anxieties, fear of relapsing (alcohol and drug misuse), or fear of mixing with men (for women on probation). Eighteen per cent (n = 74) of the people on probation who responded to the Phase 2 survey stated that they were uncomfortable visiting their local probation offices.

“Offices are triggers for some as it demands interaction with other criminals and addicts, who you are trying to avoid when vulnerable and trying to change your behaviour or address addiction. Remote supervision is better for just that reason alone...” (Person on Probation Survey Response)

3.2.6 Cases deemed to be unsuitable for remote contact

Several cases were described as unsuitable for remote contact. Probation practitioners explained that some people on probation did not have phones or frequently lost them, making a blended approach difficult.

“...they’re all chaotic. They’re not capable of keeping hold of a phone. If they have access to a phone, it’s generally like a 10-pound Nokia that doesn’t have camera doesn’t have, you know, video call functions. So, I think for the cohort that I manage that specific IOM cohort, it doesn’t really work for them. Because they don’t have the ability really to keep hold of their possessions. I know a lot of mine are street homeless. So, if they have had a phone, it’s been taken off them, they’ve been robbed themselves.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Other cases where people on probation were more likely to have in-person supervision, even if the guidance permitted otherwise, included those where manipulation was possible, where there was a sense of evading detection or deliberately avoiding coming into a local probation office in person, e.g. domestic abuse cases (victim or perpetrator) or cases with other risk markers.

“...without actually seeing them it’s very difficult to see what environment they’re in and whether there’s any risks attached to that environment. Because if for example, if somebody’s got a child protection marker against their name, it’s very difficult to identify if they’re around children, because if you’re speaking to them on the phone, they can go in a quiet corner, however, it’s very difficult to identify the other risks which might be surrounding them.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

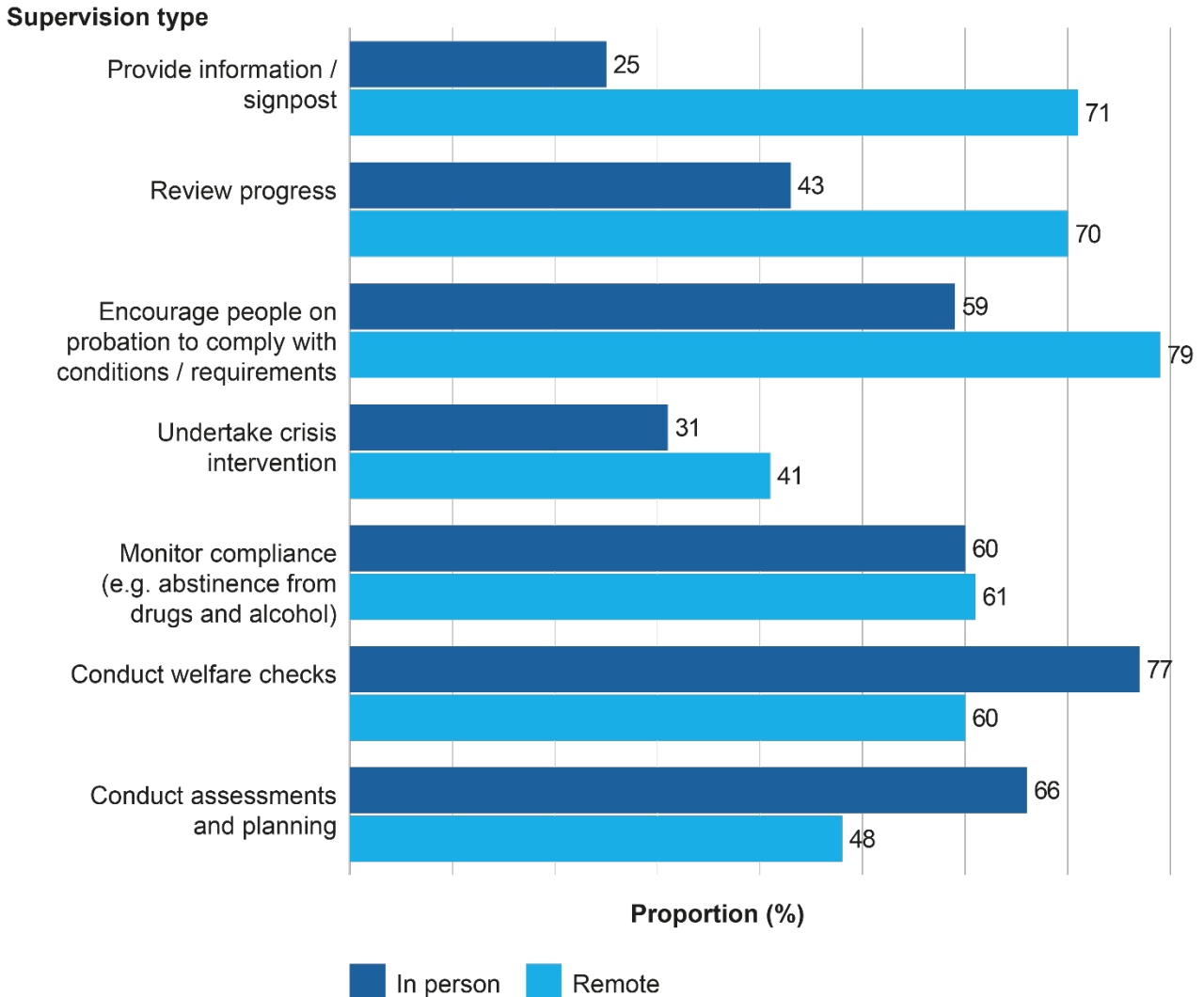
3.3 What can be addressed in Blended Supervision?

Section Overview: This section explores perceptions of what blended supervision can address. The first part of the section considers the general attitudes and thoughts of probation staff and people on probation, and the second part looks at the quality of RAR work that can be achieved, especially using remote contact for change work. While the quality of supervision (as defined by the TOM) was generally viewed positively by staff, they did voice specific concerns, particularly regarding the structure and depth of remote appointments compared to in-person sessions. Both probation staff and people on probation stated the importance of in-person interaction for achieving key outcomes. Moreover, while remote sessions may be more suitable for specific cohorts and individuals, the effectiveness of delivering RAR change work in this way was debated. To address these issues, probation staff identified a need for further training on toolkits to enhance remote supervision and boost their confidence in delivering it where it is unavoidable.

3.3.1 Content of remote and in-person supervision

The feedback from Phase 1 survey respondents suggested that probation staff were prepared to use remote contact for various tasks (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Proportion of respondents that said they completed an activity during in-person and remote supervision. (Bars ordered by the ratio between remote and in-person proportions)



Source: Phase 1 probation staff survey

There were, however, clear preferences for certain tasks in both remote and in-person contact. A higher proportion of probation practitioners said they had used remote (e.g., video contact or telephone calls) rather than in-person contact to provide information or signpost (71% compared to 25%), review progress (70% compared to 43%), and encourage people on probation to comply with conditions/requirements (79% compared to 59%). A higher proportion of respondents used in-person supervision to conduct assessments and planning (66% in-person compared with 48% remote) and conduct welfare checks (77% in-person compared with 60% remote). This feedback suggests a

focus on straightforward content in remote contacts, while more in-depth supervision might be saved for in-person contacts.

People on probation had contrasting opinions about whether issues discussed during remote supervision differed from those discussed during in-person supervision. Twenty-four per cent (n = 109) of surveyed people on probation agreed that the issues discussed in a remote appointment differed from issues addressed in an in-person appointment. In contrast, 31% (n = 136) disagreed with this statement (45%, n = 203 neither agreed nor disagreed). Those who agreed explained that this was due to the more in-depth nature of in-person appointments and a feeling that they were not getting the support they needed during remote contact.

“They keep it brief. They just ask how you are and give you your next appointment, really. It’s just brief.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Although the team did not specifically ask why people on probation disagreed that issues discussed in remote appointments differed from issues discussed in person, some people indicated there is no difference because of their good and trusting relationship with their practitioner.

“No, we have an open honest relationship so no difference [between what is discussed in-person and remote appointments].” (Person on Probation Survey Response)

The differences in opinion could partly be due to the confusion explained in Section 3.1, which involved people not always knowing whether it was a ‘check-in’ or a planned contact. This could also explain the high number of people (45%, n = 203) answering ‘neither agree nor disagree’ to the statement.

3.3.2 Perceptions of quality

The Phase 1 staff survey found that probation practitioners were generally confident about delivering Blended Supervision and comfortable with what could be achieved through a blended approach. These attitudes were mirrored in the Phase 2 staff survey. For example, in Phase 1, 76% (n = 1,471) of survey respondents agreed that they can build

good relationships with people on probation when using Blended Supervision; similarly, 73% (n = 1,385) agreed in Phase 2. In Phase 1, 64% (n = 1,239) agreed they could effectively assess and monitor people on probation using Blended Supervision. This percentage remained at 64% in Phase 2 (n = 1,219).

