



LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY BOARD

28th MARCH 2024

LRSCSB 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.

Notable developments and challenges:

Past Year

2. In recent years there have been significant staffing and workload issues which have existed across the Probation Service nationally, with LLR PDU being the worst affected in the East Midlands Region. Through an extensive recruitment process, and a significant addition to Trainee Probation Officer numbers, the situation is now finally easing. There remain vacancies in Probation Officer and Case Administrator Grades, but with recruitment and trainee Probation Officers qualifying, these will be largely filled by the end of 2025.
3. The development of the Phoenix Programme was a key partnership development in tackling Serious Violence in LLR in 2023. The Probation Service has played a significant role in developing the project and in its implementation since its commencement. This has continued into 2025, and the extension of the Programme from August to December 2025 is a welcome development, which will allow Partners to consider how the learning from the Programme can be developed into a longer term approach.
4. The prison capacity crisis has dominated the work of the Probation Service through 2024 and will continue do so into 2025. Various early release schemes,

culminating in the retrospective change to the automatic release dates of all Standard Determinate Sentences (with some exclusions) from the 50% point to the 40% point, have had a major impact on the Service. It has increased the amount of pre-release work required, and resulted in more People on Probation being supervised on post release licences by the Probation Service, and for longer.

5. Further measures being implemented to ease prison capacity issues are an extension to the criteria of those prisoners eligible for early release under Home Detention Curfew, which will result in more and earlier HDC releases. There will also a process by which recalled prisoners will have their presumed re-release date brought forward. Additionally, the criteria for a move into Open Conditions is changing so that eligible prisoners will be able to move into Open Prisons (where there is more capacity) at an earlier stage in their sentence. Home Probation Officers are involved in the risk assessments for such moves.

Coming Year

6. Despite all of the above measures, it is predicted that pressures on prison capacity will reach significant levels once more in late 2025. As part of the strategy to avoid this, there is a current Sentencing Review underway which will aim to divert less serious offenders into community-based sentences such as Suspended Sentence or Community Orders, and/or Electronic Monitoring.
7. His Majesty's Inspectors of Probation (HMIP) have been undertaking a full Inspection during the period 17th – 26th March. This follows relatively soon since the last full Inspection which occurred just over 2 years ago. The reasons for their early return is that HMIP's Inspection regime has changed so that whole Probation Regions are Inspected, with individual areas inspected, followed by a Regionally-based inspection. Given East Midlands Region was chosen as the latest to be inspected, LLR probation has been subject to a full inspection once more. The Regional element of the Inspection will take place on May and June.
8. Whilst we have been successful in recruiting and training sufficient staff to ease the workload pressures, like other public services, we now have a relatively young and inexperienced workforce overall. The next year will see an programme to upskill, embed and develop practitioners to improve the performance and quality of the probation Service's work. This will include ongoing development of the Young Adult and Women's teams in particular.

Key issues for partnership working or affecting partners

9. Key issues are as follows:
 - Managing the implications of the early release of prisoners to ease prison overcrowding through 2025, and implementing the learning of the multi-agency Hub's work into a longer term sustainable model.

- Joint work with relevant agencies on working with transition and young adults following HMIP's 2024 Thematic Inspection recommendations, and the evaluation of the Probation Young Adult Team.
- Implementation of LLR HMIP Action Plan.
- Of note is that Bob Bearne, LLR PDU Head has been asked to temporarily act as Head of Probation in Derby for a few months. Once temporary cover for LLR Probation is identified, all partners will be informed.

Issues in local areas

10. None specific.

Recommendations for the Board

11. To note the contents of the Report.

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