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Serious Further Offence Reviews: Understanding the
Perceptions of Probation Practitioners and Decision-
Makers.

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Contents.....	4
Table of figures.....	5
Table of tables.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	7
1.1 The SFO Review Process.....	7
1.2 Exploring Organisational Response and Staff Perceptions.....	8
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	10
2.1 The Probation Service and a Risk Society.....	10
2.2 Probation, a Potted History of Reform.....	11
2.3 Probation, a Cultural Identity.....	13
2.4 Legitimacy of Accountability and Audit.....	14
2.5 Organisational Legitimacy and Accountability.....	16
2.6 Learning from Failure.....	17
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	19
3.1 Research Aims and Questions.....	19
3.2 Research design.....	19
3.3 Research methods.....	20
3.3.1 Focus Groups.....	20
3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews.....	21
3.3.3 Schedule of Questions.....	22
3.3.4 Sampling.....	22
3.4 Data analysis.....	25
3.5 Ethical Considerations.....	25
3.6 Insider Research.....	26
3.7 Potential Limitations.....	27
Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion.....	29
4.1 Contested Purpose.....	29
4.1.1 Learning.....	31
4.1.2 Accountability and HR.....	32
4.1.3 Media and High-Profile Cases.....	34

4.1.4	Assurance and Influence	36
4.1.5	Victims.....	37
4.2	Emotional Context	38
4.2.1	Self-blame	39
4.2.2	Support.....	40
4.2.3	A narrative of fear	42
4.3	Legitimacy.....	44
4.3.1	Effectiveness.....	45
4.3.2	Distributive Justice	50
Chapter 5.	Conclusion and Recommendations	55
5.1	Summary of Findings	55
5.1.1	Question 1.....	55
5.1.2	Question 2.....	55
5.1.3	Question 3.....	56
5.1.4	Question 4.....	56
5.2	Implications for Further Research	56
5.3	Implications for Policy and Practice.....	57
References		58
Appendices		64
Appendix A		64
Appendix B		67
Appendix C		69
Appendix D.....		72
Appendix E		2
Table of figures		
Figure 4-1.	Framework of principles	45
Table of tables		
Table 3-1.	Focus groups.....	24
Table 3-2.	List of DMs	24

Abstract

Despite being a rare occurrence with less than 0.5% of those supervised by the Probation Service going onto commit a Serious Further Offence (SFO) (Carr, 2023), when they do occur SFOs can have a devastating impact on the victims and their families. Therefore it is incumbent on the Probation Service to identify and implement learning (Ministry of Justice, 2021)

Whilst the SFO review process is well established within the Probation Service very little has been written about its effectiveness and the impact on probation learning. In fact, organisational learning in the public sector is generally an under-researched field of study (Rashman et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is a limited understanding of how the SFO process is experienced and/or perceived by Probation Practitioners whose engagement and the need to feel psychologically safe is paramount to effective organisational learning (Edmondson, 1999). Therefore, intention was of this to develop an understanding of how probation staff perceive and experience the SFO review process.

Utilising focus groups and semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study of Probation Practitioners and Decision Makers from two contrasting probation regions to gather data on how staff perceive and experience the SFO process. The study identified 3 key themes, Contested Purpose, Emotional Context and a Question of Legitimacy, that suggest the process has become complex, bureaucratic and drives perceptions of a culture of fear and blame. Drawing upon the similar fields it is important to understand the human context within organisational failures and the need to move away from processes that can be perceived as blaming (Syed, 2016; Munro, 2019; CIEHF, 2020) it would be beneficial to conduct a whole systems review of the SFO process that re-establishes learning the primary focus of SFO reviews.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Probation Service in England and Wales found itself embroiled in a media furore in early 2023 which saw the Service being accused of a ‘litany of failures’ (Phillips, 2023) and ‘having blood on their hands’ (Thompson, 2023) following the publication of two reports by HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP, 2022b, 2023) into the Serious Further Offences (SFOs) committed by individuals whilst under the supervision of the Service.

