



HM Prison &
Probation Service

HMPPS response to the National Probation Inspection

Undertaken by HM Inspectorate of
Probation (December 2024 to February
2025)

Introduction

HMPPS welcome the opportunity to update His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) on the progress made since the publication of its inspection of national arrangements. The period following the inspection has seen further development across our national arrangements, and we are now able to set out our direction with greater certainty following Royal Assent of the Sentencing Bill. This legislative clarity enables us to articulate with greater confidence how our future programme of work responds to the Inspectorate's findings, supports improvements to probation delivery, and ensures that our reform activity meets the evolving needs of probation services and the public we protect. The progress we set out in this letter has been made possible only through the professionalism and resilience of the more than 20,000 probation staff who deliver our service every day.

HMPPS acknowledge the importance of HMIP's independent scrutiny and the crucial role this plays in supporting improvements across probation services in England and Wales. The inspection of national arrangements took place in the context of a 20% reduction in our Headquarters' headcount, a series of prison capacity measures including emergency prisoner releases and the setting up of the 'Our Future Probation Service' (OFPS) programme to reshape future provision and resourcing.

This HMIP inspection supplements other assessments undertaken by the National Audit Office (NAO) and Government Internal Audit Agency. It provides a timely review of Probation national arrangements given the significant sentencing reform being undertaken and additional investment of up to £700 million per year by 2028/29 to transform the probation system.

We were pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised HMPPS' achievements since the unification of the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies in 2021 and acknowledged our strengths in relation to digital services in improving delivery to the front-line. We also recognise the key findings within the report, in respect of leadership, staffing, services and infrastructure and we are determined to ensure that the action we are taking results in meaningful and lasting improvement.

We are aware that there is much still to do, including in relation to improving services, to better align with operational need. We trust that the responses below provide a clear sense of how we are addressing the main issues raised and serve to demonstrate the significant work that is both underway and planned, to further embed the new HMPPS leadership model. We are confident that our approach will drive the effective delivery of rehabilitation of offenders and prioritisation of public protection across our twelve regions.

Summary of progress and work we intend to build on, embed and scale

Leadership

The strategic context of the Probation Service (and HMPPS more widely) is subject to major shifts as a result of the Spending Review (SR), Independent Review of Sentencing (IRS) and subsequent Sentencing Act, and the Leveson Independent Review of Criminal Courts (IRCC). HMPPS has established the OFPS programme and alongside it an IRS implementation project. HMPPS maintains a suite of strategy and business planning documents that are updated regularly. HMPPS is undertaking business planning for 2026/7, and we are currently reviewing the Target Operating Model to ensure alignment with the outcomes of the SR, IRS and the IRCC.

Wider efforts to improve public protection practice are also underway, the first HMPPS Public Protection Strategy was published in May 2025 and sets out a five-year roadmap for improving risk management across probation and prison services. We will respond to HMIP's findings as it works through six months of dynamic inspection activity focused solely on the service's delivery of public protection. This will aim to identify effective practice and blockers to this to help embed improved public protection delivery.

To ensure that we effectively identify and respond to organisational risks at National, Area and Regional level, building on the improvements made to the Agency's corporate risk architecture over the last couple of years, the HMPPS Risk and Resilience Team has implemented a standard risk register template for each area to use. We have established regular and formalised leadership oversight of the risk registers by the HMPPS Operational Resilience Board, which is undertaken at an Area level, led by the Area Executive Director Midlands. Additionally, Government Risk Management Profession Training and accreditation has been extended to Areas to improve skills in the identification and response to risks to probation service delivery and there is early evidence of local managers taking up the training. This initiative will be supported by the provision of continued advice and guidance from national to Area teams.

Regular meetings take place between the Chief Probation Officer, Chief Operating Officer for Prisons and Area Executive Directors to discuss risk and improve join up on risk management. Internally within HMPPS, there have been changes to the way some agency level risks are managed to facilitate improved join up on risk management across Probation and Prisons. These include the creation of a whole system capacity principal risk owned by the Executive Director, Capacity Implementation and a dedicated Capacity Strategy Forum and associated risk register that focusses on both Prison and Probation capacity challenges and dependencies. Risk definition has been aligned where required to help us work better with other key stakeholders, including MoJ ExCo.