Despite this, several concerns about the quality of Blended Supervision remained. In interviews, probation practitioners highlighted difficulties in implementing formal supervision through remote appointments, which could explain their reluctance to use remote work. Likewise, some people on probation worried that they did not receive sufficient information, support, or signposting during remote contacts compared to in-person contacts and, therefore, said that the risk of ‘falling through the gaps’ was greater.

“I think it will make it too easy for so many people to fall through the gaps, or give it lip service. I know there will be some people that will just take probation however it’s given to them, and just wait for it to be over, and they won’t be touched by it at all.” (Person on Probation Interview)

About a third of staff survey respondents reported specific concerns. For example, 35% (n = 674) of probation staff survey respondents agreed that they cannot always communicate effectively when using remote supervision, compared to 42% (n = 801) who disagreed. Additionally, 37% (n = 705) agreed that they sometimes worry that they cannot effectively safeguard people on probation when using remote supervision (compared to 38%, n = 731, who disagreed).

Regarding safeguarding, a few interviewees reported important examples of people on probation self-harming during remote contact and felt the resources to safeguard were limited in this context. Where practitioners were working from home, they explained they could not readily access support from colleagues or other agencies to advise on the best course of action should a person on probation be distressed. This was exacerbated when people on probation contacted practitioners out of hours when they were unavailable.

“I was a bit stung by one guy who did a video call and he self-harmed and there was loads of blood every week... and it’s kind of put me off video calls slightly, which is silly because that’s one person and it wasn’t even a planned video contact.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Some people on probation raised concerns that remote appointments lacked confidentiality and privacy, leading to guarded conversations that could diminish the effectiveness of supervision discussions. This concern was particularly the case if people on probation did not have a good signal at home and had to go out in public. Some were also worried about their safety if having to discuss their sentence outside the office or their house.

“I didn’t have Wi-Fi at home, the signal was naff. So, like I said, I’d have had to have gone to McDonald’s or Wetherspoons and stand outside and use the Wi-Fi, which wouldn’t have been very practical.” (Person on Probation Interview)

“Because of my offence discussing it when other people are around will put me at risk.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Probation practitioners sometimes described a lack of confidentiality as a reason to keep remote contact as a ‘check-in’ rather than formal supervision. Moreover, probation practitioners were often reluctant to conduct appointments remotely with women in abusive relationships (current or past). Domestic abuse was cited as a particular example where there would be a strong rationale for in-person appointments (extending to victims and perpetrators of abuse). Practitioners stated they may not be clear on who else was present, and cues about vulnerability could be missed if contact was remote.

“I could always hear him in the background. So, she was never alone. And she was never able to really talk freely because he was there. So, I instructed her to come into the office and saw her face-to-face.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

The feedback from staff and people on probation suggests they explored how remote contact could support supervision practice. This section and the previous section described using remote contact for more straight forward supervision tasks (e.g., providing

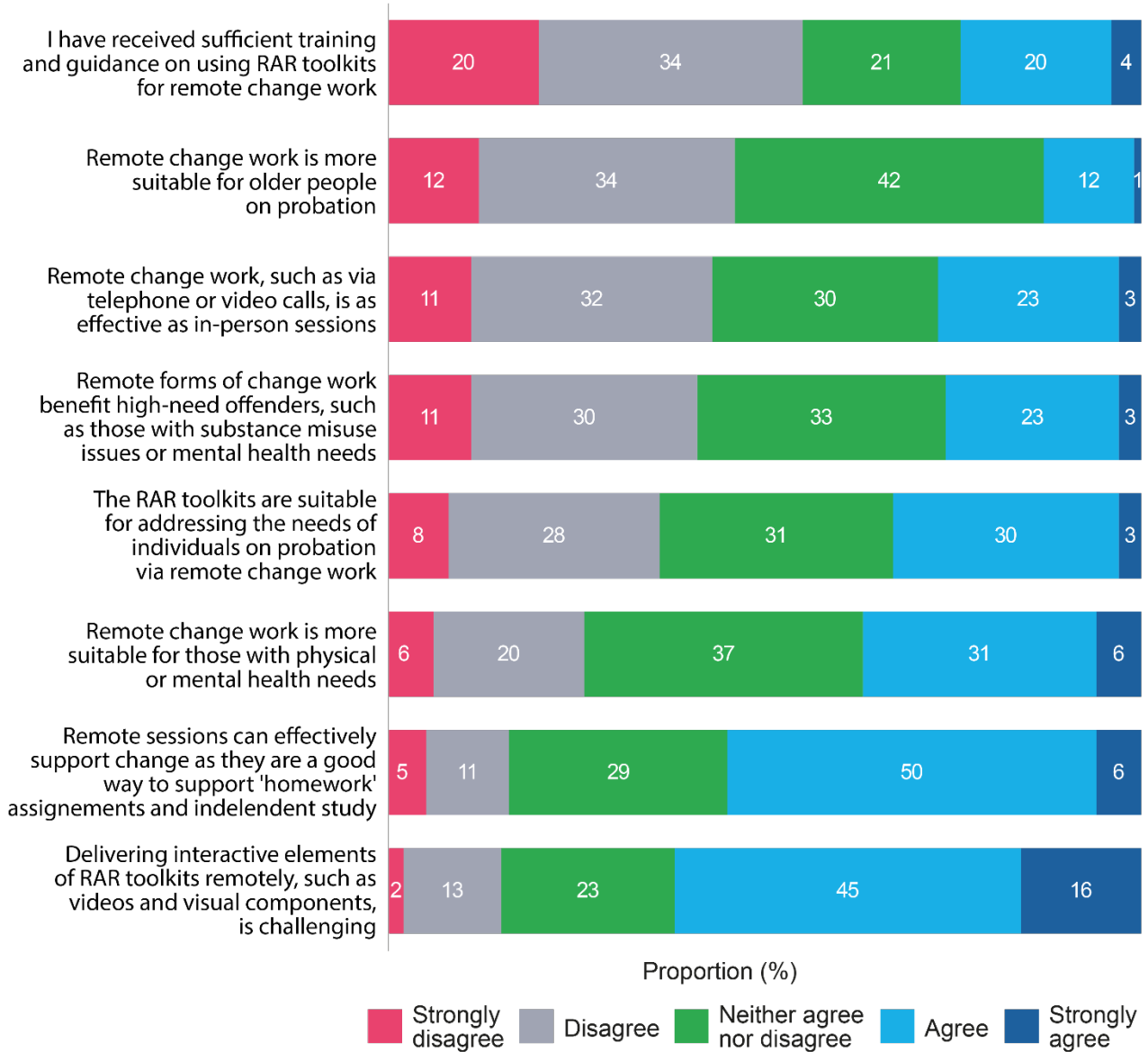
information) and saving in-person contact for more complex supervision, believing this helped to keep sufficient quality in practice. The people on probation's recollections, however, suggest different experiences of supervision. Encouraging staff to be clear with people on probation on what can be achieved through remote and in-person contact and why, and perhaps greater consistency in what is done by staff in the two different forms of contact, can help to address the lack of evidence on what contributes to the quality of experience of supervision (Beck & McGinnis, 2022).

3.3.3 Rehabilitation Activity Requirement

A RAR requires people on probation to participate in activities to address behaviours contributing to their offence. During supervision, a probation practitioner can undertake change work with an individual using the available suite of toolkits or referral to a commissioned service. This section focuses on the former part of the RAR. It is not clear whether survey respondents and interviewees were referring to RAR appointments or RAR days when discussing change work.

The qualitative and quantitative feedback in Phase 2 confirmed that change work as part of a RAR was challenging to deliver remotely, and overall, the preference was to complete this in person, regardless of the cohort. Rather than being better for specific cohorts, the feedback suggested that remote change work was only used when someone could not attend in person. Figure 6 describes the attitudes of staff who deliver RAR change work in response to a range of questions about delivering it remotely.

Figure 6: Proportion of respondents that agree or disagree with statements about the remote delivery of Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) change work



Source: Phase 2 probation staff survey (the values might not total 100% due to rounding)

Of those probation practitioners who completed change work, 43% (n = 552) disagreed that remote change work is as effective as in-person, compared with 26% who agreed (n = 333). This view was repeated in interviews, where probation staff said they would not deliver change work remotely unless there were no alternatives. This preference was because phone calls did not allow the ‘depth’ of conversation that change work required. People on probation agreed with this. The exception to this was for the limited number of

people on probation who were unable to attend in person (mainly due to social anxiety, physical health, or disability).