Although rare, with less than 0.5% of those supervised going on to commit a serious violent or sexual offence (Carr, 2023), when SFOs occur they can have a significant impact on the victims and their families for whom the consequences ‘are devastating and life-changing’ (HMIP, 2020a p.4). SFOs also leave the Service open to a high level of scrutiny and criticism. Certainly, the Probation Service operates in a high-risk environment and is vulnerable to political and media backlash (Sabbe et al., 2021) with individual probation practitioners (PPs) being blamed and public confidence in the Service being undermined (Carr, 2023). It is incumbent on the Service to learn from SFOs identifying systemic and operational issues to drive continuous improvements whilst also assuring the public, ministers, victims and their families that this learning is taken seriously and acted on (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2021).

1.1 The SFO Review Process

First introduced in 2003, the SFO review is a mandatory process that is triggered when an individual subject to probation supervision is charged with a serious violent, sexual or terrorist offence.¹ The SFO aims to provide rigorous scrutiny of practice. Initially intended as a management review, the process was revised in 2018 to allow for increased transparency for victims and their families (HMIP, 2020a) and the introduction of a narrative-style report that can be shared with eligible victims and their families as defined by (MOJ, 2021).

Specialist teams in the twelve probation regions undertake the SFO reviews and in specific high-profile SFO cases which attract media scrutiny, the Secretary of State can request that the HMIP conduct an independent review. HMIP is a body independent of the Probation

¹ A full list of which can be found as annex A to a MOJ 2021.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/probation-service-serious-further-offence-procedures-policy-framework>

Service whose primary aim is to promote excellence in probation and youth offending services across England and Wales through independent inspections, recommendations, research and effective practice guidance.

SFO reviewers are experienced PPs and equivalent to Senior Probation Officer grade. For this research, we will categorise them collectively as 'decision-makers' (DMs) because they effectively make judgement calls on the standard of practice in a case. All SFO reviews are subject to quality approval by the probation region's Head of Performance and Quality (P&Q) and agreement with the Head of Service (HoS) for the local Probation Delivery Unit, concerning the actions set before being submitted to the National SFO team which sits in the Public Protection Group (PPG) of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) for quality and assurance (Q&A). Some 80% of reviews are checked by the national team and 20% are assessed by HMIP based on a set of standards (MoJ, 2021) at which point SFO reviews are graded for their quality and content. The Q&A process is designed to ensure that SFO reviews and the subsequent action plans meet the exacting standard and at each stage, reviews can be returned to the reviewer for amendments as deemed necessary.

The SFO process involves a review of the case files, records and interviews with the individual PPs involved in the sentence management of the case. Despite its intention to identify systemic and operational issues, the review process is top-down which contributes to PPs holding negative views and a belief that the SFO review process's primary function is one of attributing blame (HMIP, 2020a).

1.2 Exploring Organisational Response and Staff Perceptions

Although the SFO review has been part of the Probation Service accountability and learning agenda for two decades, there has been little academic coverage of SFOs and what has been written has focused on the media coverage or the findings of high-profile cases (Ansbro, 2006; Fitzgibbon, 2011) leaving their effect on probation practice and staff largely unexplored. Organisational learning for public sector services is an under-researched field (Rashman et al., 2009) but there is a plethora of knowledge about organisational cultures and by drawing on research in comparable fields, the importance of organisational responses and culture surrounding perceived failings becomes evident (Munro, 2019; CIEHF, 2020).

Ensuring staff are engaged and have a voice is integral to learning organisations (Dekker, 2012). After all, staff perceptions of legitimacy and the need to feel psychologically safe are paramount to effective organisational learning (Edmondson, 1999). HMIP (2020a) explains that if PPs perceive the SFO process as top-down and blaming, it undermines organisational learning and subsequent improvements.