Multi-agency collaboration at all levels is crucial for an effective probation service, ensuring a holistic approach to rehabilitation, increasing the likelihood of desistance, and protecting the public. HMPPS senior leaders will therefore continue to prioritise collaboration with police and national safeguarding partners. This includes working through the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) lead for Domestic Abuse, the Chief Social Worker, the NPCC Domestic Abuse stakeholders' group, and the Department for Education.

The National Domestic Abuse Reference Group and the Child Safeguarding Working Group will maintain a key focus on the role of senior leadership in partnership working. Additionally, the national Public Protection Group will build on the successful work done with Norfolk Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) to support Regional colleagues with effective collaboration with their respective Local Authority Children's Services departments.

Staffing

HMPPS recognise that our people are our greatest asset. We want to first acknowledge the considerable pressure probation staff have faced during significant organisational change and that pay and reward are key issues for our workforce. Following constructive negotiations, we are proposing one of the most generous public sector pay offers this year for probation staff and are committed to engaging openly with them to help ensure they understand what the award means for them. We are also fully invested in driving improvements regarding training and workload levels to ensure that staff are properly supported and equipped to deliver our important work effectively.

Recruitment and retention remain a priority, and we are beginning to see the positive impact of the centralised recruitment process as a large number of qualified probation officers come through the pipeline. In 2024/25, we exceeded our commitment to onboard 1,000 trainee probation officers, successfully onboarding 1,057. We are now going further, having committed to onboard a total of 1,300 trainee probation officers in 2025/26. We are shortly due to publish our update on actions taken in response to HMI Probation's 'A thematic inspection of the recruitment, training, and retention of frontline probation practitioners'. This will demonstrate our ongoing efforts and progress in responding to the Inspectorate's findings in these areas.

As the NAO and Public Accounts Committee have documented, probation faces an acute capacity gap equivalent to 3,900 FTE unless determined action is taken to reduce workload. That is why we have commissioned the OFPS programme, with a Ministerial mandate to close the capacity gap by April 2027. HMPPS is currently part way through a comprehensive review of all activities undertaken by probation practitioners, as part of the Probation Workforce Strategy 2023 – 2025. Database and Workload Intelligence Trackers are being used to inform the OFPS programme, which is aiming to reduce workload by 25% by 2027 through policy and legislative measures. OFPS will also redesign processes, enabled by digital technology, to reduce the administrative burden on staff and improve

effectiveness. We recognise that process standardisation is necessary to maximise the productivity gains from digital investment.

The Assessing Risk Needs and Strengths (ARNS) project is redesigning how HMPPS assesses and works with people under its supervision, supported by the development of new bespoke digital tools. We have seen positive progress through established pilots of ARNS and plan to commence national deployment of the ARNS Sentence Plan from March 2026 in the first instance, followed by roll out of our dynamic risk, needs, and strengths assessment tool. This will eventually enable the decommissioning of the current core probation service assessment tool (OASys).

Services

We continue to make strong progress ensuring probation has the tools it needs to robustly manage offenders in the community and protect the public, and the Government has been clear that this remains a priority. To drive that effective delivery and continue to strengthen services, Regional Probation Directors (RPDs) already have powers to commission and contract manage a broad range of services. As future generations of different services are iterated, further devolution opportunities are considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, we are devolving budgets for drug testing to Area Executive Directors from April 2026, who will then be able to make allocations to RPDs.

In some circumstances, for example where there is a need for consistency across the regions or to achieve best value for money, national commissioning does remain the most effective approach. Service design will be based on the latest evidence base of 'what works' and modelled on the risk and needs data taken from OASys, risk of recidivism scores, sentence type and diversity information.

For national commissioning programmes, HMPPS will continue to support regions by fully including them in the service design, market engagement and procurement processes and by maintaining and developing relationships with specialist providers and local points of contact around service delivery. Regional input into the recommissioning of future Commissioned Rehabilitative Services for both men and women, for example, continues to ensure improved, flexible service and contract design to meet specific local needs through informed stakeholder and market engagement; complemented by the use of service user segmentation analysis and the latest evidence base.

The focus on improving the quality of services has already led to the expansion of the Creating Future Opportunities service in the community and a doubling of the number of prison leavers in employment six months post-release. To go further, last year the Government launched new regional Employment Councils which involve the Probation Service in identifying employment opportunities for the tens of thousands of people serving their sentences in the community.