“To be fair, it’s much much better for me because (a) I struggle with lots of various mental health issues, and (b) it’s a good distance from where I live at home, I’m quite remote, so it’s an hour and a half bus journey to get to probation and an hour and a half back, and with having physical difficulties as well. I’m in a lot of pain when I come back.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Probation staff expressed different views about who could be suitable for remote change work. Thirty-seven per cent (n = 467) of survey respondents agreed that remote RAR change work is more appropriate for people with physical or mental health needs, compared with 26% (n = 328) who disagreed, but more disagreed than agreed that remote change work benefited people with high and complex needs (41%, n = 516, compared with 26%, n = 318 respectively). Practitioners were in greater agreement that remote change work was not more suitable for older people on probation (46%, n = 569, disagreed that it was more suitable compared with 13%, n = 166, that agreed). People on probation with social anxiety issues often preferred remote RARs as they described in-person discussions or group sessions as difficult to attend.

A partial explanation for the preference for in-person change work could be the perception, from probation staff, of limited training to complete it remotely. In particular, Phase 1 qualitative data indicated insufficient training and guidance to complete RAR change work remotely. That sentiment continued in Phase 2 of the evaluation. For example, most survey respondents said they had not received sufficient training and guidance on using RAR toolkits for remote change work⁶ and some probation practitioners felt training to conduct RARs remotely would help them to use it. This was supported by staff focus group data, which focused on RARs.

⁶ 55% (n = 690) of respondents disagreed that they had received sufficient training and guidance on using RAR toolkits for remote change work.

“We can block out like three hours of training, to actually go through these materials, understand it, then actually then go and start delivering this, we’d probably be better off, and people would be more confident to even do it blended. Yeah, but I just don’t think a lot of people are confident doing it even over the phone. That’s why it’s mainly just check-ins, which do like five-minute check-ins with people.” (Staff Focus Group)

Fieldwork from Phase 1 found that some probation practitioners used remote sessions to enhance and improve in-person change work. Remote sessions were used to encourage the completion of independent study and review what had been learnt when in person. Most survey respondents in Phase 2 also agreed that remote sessions could supplement change work when used this way (56%, n = 695, compared with 16%, n = 196, who disagreed). Some people on probation considered remote homework a good addition to in-person change work. People on probation who disliked remote RAR work attributed this to issues with technology and the inability to learn from online materials.

“I’ve got a good relationship with my probation officer, and I do my RAR days myself. Like, she gives me stuff to do, and I do that, and I type it up... So, it is nice going up and then handing it over what I’ve been asked to do. It feels like a nice achievement.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Overall, RAR change work was considered a complex task and, along with other more involved supervision tasks, was preferred to be completed in person with remote sessions used when no other option presented itself. In those (limited) occasions when remote contact was used, the evidence suggests that the necessary quality of work might not be achieved. As such, exploring what is undertaken and how training and guidance can improve them could avoid unequal experiences.

3.4 What enables effective Blended Supervision?

Section Overview: This section examines the mechanisms that enable effective Blended Supervision and the extent to which this appears to be happening. Across people on probation and probation practitioners, Blended Supervision was said to be facilitated once a relationship was established. This is supported by the phasing suggested in the BSM guidance and tier system, e.g., seeing people in person for several weeks before considering replacing in-person contact with a remote session. Supplementary remote contact, in between in-person appointments, was said to further contribute to building rapport and relationships between people on probation and their probation practitioner. This type of ‘top up’ contact and having a direct line to probation practitioners improved communication. Therefore, remote contact can be a tool for building a relationship, which is central to engagement, compliance, and quality of supervision.

3.4.1 Building a relationship

Across interviews with people on probation and probation practitioners, the need for a robust, professional relationship was said to be central to facilitating Blended Supervision. The difficulties in conducting meaningful, in-depth conversations remotely could be alleviated by having a strong, professional relationship. This related to the desire to conduct supervision in person before moving to anything remote. Once able to take a blended approach, this continued to support a positive relationship between practitioners and people on probation. For example, 52% (n=235) of people on probation who responded to the Phase 2 survey agreed that remote supervision can improve their relationship with their practitioner, whereas 10% (n = 44) disagreed. Further (and stated earlier), 46% (n = 206) agreed remote supervision had a positive impact on their life, whereas 11% (n = 52) disagreed with this statement. The reasons for this, as perceived by interviews with probation practitioners, were:

- Recognition of engagement and a perceived level of trust from the probation practitioner to the person on probation;
- A greater level of access and contact between in-person meetings, which helps the relationship and communication to flourish; and,

- A degree of flexibility and responsiveness to the person on probation's needs regarding employment, childcare responsibilities, and health related issues (i.e., disability, social anxiety), which also supported relationship building.

"I think it improves it [relationship with practitioner] because it's like she's got a level of trust there. ...yes, it's that bit of trust. It makes me feel like, yes, she knows. She must believe me that I'm actually on the straight and narrow because otherwise it wouldn't be the phone calls." (Person on Probation Interview)

Probation practitioners reported that the ability to offer a blended approach helped 'humanise' the relationship. This was especially important where people on probation had historically seen probation as 'rigid' or 'inflexible'.

"...it has really helped our relationship, and she feels that I consider what her needs are and what difficulty she's having getting to the office all the time. So that's really helped us to build up that relationship, that working relationship. And I think she, you know, she, she trusts me as a result of that..." (Probation Services Officer Interview)

A few people on probation felt that remote contact with their probation practitioner could lead to potentially harmful miscommunication.

"I think it could be harmful. I think things could get misconstrued via text message, this, that, and the other. Miscommunication, I think, could happen." (Person on Probation Interview)

If remote contact was relied on too frequently, the tendency for this to be briefer than in-person contact was said to sometimes disrupt the relationship. This was especially the case if not supplemented by in-person supervision.

"No [Blended Supervision doesn't improve relationship], because when it's on the phone it's a case of she can't wait to get off the phone soon enough." (Person on Probation Interview)

For this reason, while a blended approach afforded many benefits, the data indicated this should always be in addition to, and not instead of, in-person support and occur after an in-person relationship has been established and consolidated.

“...there is something about being in the presence of a person... you’re really listening and that when you’re listening to a person, you’re not just hearing their words, but you’re almost taking in like the atmosphere around them. You know, what they bring into the room? And if we overuse alternative methods of contact, there’s a danger that we miss that, and what did they lose by not having a person who was showing basic care and warmth towards them?” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

3.4.2 Increased accessibility to probation staff

The introduction of a blended approach was said to increase contact between probation practitioners and people on probation. People on probation described having a ‘direct line’ to staff rather than going through reception. This access meant they could text or call their probation practitioner in an ‘ad-hoc’, unplanned fashion.

East of England practitioners noted people on probation were also now more likely to attend the local probation offices in person on an unplanned basis. This was taken by staff to indicate enhanced engagement and that people on probation viewed their probation practitioners as a valuable resource.

“...where people are using remote contact more, it’s actually sort of in turn, increasing the number of unplanned people dropping in for support.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Overall views were positive about having direct contact. Probation practitioners stated it supported relationship building and reduced the risk of a breach as it allowed people on probation to check their appointment times and flag any crises or potential issues immediately.

“...because they can ring you straight away and text you it enables you to kind of build-up that rapport a lot quicker. To not go through reception or being put on hold and wait for someone to find you I do think it works better. Because I think you need them to be able to contact you and be able to give you a call when they need you in a crisis.” (Probation Services Officer Interview)

Some practitioners reflected that the increased availability added to their workload, and it was acknowledged that they needed to be more disciplined by turning their work phones off after hours. They indicated that it may create an over-reliance on alerting probation practitioners to issues when people on probation may need to contact other agencies instead.

“I think sometimes you can also be too available, because then you might be getting a call every single day or every other day. So, I think you have to strike a balance.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

3.4.3 Preferred technologies for Blended Supervision

Most probation practitioners stated they used phone calls over video calls and texts. Despite HMPPS guidance that WhatsApp is not to be used, many probation practitioners said they did use WhatsApp on occasion to contact their cases. People on probation echoed this and said most remote contacts are on the phone with some additional WhatsApp and text messages, which was their preference. Only a few people had had a video call.

“No, she’s never done a video call, just, like, a WhatsApp and that. Like, lets me know my next appointment, so if I’m to come into the office or if she’s doing a phone call.” (Person on Probation Interview)

Probation practitioners raised digital poverty as one reason for defaulting to phone calls and texts instead of WhatsApp or video calls.