This research aims to start to develop an understanding of PPs' and DMs' perceptions of the SFO process, what influences these perceptions and what this suggests about the organisational culture surrounding SFOs.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 The Probation Service and a Risk Society

The history of the Probation Service is well documented with academics and practitioners offering commentary on the various stages and changes in the organisation (Gelsthorpe and Morgan, 2007; Canton and Dominey, 2018). Certainly, the Service has changed markedly, moving from its philanthropic origins to the risk and target-focused organisation of today (Calder and Goodman, 2013). Change has been the only consistent feature with the most seismic of these changes occurring since the 1990s (Gelsthorpe and Morgan, 2007). These changes have been influenced by the organisation's need to be seen as effective in a changing political and societal landscape (Calder and Goodman, 2013). Ultimately, probation can be viewed as a reflection of societal values on criminality (Canton and Dominey, 2018, p.58).

If the Probation Service reflects societal values, then one could consider the field of criminal justice as a microcosmic representation of these values. In their seminal work, *A New Penology*, Feeley and Simon (1992) argue that criminal justice has been on a trajectory of punitiveness since the 1970s. They state that there is an increasing reliance on surveillance and control measures driven by a perceived need to be tough on crime that is increasingly concerned with the management of actuarially defined risks and the need for accountability. This is a position shared by Garland's (2001) *Culture of Control* and is reflective of the idea that risk is central to the construct of post-modern society.

The notion of post-modern society's preoccupation with risk is central to the argument in Ulrich Beck's (1992) *Risk Society* which identifies an intolerance of risk as something that must be managed. This obsessive need to identify and control risks is compelled by fear and anxiety and an apparent inability of individuals to adequately control external factors (Giddens, 1991). Yet, in the risk society, people also exhibit an increased desire for responsibility, seeking to hold someone or something accountable. The risk society is also categorised by the empowerment of its citizens to hold those in positions of power to account when failures do occur (Lupton, 1999).

The emergence of the risk society is not to say that the world has become riskier. On the contrary; the world in many ways is safer than ever. What has changed is the development of the societal notion that risk is intrinsically linked with a preoccupation with predictions and

safety (Giddens, 1999). In this context, risk always has negative connotations in which citizens seek guarantees or promises that threats to their safety will be managed, resulting in risk controls becoming central to political life. Applying this to the realms of criminal justice, Nash (2005) states that the risk society is entwined with the fear of crime. Despite statistics suggesting that crime is decreasing (Farrell et al., 2010; ONS, 2023), the fear of crime continues to grow fuelled by media-derived moral panics and increased pressure on governments to be seen to act (Nash, 2005).

Undoubtedly, the nature and direction of criminal justice are influenced by perceived public opinion (Hough and Roberts, 2017). In the risk society, public opinion which is significantly influenced by a media-derived fear of crime has motivated a zero tolerance and populist approach to criminal justice that is primarily concerned with measures of control designed to appease public demands for state protection (Garland, 2001). However, the punitive response is underpinned by fear and a need to perpetuate the illusion of control and accountability, resulting in the need to scapegoat or apportion blame (Dekker, 2012). The production of an identifiable and blameable villain is an attractive proposition in the uncertainty of the risk society in which the state is drawn into ceaseless attempts to control (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). Of course, risk has always been present in criminal justice; it is just the discourse has shifted to one of uncertainty and blame attribution that extends to a questioning stance towards regulatory systems (Kemshall, 2008). Public intolerance of failure and the need to blame certainly has significant implications for those charged with the management of risk, especially considering that public opinion is likely to be based on inaccurate media information that does little more than further undermine public trust in criminal justice agencies (Hough and Roberts, 2017).

2.2 Probation, a Potted History of Reform

Organisational avoidance of blame is increasingly important (Nash, 2005) which has further contributed to the risk-averse politically driven progressively punitive criminal justice system of the past 40 years. It is in this arena that the Probation Service has found itself, and this has influenced the most significant and unsettling changes in the organisation's history.

The history of probation is described well by Canton and Dominey (2018), who offer an insightful yet broad-stroke account. Along with examining the contributing factors that have

influenced the organisation's continued paradigm shift from a welfare-inspired ideology of 'advice, assist befriend' to the primary focus of assessing and managing risks posed by individuals.