Accommodation provides a critical stabilising platform for people to engage in wider rehabilitation and to ensure robust community offender management, and we are continuing to take steps to strengthen our offer, for men and women across all tiers of our Community Accommodation Service (CAS) and through our work in partnership with MHCLG and Local Authorities. HQ and regional teams have collaborated on the design, procurement, and delivery of CAS3 to ensure a balanced approach that maintains national consistency while addressing local needs. This collaborative approach has also facilitated co-commissioning with local authorities in Wales and Greater Manchester. We have developed digital referral and management systems to support the delivery of CAS and will continuously improve and refine our digital offer.

The completion of the nationally coordinated rollout of the Probation Notification and Actioning Programme has facilitated greater collaboration between probation regions and health partners. Additionally, the national rollout of the HMPPS-designed Building Choices Accredited Programmes will ensure PDUs can utilise some of the most evidence-informed interventions available globally.

Infrastructure and IT

The Spending Review and Sentencing Review inform our approach to digital transformation. We have already undertaken a robust process to prioritise digital bids and identify immediate efficiencies. This reinforces our commitment to delivering meaningful improvements to live services while building for the future.

We remain dedicated to replacing legacy systems with simpler, clearer, and faster digital services that capture, store, and share high-quality, connected data. This will lead to improved decision-making to support our work with people on probation. By enabling staff to focus more on the individual and their needs, and less on the administrative processes of case management, we will support improvements in the quality of public protection and rehabilitative work undertaken.

Over the last 12 months HMPPS digital tools and technology have prioritised the introduction and adoption of dedicated, modern, and integrated digital services for core probation activities. In April 2025, pilots commenced to 'Manage a Person on Probation' which brings together information about a person on probation from different systems into one place, providing the probation practitioner with a comprehensive view of the individual. In addition to ARNS, further digital solutions are being tested and validated. This includes the use of automated text message appointment reminders, which are expected to promote improved compliance and quality sentence management. Additionally, we are exploring new AI opportunities to streamline administrative work in probation. We have equipped every staff member with CoPilot Chat, supported by a clear set of training resources and role-specific guidance to help staff use it safely and effectively. We are also scaling the use of Justice Transcribe, a secure AI tool that quickly records, transcribes, and summarises probation supervision conversations, cutting admin time and letting practitioners focus on better, more meaningful engagement. These initiatives are designed

and implemented through the OFPS programme to manage the impact on stretched operational teams and support them to adopt changes to achieve the intended benefits.

For the business year 2025/26, HMPPS was allocated a significant uplift for capital maintenance for the community estate, representing a significant uplift from previous investments. This funding will support HMPPS in identifying and controlling all health and safety hazards as far as is reasonably practicable. Spending is being prioritised across the Probation Estate and Approved Premises for statutory obligations, critical health and safety improvements, maintaining bed availability, mitigating building closures, and complying with fire and security requirements.

Governance and accountability

HMPPS is committed to ensuring that work across the organisation delivers the right change, with tangible benefits and outcomes. We will manage this through our existing workstreams and associated governance structures, which we believe are sufficiently robust for this purpose. Consequently, we see no need to establish entirely new structures or a new action plan.

We will ensure robust governance and senior accountability are in place to check, challenge, and quality assure activities as set out in the HMPPS Business Plan (2026-27) which will be monitored quarterly at HMPPS Leadership Team meetings. This approach will allow for early learning, amendments, or cessation of activities if they do not provide the desired support for our practitioners, improve outcomes for people on probation, or contribute to enhanced public protection.

The Probation Operational Priorities for 2026/27 set out four areas of focus that provide the foundations for delivering the long-term reform ambitions of the HMPPS Business Strategy. They translate the strategy's aims into clear, practical activity for the year ahead, strengthening core practice, embedding OFPS, enhancing workforce capability, and building confidence in probation. Together, these priorities ensure measurable progress against the Business Strategy and act as the mechanism through which regions turn national strategic aims into day-to-day operational delivery, enabling consistent, system-wide progress.

We will hold ourselves accountable by maintaining rigorous oversight through our established governance structures and ensuring senior leaders are responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress. We additionally intend for Non-Executive Director oversight of progress to provide additional assurance that we are delivering meaningful improvements and that efforts are aligned with our strategic goals.

Conclusion and commitment

Embedding effective changes to national arrangements to improve the quality of services we deliver to protect the public and reduce reoffending remains a top priority for HMPPS. We are committed to responding positively to the Inspectorate's findings and will continue to build on the good work already being done. Our goal is to deliver sustainable, evidence-based change that maximises resources and improves performance in targeted areas.

We look forward to demonstrating this continuous improvement in future inspection.