“It’s not realistic that our service users will have Microsoft Teams on their devices. They might just have basic Nokia phones.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

It was noted that for those with smartphones, using an internet connection to make a call overcame the need for phone credit. Furthermore, where WhatsApp was used, it was said to feel more 'natural' as it was used socially by people and was familiar. It also facilitated the sending of photos or documents where necessary.

“Obviously with WhatsApp, you could have just Wi-Fi, I don't need phone credit. So, a lot of our service users can get in touch with us through WhatsApp. Sending us sick notes. Sending any kind of messages to a picture format was through WhatsApp.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Support from on-site staff enabled video links or Microsoft Team calls to be facilitated for people in prison or Approved Premises. Where video calls were used, this was said to allow practitioners to better gauge someone's wellbeing. Practitioners gave some examples where using a video call enabled them to see someone's home (including examples where they had been given a tour) that would otherwise not be possible. This was said to be comparable to home visits and helped strengthen relationships. There was some ambiguity from probation practitioners as to whether this could be recorded as a face-to-face contact despite the guidance stating it should not be classified in this way.

“If it's a video call, because you still have that element of face-to-face, you can still get more out of them and under Blended Supervision, the video call can still count as a face-to-face appointment, just the telephone call that counts as remote. If you do a video call and someone is in their home, I've had them when they turn the camera around, 'Look, here's my house, I've just done this and we've just done this' and actually I wouldn't have got that if I'd seen you face-to-face. It's just a convincing them to do video calls.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

A small number of probation practitioners stated they did not feel comfortable conducting video calls when they were in their own home and noted that some people on probation found it 'intrusive' or 'lacked self-esteem' for a video call. One probation practitioner noted she sent voice notes to one of her cases due to his lack of writing skills.

3.4.4 Skills and training for Blended Supervision

There was no centralised training for staff to deliver Blended Supervision when it was first introduced. In Phase 1, the regions explained that action was taken to provide staff with the necessary skills. This involved the provision of guideline documentation, team events, and informal discussions with line managers. However, data collected during Phase 1 of the process evaluation indicated that some staff desired more formal training to support them in delivering Blended Supervision. Specifically, probation staff survey data from Phase 1 revealed mixed perceptions of the adequacy of training around Blended Supervision, with only 38% (n = 717) of respondents agreeing suitable training is available for remote supervision skills (a further 32%, n = 618, neither agreed nor disagreed and 30%, n = 587, disagreed). In Phase 1, respondents from Greater Manchester were more likely to agree than respondents from other regions (42%, n = 59, compared with a mean of 34%, n = 529, in the remaining ten regions). There also appeared to be few opportunities to develop relevant skills: only 29% (n = 566) of Phase 1 survey respondents agreed (8%, n = 159, of whom strongly agreed) that they had time and opportunities to develop their remote supervision skills (32% neither agreed nor disagreed, n = 619, 39% disagreed, n = 749). In Phase 2, more staff (36%, n = 704) agreed that their region gave an opportunity to develop effective remote supervision skills compared to 29% in Phase 1 (n = 566).

The qualitative data from staff interviews was mixed. In Phase 1, some practitioners were satisfied with the level of training they received, reporting the guidelines to be 'quite self-explanatory' or that they 'prefer being left alone to get on with the job'. In Phase 2, some practitioners thought remote supervision required a different or specific skillset and felt that training would be beneficial. For example, during interviews, practitioners explained that there needed to be more scrutiny around someone's ability to engage when conducting supervision remotely. Practitioners gave examples where sending sessions or paperwork in advance had supported this.

Other probation practitioners described how they could transfer their skills around active listening and motivational interviewing to remote approaches. For those who advocated for extra training, the rationale was that a lack of central support could compromise the quality of remote supervision. Therefore, whilst it was reassuring that staff in Phase 2 of the

survey described greater opportunities to develop effective skills, this has not seemingly translated to confident practice. It may be that whilst there were more opportunities for development (between phases 1 and 2), staff still did not feel competent to deliver supervision remotely and preferred in person.

“...if it’s going to be the expectation that people should be doing that sort of interventions and that over the phone, there should be some more training on it.”
(Probation Services Officer Interview)

Overall, feedback from practitioners and people on probation indicates that the central tenet of effective supervision is a supportive relationship. Previous work has highlighted this (see the meta-analysis from Beck & McGinnis, 2022) drawing attention to the need to carefully balance ‘surveillance’ with ‘support’. A supervisory relationship which is seen as punitive or controlling undermines the quality of it (King, 2013). Undertaking a blended approach can be seen to offer some discretion and autonomy, attending to people’s needs which could ensure the supervisory relationship is seen as supportive. Chamberlain et al. (2017) have also indicated that this may have an impact on reducing reoffending relative to ‘non supportive’ relationships.

3.5 Are Blended Supervision contacts attended?

Section Overview: This section explores people on probation’s attendance at Blended Supervision appointments, drawing attention to the higher attendance at remote contacts compared to in-person contact. This difference suggests that remote contact could facilitate better compliance due to its inherent flexibility and potential to encourage good behaviour. However, the interpretation of what constitutes attendance for remote contact is more lenient than that used for in-person contacts.

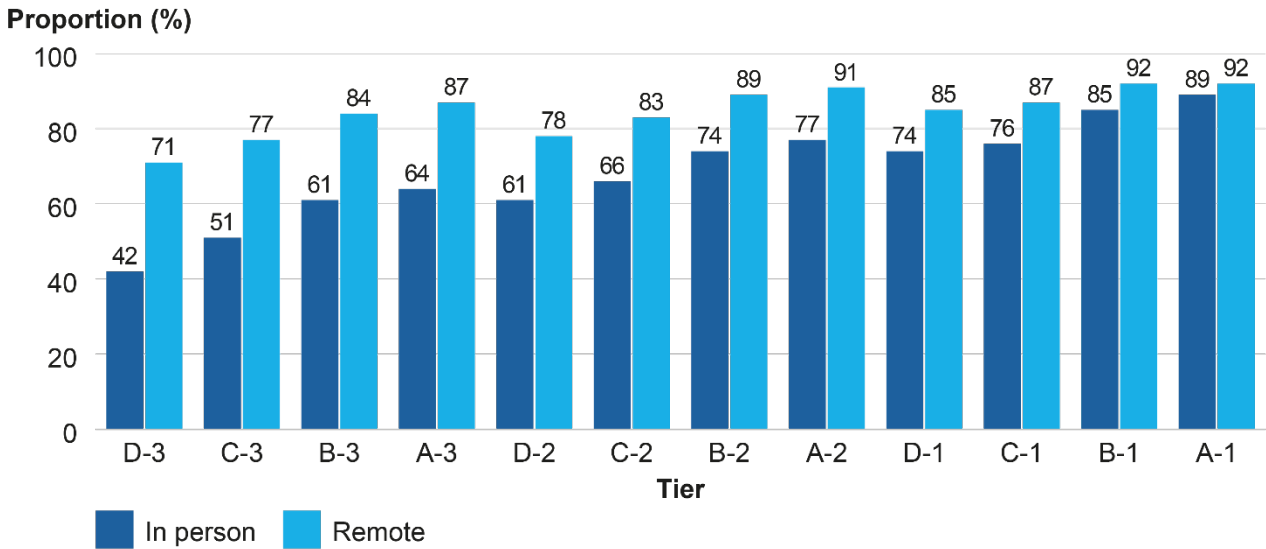
3.5.1 Attendance rates

From the start of Blended Supervision (April 2022) until December 2023, there were 2,911,289 in-person contacts and 435,252 remote contacts (all national standard⁷). The

⁷ A contact can be recorded as a National Standard on the NDelius case management system. These contacts are planned and can be enforced.

remote contacts were more likely to be recorded as attended: 86% of remote contacts were attended compared with 70% of in-person contacts. This pattern was repeated across tiers – see Figure 7.