A comprehensive chronological and detailed view of the Probation Service's early history can be found in the first two chapters of *The Handbook of Probation* (Gelsthorpe and Morgan, 2007; Nellis, 2007). They note that probation history and its historical values are so embedded in its culture as to be in stark contrast to the present risk-driven paradigm. An observation shared by Canton and Dominey (2018) notes that the discourse between the Service's deep-rooted values and its current objectives forms a tension intrinsic to the organisation's identity.

Whilst the Probation Service has continuously had to reimagine itself throughout its history, the ideals of welfare and rehabilitation have remained closely associated with probation practice (Burke et al., 2023) which suggests stability in identity despite pressures to reform or more accurately conform to the changing political landscape.

The Service's early history was relatively stable but by the 1980s, it was experiencing a full identity crisis with its historical casework and treatment paradigm facing overwhelming criticism and sentencers being less than receptive to the alternative to custody approach (Kemshall, 2008). However, by the 1990s the Service had found a new way and had started to position itself as an agency concerned with public protection in which the assessment and management of the risk of harm and re-offending became the central tenet of practice (Kemshall, 2003, 2016, 2021). The adoption of a risk agenda was as much due to the emerging dominance of public protection in penal policy and the societal need for state protection from risk, as it was the Service searching for a legitimate role in the neo-liberal post-welfare ideology of the risk society (Garland, 2001). It was during this period and against a backdrop of uncertainty and scepticism about the effectiveness of probation that the role of managerialism first emerged in the Probation Service to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to bolster the Service's reputation as a viable alternative to the increasing prison population (Phillips, 2011).

In 1997, the new Labour government further cemented the new penology mantra of ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ (Garland, 2001) and the growth of managerialism and accountability alongside new forms of governance (Oldfield, 2002). For the Probation Service, this manifested as the first attempts at centralised governance with the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the creation of Probation Boards and then trusts subject to rigorous processes of accountability and service level measures.

The Offender Management Act 2007 introduced competition in probation but the Service remained relatively stable and despite some high-profile failings, not only improved but excelled to become the first public sector organisation to be awarded a Gold Medal for Excellence (Calder and Goodman, 2013). Nonetheless, criticisms persisted which led to the marketisation of the Probation Service in 2014 with Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) and the part-privatisation of the Service. Seen as a failed experiment by many, its reversal in June 2020 appears to have been welcomed by many of those interested in probation practice (Millings et al., 2023). However, the failings of TR simply highlighted long-standing issues with the Probation Service (Tidmarsh, 2020) and unification is another element of prolonged periods of reform.

Certainly, some of the rationales for the unification of the Probation Service were to restore its damaged reputation and repair confidence in it (Carr, 2023). However, despite all of its reforms and upheaval, scepticism remains about its effectiveness, particularly as a credible means of control and its ability to protect the public, something that plays out in the media when high-profile SFOs occur (Garland, 2001).

2.3 Probation, a cultural identity

If the history of the Probation Service is complex, then its value base is even more so and its welfare origins and the value base of ‘advice assist and befriend’ no longer hold currency (Gelsthorpe, 2007). Nevertheless, research into probation culture has found a stubbornness and resilience of this value base. Despite the numerous reforms and moves to a more punitive approach, PPs continue to hold the shared belief in an individual’s ability to change (Burke, Millings and Robinson, 2017). This is not to say the culture or value base of the Probation Service has not changed along with its practices; Values are more than a set of beliefs but rather a prescribed set of behavioural standards (Canton and Dominey, 2018). The resilient

nature of the rehabilitative ideal in the Service is noteworthy and speaks to an ongoing commitment to fairness and a humanistic approach to justice.

Nevertheless, the effect of reforms cannot be underestimated and an organisational culture is shaped by narratives, actions, and a sense of belonging or identity. Culture is multivariant by nature and multiple operational cultures can exist (Phillips, 2011).

