



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Probation
Service



South Central

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Regional Probation Director
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Mr. Tom Osborne
Senior Coroner for Milton Keynes

07 Oct 2024

Dear Mr. Osborne,

Inquest into the death of Leah Shannon Croucher

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report, issued following the Inquest into the death of Leah Croucher and addressed to the Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation. I am the Regional Probation Director for South Central Probation and am replying on behalf of the Minister.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with the family, and I would first like to express my sincere condolences for their loss.

You have raised the following area of concern to which I respond as follows: -

“There should be a fundamental review of the process for monitoring sex offenders in the community and the sharing of information between all agencies particularly the police and probation service to ensure that a similar death can be prevented”.

This recommendation was directed to the Minister of State for Prisons and Probation. That said, given the focus of the inquest, my response will address local probation practice in the management of people convicted of sex offences and in working with the local police force, Thames Valley Police. I will also set out how the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Strategic Management Board (SMB) will be involved to ensure this is a multi-agency response.

It has been 5 years since Leah Croucher was unlawfully killed in 2019, and the Probation Service has undergone significant national changes during this time. This has included the unification of the

Probation Service, when the former Community Rehabilitation Companies were dissolved in 2021, and attendant changes to organisational structure, policy and practice. Since then, the Probation Service has taken steps to strengthen our management of those who have committed sexual offences. We have streamlined risk assessments for such offenders and introduced a new national learning programme for all experienced probation officers to improve their knowledge and skills in this vital area of public protection work. We have also introduced new policy frameworks covering the preparation of pre-sentence reports, requirements to undertake home visits and expectations when it comes to cases managed at level 1 under MAPPA (██████████ was managed at MAPPA level 1 at the time Leah Croucher was killed). I now quote from the MAPPA Level 1 Policy Framework where it states that '(I)t is essential that information sharing takes place'. The Policy Framework further stipulates that the Probation Service actively seek out any new information which may affect risk assessment and management and invite the Police to take part in reviews where the inclusion of their expertise would be of benefit (as it would have been in this case).

I am also aware that the Home Office commissioned an independent review into the police-led management of registered sex offenders in the community which was published in April 2023. While the focus on the review was as the title suggests on policing, the report recognises it would be impossible to undertake the review looking solely at the policing aspect of what is chiefly a multi-agency process. The new Government will consider its response to the recommendations in due course.

I now turn to what the Thames Valley MAPPA SMB will do to review the arrangements for managing sexual offenders in the Thames Valley MAPPA Area.

In terms of the process for monitoring sex offenders in Thames Valley, the Criminal Justice Act 2003 ("CJA 2003") provides for the establishment of MAPPA in each of the 42 criminal justice areas in England and Wales. These are designed to protect the public, including previous victims of crime, from serious harm by sexual and violent offenders. The MAPPA Responsible Authority (RA) consists of the Police, Probation Service, and Prison Service acting jointly in each area. It is fundamental to the operation of MAPPA and must make arrangements for assessing and managing the risks posed by MAPPA eligible offenders in its area and monitoring the effectiveness of its arrangements. The role and functions of the RA are exercised through the SMB. The Chair of the SMB has accepted that the Board should oversee a piece of work to review the effectiveness of the multi-agency processes for monitoring sex offenders and for information exchange between police and probation. This will build on the extensive learning which came from the MAPPA Serious Case Review (SCR) and associated action plan, which is due to be implemented in full by August 2025.

Within the Probation Service, we will focus our review on information sharing practice at the pre-sentence report stage and throughout the management of an order or licence, building on the actions set out in the internal Serious Further Offence (SFO) review. The Pathfinder to Improved Pre-Sentence Advice (PIPA) project is piloting in the South Central Probation Region. This project aims to improve the quality of Pre-Sentence advice to the Judiciary. This includes reviewing cases further in advance of upcoming hearings. This gives staff more time to gather information from other agencies and consider the implications for risk and the suitability of various sentencing options. We will specifically consider how this is supporting the preparation of reports on registered sex offenders in light of this case. We will also build on the actions set out in the internal Serious Further Offence (SFO) review to focus on information sharing. We will conclude the review by 31st March 2025.

We will work with the national Assessment and Management of Sexual Offending (AMSO) Team within HMPPS to share the findings from our review, to support any learning on a national basis, disseminating any outcomes or proposed practice changes which arise from it. This will include continued improvement of the effective and efficient delivery of ViSOR as the primary means of multi-agency information sharing in the region. National projects are ensuring that all areas are working to establish the use of ViSOR as a business-as-usual system in sentence management. Over the last 3 years these projects have seen a steady rise in the number of HMPPS staff with access to ViSOR, rising from less than 300 to more than 3500. These numbers continue to increase by approximately

300 a month and the intention is that more than 12,000 HMPPS members of staff will have access to ViSOR by the time it is replaced by a more dynamic and agile system (MAPPS) in 2026. In South Central ViSOR usage has been increased steadily and now 35% of in scope staff have access to the database. We will continue to provide capacity to train 40 staff a month and pending vetting being timely will deliver full access in a year.

Thank you for bringing this matter of concern to my attention. Please be assured that learning from the circumstances of this tragic death has been shared more widely with colleagues and will continue to inform improvements across all the Probation Regions.

Yours sincerely

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Regional Probation Director