Figure 7: The proportion of remote and in-person National Standard contacts attended from April 2022 to December 2023 by tier (see Section 1.1.2 for tier definitions)

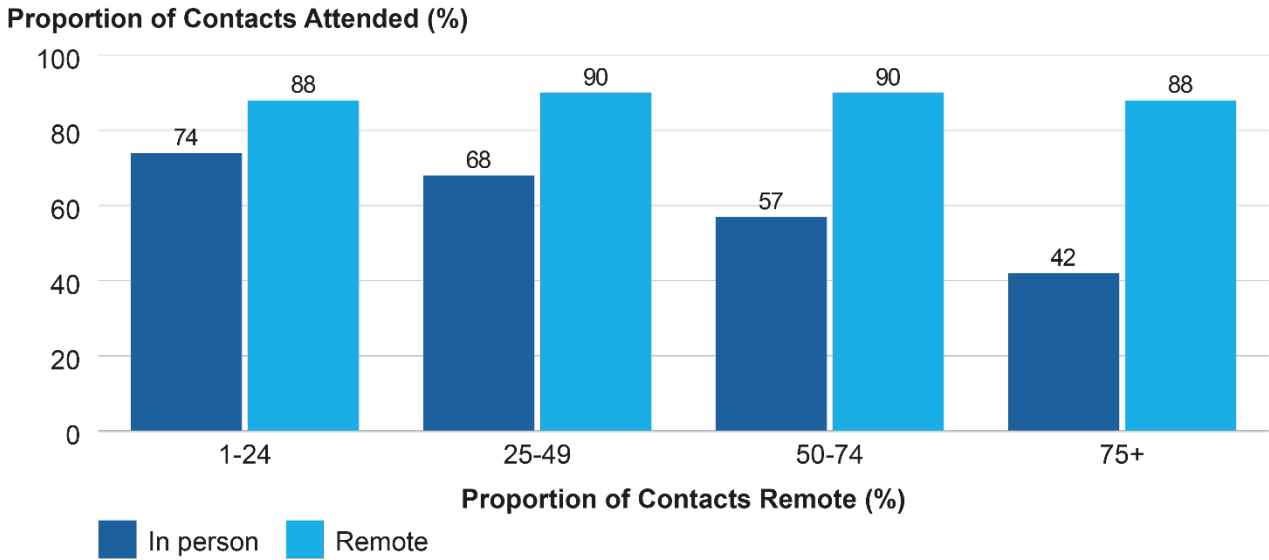


Source: NDelius commencements and contacts data

People on probation across all tiers were more likely to attend a remote planned contact than an in-person one. This pattern was most prominent in tier 3 (those with high-needs), who attended the lowest proportion of in-person contacts.

The administrative data also show that people on probation with a greater proportion of their contacts remote attended a lower proportion of their in-person supervision while maintaining a high attendance at planned remote contacts (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Proportion of remote and in-person National Standard contacts attended from April 2022 to December 2023 by the proportion of the person on probation’s contacts that were remote (excluding those with no remote contact)



Source: NDelius commencements and contacts data

The feedback from probation practitioners suggested occasions when being flexible and offering a blended approach supported attendance, as it allowed rapport to be built alongside an acknowledgement of good behaviour and adherence to orders (e.g., offering a telephone appointment over in-person). For example, 57% (n = 978) of staff survey respondents said they ‘often’ or ‘always’ considered how to reward good behaviour or progression when using Blended Supervision. Only 15% (n = 258) said they would ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ do this.

“I think if they know that we’re able to offer a bit of flexibility, I think they’re more likely to work with us as well.” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

However, staff survey responses suggested that staff were unsure whether attendance was improved overall by using remote contact. In Phase 2, the largest group of probation practitioners (40%, n = 779) neither agreed nor disagreed that people on probation are more likely to comply with remote supervision than in-person supervision, while 39% (n = 749) agreed, and 21% disagreed.

As described in section 3.3, people on probation explained that acknowledging good behaviour made them feel trusted. This acknowledgement, they explained, made them

more likely to engage with their sentence and probation practitioner. They also described occasions where remote contact supported adherence to sentences, e.g., there was less risk of a breach because people on probation could get reminders of appointments.

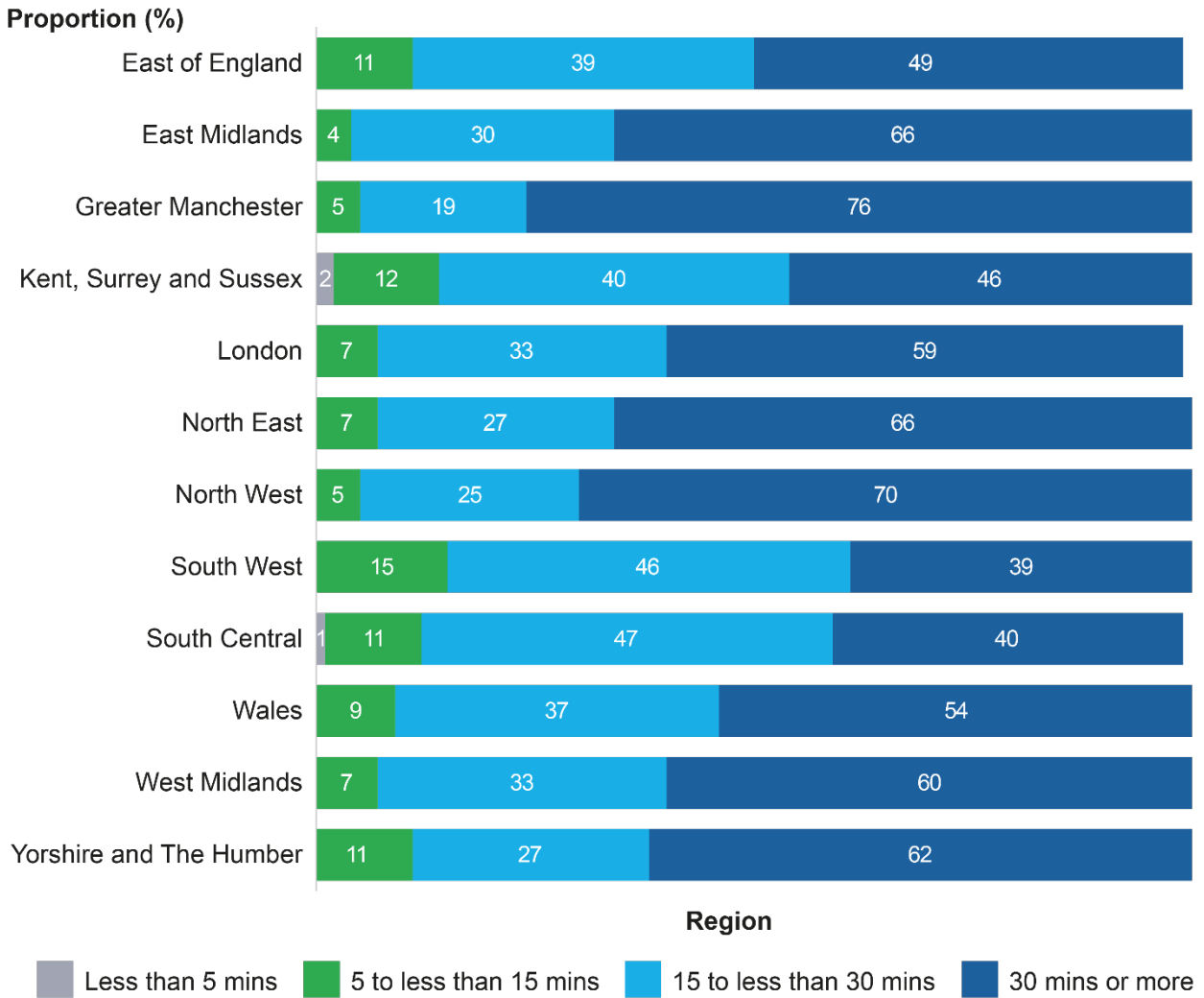
“It makes life easier as life is busy and you cannot make it in every week, having this option gives us the freedom and in turn not to get into breaches and get angry with the officers.” (Person on Probation Interview)

3.5.2 Definition of remote contact attendance

The results above indicate that attendance at remote contacts was perhaps more manageable for people on probation than in-person contacts. When discussing definitions of attendance with practitioners, there was an agreed sense of ‘leniency’ if someone did not answer the phone to a planned remote contact. Fifty-eight per cent (n = 1,029) of probation staff survey respondents believed people on probation could be more than 30 minutes late for a planned remote contact. Band 4 officers were more likely to wait longer than probation service officers and senior probation officers, with 64% (n = 496) stating that they would wait 30 minutes or more.

There was substantial regional variation in the proportion of respondents who would wait more than 30 minutes before saying there was non-attendance. For example, 39% (n = 57) of respondents in the South West said they would wait 30 minutes or more, compared to 76% (n = 91) of respondents in Greater Manchester (see Figure 9). This appears to be due to different regional policies, as most respondents said that remote non-compliance (51% agreed, n = 929, compared with 17%, n = 324, that disagreed) and failure to attend planned remote contacts (50% agreed, n = 939, compared with 19%, n = 345, that disagreed) were clearly defined and understood in their PDU.

Figure 9: The time needed to elapse before deeming a remote contact 'failure to attend' by region



Source: Phase 2 probation staff survey (the values might not total 100% due to rounding)

During probation staff interviews, greater leniency was described as relating to the fact that they were less disrupted by someone not answering the phone than by failing to attend an in-person appointment. Practitioners stated that they found it harder to enforce phone contact than in-person appointments.

