

LEICESTERSHIRE SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY BOARD

30th JUNE 2023

LSCSB UPDATE: PROBATION SERVICE

Background

1. The Probation Service holds the statutory responsibility for advising sentencing courts and the Parole Board, managing those subject to community-based Orders, and supervising offenders on release from custody. Probation Staff are also located within Prisons. It is part of His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), which sits within the Ministry of Justice. The Probation Service is organised Regionally, with the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Probation Delivery Unit (LLR PDU) sitting within the East Midlands Region.
2. Since the re-unification of the Probation Service in June 2021, significant staffing issues have existed nationally, largely as a result of funding issues relating to the legacy Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), and the numbers of trainee Probation Officers not keeping pace with the recruitment needs of the service. This has been exacerbated in LLR as a result of particularly acute staffing shortages for the local CRC Provider that were inherited into the local reunified Probation Service. The resultant issue of the high workloads and staff shortages has resulted in a serious issue of staff retention and long-term sickness absences relating to work stress. Recruitment has proved difficult both due to a diminishing pool of potential recruits, which is affecting many public sector organisations, and worsened locally by the opening of HMP Fosse Way which is taking away existing and potential Probation Service resources. As a result of all of the above, LLR PDU currently has 55% of its posts covered, with workloads for Probation Officers currently sitting at between 130 – 180% of the expected level. Whilst there are now higher numbers of Trainees in the system, they will not have an impact post qualification for another 6 – 18 months.
3. As a result of the national issue of staffing shortages and excessive workloads, the Probation Service introduced a Probation Prioritisation Framework (PF) which designates the priorities and actions to be taken by any local Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) depending on the severity of their position. Red Status is reserved for those PDUs in the worst situation, and at the beginning of May, LLR PDU moved into Red Status, the second time it triggered this status in the past 9 months. Those priorities largely relate to concentrating resources on managing cases where there is domestic abuse, safeguarding and/or higher risk issues.

Notable developments and challenges:

Past Year

4. LLR PDU was subject to an HMIP Inspection in November/December 2022. At the time, the PDU was in the midst of it's first period of Red Status. Whilst scoring well on Leadership and Partnership working, lower scores in some crucial practice areas resulted in an overall rating of 'Inadequate'. Whilst disappointing, it was not a major surprise as all other PDUs across England & Wales who have been inspected whilst subject to Red Status received the same rating, and the Inspectors were very clear in locating the issues very firmly within the context of long-standing staffing and workload issues:

"Although staff were committed and dedicated to their roles, high workloads, a problem that has existed over a prolonged period of time, had taken their toll, leading to low morale across the PDU.

As we have found in other recent PDU inspections, there were significant gaps in probation practitioner and administrative officer grades..... Despite efforts from the PDU and the region to improve the staffing levels, this remains a critical issue and a national approach is needed to assist with the appropriate recruitment and retention of staff.

Despite the resourcing challenges, we did see some evidence of innovation within the PDU, with the creation of young adults and women's teams to improve the quality of work delivered to these groups. These teams were in their early stages and, like the rest of the PDU, their workloads are high, but aspirations for what can be delivered".

The practice issues which were identified have been subject to a local HMIP Action Plan which is progressing but having to be implemented in current circumstances.

5. The above reference to the creation of Women's and Young Adults teams was a major achievement of the year, despite the staffing challenges. The former was very much developed together with our local Womens Services provider, New Dawn New Day, with whom much co-located work is undertaken. The Young Adults Team was developed alongside colleagues in Youth Justice Services in City and County in order to hone a smoother transition process into Probation, and develop a more bespoke, young adult orientated approach. Both Teams are also adopting a trauma informed approach.

Coming Year

6. With a number of trainee Probation Officers qualifying over the coming 12 months, it is hoped that the position with staffing and workloads will ease. There also continues to be active recruitment to all other grades within the Service, although the recruitment landscape remains challenging. It is then hoped to develop further the work of the YA and Women's Team, as well as rolling out a Trauma Informed approach across all areas of delivery, a process which has started with changes to some waiting and interview spaces.
7. The development of the Phoenix Programme is a key partnership development in tackling Serious Violence in LLR. The Probation Service has played a significant role in developing the project and will do in its implementation over the coming year.

Key issues for partnership working or affecting partners

8. Nothing other than to note the challenges outlined above.

Recommendations for the Board

9. To note contents of the report.

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