“Obviously, if someone’s got a face-to-face appointment and they don’t turn up there’s no contact then we are straightaway kind of go into to enforcement or we’re trying to contact them. If you’re on the phone, I’ve had it before they have gone ‘Oh my battery’s going to die’. I don’t know if the battery’s dying, or if they’re just cutting me off because they’re sick of me. There’s actually no way of proving anything if you’re on the phone, so...how can we enforce on that if the battery legitimately did die?” (Probation Practitioner Interview)

Most people on probation said they are unwilling to risk being breached or recalled by missing a remote appointment. A few individuals admitted that they have used remote contacts to avoid doing something their practitioner had asked them to do (i.e., claim they cannot attend their remote appointment due to bad internet connection). This corresponds with the 44% (n = 835) of probation staff survey respondents who agreed that people on probation can use remote contacts to evade their probation practitioner.

“Yes. If we have a remote appointment, they’re easy to get out of... With a remote appointment, I can tell you that my house is on fire, call me back tomorrow.”
(Person on Probation Interview)

The achievement of a consistent definition of attendance may not be possible or desirable as staff are responding to the specific circumstances of the person of probation and, as shown in this report, the content of remote contact can be focused on check-ins suggesting limited consequence if not immediately attended. An implication of this, however, is to encourage staff to examine the person on probation’s overall attitude to attending remote contact and moving to greater in person if perceived not to take them sufficiently seriously.

4. Conclusion

It is clear from the data that both probation practitioners and people on probation value the ability to take a blended approach to supervision. However, the extent to which this is genuinely used for structured and planned supervision is infrequent. The evaluation indicates that the BSM has become synonymous with in-person supervision and supplementary remote check-ins. This evolved and developed between Phase 1 and 2 of the evaluation. In Phase 1, probation practitioners expressed ambition for undertaking remote supervision, and more people on probation were receiving a blended approach. However, by Phase 2, it emerged that any remote contact aligned more with a remote 'check-in' in terms of the length and content of the session. Remote contact was only used for supervision in particular circumstances, such as when someone could not physically attend the office in person due to work, health or childcare reasons. Probation practitioners and people on probation seemed satisfied with this arrangement, even though it may conflict with the original ambition to deliver remote supervision more widely.

The majority of probation practitioners and people on probation expressed a preference for in-person supervision because it was reported that this fostered relationship building, the ability to read someone's body language better, assess their wellbeing, and address difficult content concerning desistance better. Previous work has highlighted the important role of relationships in supervision (see the meta-analysis from Beck & McGinnis, 2022) and the need to carefully balance 'surveillance' with 'support'. Undertaking a blended approach can be seen to offer some discretion and autonomy, attending to people's needs which could ensure the supervisory relationship is seen as supportive.

Indeed, remote supervision was delivered for cases with health conditions, concerns about attending local probation offices, employment, or childcare responsibilities. It was also sometimes raised as an option when someone was doing particularly well, given recognition of this. Where people on probation had a higher level of need or required greater flexibility, remote supervision was described as helpful. In these cases, people on probation also described the positive impact of a blended approach on their lives and

wellbeing; it supported a greater level of trust between them and their probation practitioner and a high level of responsivity, which also positively affected their relationship. This relationship was said by people on probation and probation practitioners to be central to compliance and engagement. Having more direct contact with probation practitioners (i.e., not having to go through reception) also consolidated the professional relationship, and examples were given where this reduced the risk of breach. Chamberlain et al. (2017) have also indicated that a supportive relationship may have an impact on reducing reoffending relative to 'non supportive' relationships.

NDelius contact data showed a higher amount of Blended Supervision was offered to women and cases with complex needs. These data also described a high level of attendance at remote appointments, relative to in-person appointments, across all people on probation. This result may suggest that these remote appointments were being offered appropriately to the right cohorts (as they struggled to attend in person). However, it may also indicate an increased leniency around remote appointments. Probation practitioners described how remote contact was sometimes used as a form of reward and recognition for progress, while people on probation were open about the fact they sometimes used excuses, such as poor signal, to avoid having contact with their practitioner (when conducted remotely). Therefore, more guidance could be beneficial in terms of enforcement and compliance to ensure consistency across PDUs and practitioners.

Further, despite being used for specific cohorts, concerns still exist about the overall quality of remote supervision, particularly in terms of confidentiality, safeguarding, and ability to achieve meaningful or 'in-depth' conversations. Indeed, there were some types of supervision which were said not to be suitable for remote contact. The majority of probation practitioners described that they would not deliver RAR change work remotely and would value additional training on the available structured toolkits (even for in-person delivery).

Regarding the guidance on the BSM, probation practitioners generally felt it was easy to follow, especially the tier system. Yet, probation practitioners also reflected that they would like more professional judgement and the ability to use their discretion around who gets a blended approach. This was most likely to be discussed in relation to high-risk cases, for

example, when they are considered to be 'stable' and in employment but are still required to be seen weekly in person.

Probation practitioners would benefit from dedicated training to empower them to deliver supervision remotely (when required), focusing on the effective delivery of toolkits more generally (for change work delivered in-person *and* remotely). However, whilst there was an appetite from practitioners to have more training, they also acknowledged the practical challenges of taking time away from case management to attend this.

With regard to sustainability, it is suggested that the current model *is* sustainable.

Probation practitioners appreciate the level of flexibility in the delivery of their work and feel the guidance is clear. Moving forwards, there could be more professional judgement and discretion afforded to probation practitioners to allow for a more holistic, person-centred approach, as the emphasis on 'risk' currently was said to sometimes override 'need' and 'responsivity'.

The following implications were made from these findings:

- The evaluation found that Blended Supervision was not being used as structured supervision unless necessary. However, the way it was referred to made it hard to discern when practitioners were referring to structured sessions or catch-ups. Clearer communication about using the term 'Blended Supervision' to enable accurate recording of remote contact and whether this pertains to 'check-ins' or structured supervision delivered remotely can address this difference.
- Practitioners said they would like to use more professional judgement when deciding who gets a blended approach and to be able to consider individual circumstances more when determining who is managed under the BSM. These include people on probation with organised crime affiliations for whom it is risky to attend probation offices; those who are in full-employment and risk losing work and/or clients when having to report in person; those who must travel for long distances to attend appointments; and women who feel unsafe reporting in mixed-gender facilities and/or have childcare responsibilities. A consultation with staff on greater use of professional judgement and subsequent guidance updates can improve the use of the BSM. This action could boost morale amongst staff

because they would feel empowered, but it could also increase undesirable practice (e.g., using remote contact for practitioners' convenience in inappropriate circumstances).

- Practitioners desired greater discretion in managing high-risk cases, though understood that remote contact was inappropriate for most high-risk cases. This suggests that potential improvement can be made by investigating how people on probation who are considered high risk of harm can be offered Blended Supervision if they demonstrate clear progress in integrating into society and rehabilitation (e.g., in full-time employment).
- People on probation expressed frustration at inconsistent signposting information from practitioners when supervision is delivered remotely. Exploring and implementing an effective method to share such information remotely can help address this frustration.
- Both practitioners and people on probation expressed frustration with remote contact privacy. Consultation on how practitioners can take additional measures to ensure confidentiality during remote appointments can highlight how to make improvements to feelings of privacy.
- The evaluation found that a sizeable proportion of practitioners requested training in how to undertake remote supervision, and this could address some of the hesitancy to use remote contact for anything other than a check-in.
- The findings suggest that encouraging staff to set clear expectations for people on probation, regarding what will be covered in remote contacts and why, can improve the experience of Blended Supervision. Also, guidance can be updated to reflect staff and people on probation's feedback (in this evaluation) on what can effectively be covered in remote and in-person contacts.
- Feedback on RARs suggests that change work should remain predominantly in-person. However, there were limited cases when remote contact was used, and a better understanding of how to deliver change work remotely is required in those circumstances, as the evidence collected suggests it may be of low quality.

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Appendix A

Data samples

This appendix describes the data samples for each data source outlined in the approach section (except for the probation staff survey described in Appendix C and the administrative data described in Appendix D).

Probation staff interviews and focus groups

Table 2: Number of probation staff interviews and focus groups during Phase 1 and 2

Region	Role	Interviews		Focus Groups	
		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Greater Manchester	PP	6	22	3	N/A
	SPO	4	N/A	1	N/A
	SLT	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	12	22	4	-
North West	PP	9	17	N/A	N/A
	SPO	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
	SLT	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	13	17	5*	2*
East of England	PP	3	17	N/A	N/A
	SPO	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
	SLT	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Other	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
	Total	8	18	5*	2*
West Midlands	PP	6	16	4	N/A
	SPO	6	2	2	N/A
	SLT	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Other	N/A	N/A	1	N/A
	Total	14	18	7	1

Region	Role	Interviews		Focus Groups	
		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Wales	PP	1	N/A	1	N/A
	SPO	1	N/A	1	N/A
	SLT	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	3	N/A	2	1*

*Mixed attendance between roles

Note: PP = Band 4 Probation Practitioner/PQIP; SPO = Senior Probation Officer; SLT = Senior Leadership Team

People on probation interviews, focus groups and surveys

Table 3: Number of people on probation interviewed and surveyed in Phase 1 and 2

Region	Interviews		Focus Groups		Survey	
	Phase 1	Phase 2 (% men)	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
East of England	6	14 (71%)	1	N/A	38	69
Greater Manchester	9	16 (63%)	2	N/A	54	26
North West	10	17 (59%)	4	1	209	237
West Midlands	6	10 (100%)	2	N/A	64	43
Wales	N/A	17 (71%)	N/A	1	N/A	73
Total	31	74	9	2	365	448

Appendix B

Outcome evaluation description

The evaluation aimed to assess whether Greater Manchester's prescriptive Blended Supervision Model (BSM) improved compliance with probation orders and licenses compared to the approaches used in other regions. However, the preferred quasi-experimental design, which compared the BSM to in-person supervision only and involved using contemporary or historical control groups, was not feasible:

- **Contemporary Control:** Using a contemporary control group was discarded because all individuals on probation were eligible for Blended Supervision, leading to a significant selection bias. This bias arose because the choice to use remote supervision was influenced by specific individual circumstances that were not measured, making it difficult to find a comparable group not receiving remote supervision.
- **Historical Control:** Using an historical control group, where persons subjected to the BSM are compared to people who received probation supervision before its implementation, was also impractical due to changes in probation practices over time. During the operation of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) from 2014 to 2022, remote supervision was already in use. Additionally, before 2014, the probation context was significantly different – it lacked, for example, key current policies such as licenses for sentences less than 12 months. The changes in probation practices and the evolution of remote supervision meant that historical data would not provide a valid comparison.

Due to these constraints, the study focused on a natural experiment that compared Greater Manchester's BSM's detailed, prescriptive approach with the broader, less detailed national guidance. This comparison allowed for an assessment of whether the more structured guidance in Greater Manchester led to better compliance outcomes. The evaluation aimed to measure short and medium-term outcomes, focusing on compliance with contacts, orders and licenses. The current evidence base in this area is limited, but

the Greater Manchester approach's clearer expectations for practitioners and communication of evidence-based decisions could generate greater compliance with contacts, orders, and licences (Fox et al., 2021)

As the final study's design was not an estimate of the BSM's impact but a comparison of two interpretations, the findings were not included in this report. In summary, the results suggested a slight improvement in compliance in the Greater Manchester region. The main report, however, highlighted that the definition of complying with a planned remote contact was potentially more lenient in Greater Manchester. As such, differences in compliance could be due to this rather than the different Blended Supervision approaches employed. The findings found no disbenefits to the more prescriptive approach and raised no concerns about the general movement to greater prescription in the March 2023 National Blended Supervision guidance.

Appendix C

Staff survey samples and weighting

Survey description

The project implemented a repeated online cross-sectional survey using the Alchemer survey system. The team collected two sets of observations from all active probation practitioners at two time points – January to February 2023 and December to January 2024. In Phase 1, the survey was delayed by one month in Greater Manchester, and Yorkshire and the Humber did not participate. In Phase 2, all regions took part, and the survey was delayed by one month in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. If a staff member was active during both survey phases, they would have been sent both surveys. The second iteration of the survey repeated most questions from Phase 1, but additions and removals of questions were made based on the findings of the first phase. A filtering criterion was used in both surveys so that the analysis survey sample only contained relevant responses. The filtering criteria were:

1. Staff member supervises people on probation.

Or

2. Staff member is aware of Blended Supervision being practiced in their region.

The wording of the survey's questions was dynamic based on whether the staff member supervised people on probation or if they were aware of Blended Supervision. During the analysis, questions with the same purpose but different wordings were mapped together in the analytical dataset. Some questions had a random order of statements.

Each phase of the survey had an initial email invitation sent to the staff members, followed by four email reminders. Each region publicised the survey and encouraged completion before the study team sent the initial invite. Table 4 describes the number of surveys sent and the responses across each phase. Each email explained the confidentiality of the survey and that starting the survey meant they consented to the research, and the email provided a link to a privacy policy.

Table 4: Samples for each phase of the staff survey

Phase	Invite Message Date	Number of Recipients	Overall Response Count	Analytical Sample Count
Phase 1	25/01/2023	10,003	2,607	2,267
Phase 2	12/12/2023	13,011	3,213	2,841

Sample weights

Two datasets were created based on the survey samples:

- Analytical dataset for the new questions in the Phase 2 survey.
- Analytical dataset for the questions repeated in both phases of the survey.

Both datasets were weighted by region and staff grade, so the results represented the population. A post-stratification method was employed because the population characteristics were known. Region and staff grade were used because these were considered potentially important influences on responses, and the number of stratifiers was kept to a minimum.

Appendix D

Administrative data processing

Data

The data used throughout the report were sourced from NDelius, and the sample period is from 01/04/2022 to 31/12/2023. The report contains an analysis of the following datasets:

- **Commencements** – a list of the people on probation, including their start dates, demographics, unpaid work information, and sentence lengths. After excluding people on probation who did not qualify for supervision and concurrent orders, the commencement data were left with 213,307 records.
- **Contacts** – a list of all supervision contacts and information regarding whether the individual attended. Contacts with no data recorded for whether the individual attended were removed, leaving 3,586,820 contacts.
- **Terminations** – a list of terminations for people on probation, also stating the reason for termination. After removing termination records where the individual died, was deported, was transferred, or had no termination reason entered, there were 113,833 terminations.

These datasets were linked using a unique identifier (CRN_EVENT_NO).

Data processing

The data were processed in R, a statistical computing and graphics software application.

The specific processing completed for this report's analyses was:

- The analysis only includes completed months to prevent the results from being skewed by an incomplete month.
- Whether a person on probation met the Blended Supervision Guidance is based on the March 2023 version of the guidance and includes the following:
 - First four weeks: in-person contact weeks 1 & 2 for all of Tier 0; weekly in-person contact for all of Tier 3 and the remaining Tiers in A and B; and Tiers C-1, C-2, D-1 and D-2 require in-person contact in weeks 1 & 2 while contact in weeks 3 and 4 could be in person or remote.

- Subsequent months: Tiers A and B, assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm, require at least one in-person contact per week, and Tiers C and D require at least one in-person contact a month. No guidance is provided for Tier 0, so it was excluded from subsequent months analyses.
- Only National Standard contacts were used in the analysis unless otherwise stated.
- In-person National Standard contacts are an aggregation of the following contact types: Home Visit to Case (NS); Planned Office Visit (NS); Initial Appointment – Home Visit (NS); and Initial Appointment – In office (NS).
- Remote National Standard contacts are an aggregation of the following contact types: Planned Telephone Contact (NS) and Planned Video Contact (NS).
- Acceptable and unacceptable non-attendance were combined and counted as non-attendance.
- Records with a missing PDU were excluded from the analysis.

Appendix E

Regression analysis

Binomial Logistic Regression – Remote Contacts

Model definition

A binomial logistic regression was employed to model the proportion of remote contacts per month to understand the relationship with the following set of predictors:

- The interaction between gender and the number of months after 01/04/2022 (the first month of the dataset) that the person on probation started their order/license.
- Need level.
- Risk level.
- Region.
- Age Group.
- The month of the sentence.

The model was filtered to those with at least one remote contact to investigate the differences in the amount of remote contact received. Predictors that were not significant were removed from the model. The logistic model used a binomial family with a logit link function, suitable for modelling the ratio of remote contact occurrences relative to in-person contacts:

$$\log\left(\frac{p_i}{1-p_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_p X_{pi}$$

Where:

- p_i is the probability of remote contacts for the *ith* observation.
- $\beta_0, \beta_1, \dots, \beta_p$ are the coefficients of the predictors.
- $X_{1i}, X_{2i}, \dots, X_{pi}$ are the predictor variables for the *ith* observation.

Model assumptions

The regression model relies on the following assumptions:

- Proportion Outcome: The dependent variable is the proportion of occurrences, specifically the proportion of remote contacts relative to the total number of contacts.
- Independence: The count of remote contacts for one individual is independent of the count for any other individual.
- No multicollinearity: The predictor variables should not be highly correlated with each other.

Model results

The model was applied to investigate the factors influencing the count of remote contacts. The analysis incorporates a range of predictors, including demographic characteristics, tier need categories, risk levels, region, age groups, the month of commencement, and an interaction term between gender and month of commencement. Table 5 displays the key results obtained from the model. Key interpretations include:

- Gender: Being male is associated with significantly lower odds of remote contact compared to females, with a coefficient of -0.145.
- Gender and month of commencement interaction: The interaction between gender (Male) and month of commencement has a positive coefficient. Indicating that the expected proportion of remote contacts increases slightly each month for males compared to females, holding other variables constant.
- Need level: Compared to need level 1 (reference category), need level 2 slightly decreases the odds of remote contact (-0.019, significant). Need level 3 increases the odds (0.050, significant), suggesting higher remote interactions for individuals in this category.
- Region: The coefficients for different regions indicate variability in the expected proportion of remote contacts, with some regions showing a significant increase (e.g., London and South Central) or decrease (e.g., Greater Manchester) in remote contacts.

- Age Groups: Slight increases in the odds of remote contacts are noted for age groups 25–34 and 45+ compared to the youngest age group, though these effects are small.

Table 5: Coefficients and p values of the binomial regression model for count of remote contacts

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Intercept	-0.301	0.023	-13.246	< 2e-16 ***
Gender (reference female)				
Male	-0.145	0.018	-7.846	4.30e-15 ***
Month Of Commencement	-0.013	0.002	-7.637	2.22e-14 ***
Need Level (reference level 1)				
Need Level 2	-0.019	0.006	-3.203	0.00136 **
Need Level 3	0.050	0.012	4.229	2.35e-05 ***
Risk (reference High)				
Risk Low	0.679	0.011	62.560	< 2e-16 ***
Risk Medium	0.281	0.006	46.664	< 2e-16 ***
Risk Very High	-0.001	0.032	-0.018	0.98531
Region (reference East Midlands)				
East of England	-0.034	0.013	-2.530	0.01140 *
Greater Manchester	-0.387	0.014	-27.242	< 2e-16 ***
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	-0.026	0.015	-1.750	0.08015
London	0.366	0.012	29.253	< 2e-16 ***
North East	-0.027	0.014	-1.920	0.05490
North West	-0.055	0.012	-4.497	6.91e-06 ***
South Central	0.507	0.014	36.716	< 2e-16 ***
South West	-0.005	0.015	-0.303	0.76214
Wales	-0.237	0.015	-16.240	< 2e-16 ***
West Midlands	0.259	0.012	20.983	< 2e-16 ***
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.069	0.012	5.691	1.26e-08 ***

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Age Group (reference (18-24))				
25-34	0.017	0.008	2.022	0.04315 *
35-44	0.007	0.009	0.843	0.39923
45+	0.018	0.009	1.991	0.04650 *
Month of Sentence	0.072	0.001	91.122	< 2e-16 ***
Gender Male: Month of Commencement	0.008	0.002	4.563	5.04e-06 ***

Null deviance: 214716 on 233698 degrees of freedom, Residual deviance: 188118 on 233675 degrees of freedom, AIC: 432438 Source: NDelius commencements and contacts data

Model diagnostics

- Null and Residual Deviance: The substantial drop from the null deviance to the residual deviance indicates that the model with predictors provides a significantly better fit to the data than the intercept-only model.
- Fisher Scoring iterations: The model converged in 3 iterations, suggesting that the fitting process was stable.

Negative Binomial Regression – Remote Contacts

Model definition

A Negative Binomial regression was employed to model the count of remote contacts per month to understand the relationship with the following set of predictors:

- The interaction between gender and the number of months after 01/04/2022 (the first month of the dataset) that the person on probation started their order/license.
- Need level.
- Risk level.
- Region.
- Age Group.
- The month of the sentence.

Predictors that were not significant were removed from the model. The Negative Binomial model accounted for the overdispersion in the remote contact counts (which prevented

using a Poisson model). The mean of the Negative Binomial distribution is modelled as follows:

$$\mu_i = \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_p X_{pi})$$

The variance of the Negative Binomial distribution is given by:

$$\text{Var}(Y_i) = \mu_i + \alpha \mu_i^2$$

Where:

- Y_i is the count variable for the i th observation.
- μ_i is the expected mean count for the i th observation.
- $\beta_0, \beta_1, \dots, \beta_p$ are the coefficients of the predictors.
- $X_{1i}, X_{2i}, \dots, X_{pi}$ are the predictor variables for the i th observation.
- α is the overdispersion parameter; as α approaches 0, the Negative Binomial model converges to the Poisson model.

Model assumptions

The regression model relies on the following assumptions:

- Count Outcome: The dependent variable is a count of occurrences.
- Independence: The count of remote contacts for one individual is independent of the count for any other individual.
- Overdispersion: The variance of the count variable is greater than its mean, which is explicitly modelled in the Negative Binomial regression through the overdispersion parameter α .

Model results

The model was applied to investigate the factors influencing the count of remote contacts. The analysis incorporates a range of predictors, including demographic characteristics, tier need categories, risk levels, region, age groups, the month of commencement, and an interaction term between gender and month of commencement. Table 6 displays the key results obtained from the model. Key interpretations include:

- Gender and month of commencement interaction: The interaction between gender (Male) and month of commencement has a negative coefficient. Indicating

that the expected log count of remote contacts decreases slightly each month for males compared to females, holding other variables constant.

- **Need level:** Different need levels show varied effects on the expected log count of remote contacts. For instance, need level 1 increases the expected remote contact count, while need level 3 significantly decreases it.
- **Risk Levels:** Lower risk levels ('Low' and 'Med') are associated with substantial decreases in the expected log count of remote contacts), indicating that higher-risk categories are associated with more remote contacts.
- **Region:** The coefficients for different regions indicate variability in the expected log count of remote contacts, with some regions showing a significant increase (e.g., South Central) or decrease (e.g., South West) in remote contacts.
- **Age Groups:** Different age groups show varying effects, with the '25–34' age group showing a significant increase in the expected log count of remote contacts.
- **Month of Sentence:** The coefficient for sentence month indicates a significant decrease in the expected log count of remote contacts over time.

Table 6: Coefficients and p values of the Poisson regression model for count of remote contacts

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Intercept	-0.188	0.0164	-11.5	<2e-16***
Gender (reference female)				
Male	-0.0132	0.0111	-1.19	0.235
Month Of Commencement	-0.0322	0.00113	-28.5	<2e-16***
Need level (reference Level 0)				
Level 1	0.0607	0.00922	6.59	4.52e-11***
Level 2	-0.0200	0.00919	-2.17	0.0297*
Level 3	-0.383	0.0123	-31.1	<2e-16***
Risk (reference high)				
Low	-0.797	0.00744	-107	<2e-16***
Medium	-0.789	0.00492	-161	<2e-16***
Missing	-0.606	0.0111	-54.5	<2e-16***
Very High	-0.150	0.0274	-5.47	4.46e-08***

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Region (reference East Midlands)				
East of England	-0.101	0.0100	-10.0	<2e-16***
Greater Manchester	-0.305	0.0111	-27.5	<2e-16***
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	-0.155	0.0113	-13.7	<2e-16***
London	0.0316	0.00883	3.57	0.000352***
North East	0.0294	0.0106	2.78	0.00546**
North West	0.000069	0.00923	0.007	0.994
South Central	0.505	0.00996	50.7	<2e-16***
South West	-0.413	0.0109	-37.8	<2e-16***
Wales	-0.391	0.0111	-35.4	<2e-16***
West Midlands	0.362	0.00913	39.6	<2e-16***
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.0792	0.00900	8.82	<2e-16***
Age Group (reference 18–24)				
25–34	0.0287	0.00619	4.63	3.58e-06***
35–44	0.00443	0.00634	0.700	0.484
45+	0.0353	0.00658	5.37	7.97e-08***
Missing	-0.0588	0.0339	-1.74	0.083
Month of Sentence	-0.0427	0.000550	-77.6	<2e-16***
Gender Male x Month of commencement	-0.00358	0.00118	-3.04	0.00233**

Dispersion parameter for Negative Binomial (0.7761) family taken to be 1, Null deviance: 891844 on 1346692 degrees of freedom, Residual deviance: 841622 on 1346665 degrees of freedom, AIC: 1742807

Source: NDelius commencements and contacts data

Model diagnostics

- The significant reduction in residual deviance from the null deviance suggests that the model with predictors better fits the data than the null model.
- The estimated theta value of 0.7761, with a standard error of 0.00496, confirms the presence of overdispersion in the data and justifies using the Negative Binomial model over the Poisson model.