The unification of the Probation Service is the most significant threat to its historical value base with staff commitment to their roles being tested and an underpinning fear of vulnerability to political interference (Millings et al., 2023). The years of politically motivated and imposed reforms continue to contribute to the uncertainty that can only be amplified by further reforms and concerns of dilution of identity as the Service continues to move closer to the Prison Service in one HMPPS (Webster, 2022).

The Service's history has been punctuated by periods of uncertainty and searching for a strong identity. In part, this is because the Probation Service is considered the hidden element of the criminal justice system. Historically, it has not had the same media profile as other agencies and is only noticed for its failings or misrepresented as a soft option (Mawby and Worrall, 2013). That said, the Probation Service is more visible than ever, albeit in the anxiety-provoking arena of public protection (Nash, 2005). Public protection operates in a climate of intolerance of failure leaving the Service vulnerable to further scrutiny and the need to be accountable. However, accountability in this sense is being seen to deliver rather than being responsible for failure.

2.4 Legitimacy of Accountability and Audit

All accountability processes, audits and learning reviews are part of a hierarchical structure in which someone sits in judgement over others. In terms of the SFO review process, the DMs sit in judgement over the PPs who are responsible for the management of the case. In turn, the SFO reviewers are held to account by the quality assurance conducted by the HMPSS SFO team and HMIP. This design of audit processes is important when considering the creation of a learning culture, accepting that a sense of safety is a critical element of learning after all 'it is only when people trust those sitting in judgement over them that they will be open' (Syed, 2016 p.245) thus, enabling them to speak openly about their mistakes.

Issues of legitimacy are multi-faceted for both an individual and an organisation. For individuals, legitimacy also holds importance in how processes are experienced, especially given the capacity for processes to be experienced as blaming. Lucas and Lovaglia (2006) propose that legitimacy does not imply individual benefit but rather when structures are perceived as legitimate there is an acceptance of outcomes, even those detrimental to oneself, and people trust that their individual needs will be met. This is not to say that legitimacy is a blind acceptance but rather, as Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) argue, it is a two-way dialogue between power holders and audiences through which acceptance and trust are built. Legitimacy requires the development of mutual trust in which there is some acceptance of vulnerability (Lucas and Lovaglia, 2006) and it can be conceptualised by four components: procedural justice, distributive justice, effectiveness and lawfulness (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2017)

Whilst this conceptualisation is in relation to criminal justice and police authority, it is just as relevant in an organisational accountability process which also involves interplay between power holders (DMs) and audience (practitioners), particularly the components of procedural justice and effectiveness, both of which influence individual perceptions of legitimacy. This is different from the legally defined due process which offers individuals protection but indicates a psychological acceptance of a process that is characterised by trust and voice (Posthuma, 2003). Whilst this can be defined as a consistent process, free of bias, and consists of accurate information that can be challenged and corrected (Greenberg and Tyler, 1987), it is the emotional element that is important because trust is a psychological state that allows vulnerability (Camerer, 1998, cited in Lucas and Lovaglia, 2006). Therefore, the four pillars of voice, trust, respect and neutrality become a vehicle for psychological safety and acceptance of the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes. Procedural justice and legitimacy influence not only emotional responses (Clay-Warner, 2006) but also workplace behaviours and attitudes (Greenberg and Tyler, 1987).

If we apply this to SFO reviews it is reasonable to assume that the process is emotionally charged and the extent to which it is believed to be legitimate becomes important.

2.5 Organisational Legitimacy and Accountability

Individuals subject to accountability processes sense if legitimacy is only part of the discussion and for organisations such as the Probation Service, accountability processes form part of the organisation's public legitimacy loop. Since the 1980s, the Probation Service has increasingly adopted managerial approaches to satisfy the effectiveness criteria of legitimacy and these issues of effectiveness are complex (McNeill, 2000) and do not sit solely in managerial outputs but are in competition with the outputs of public protection and reducing re-offending.

With the introduction of managerialism, the Probation Service found itself subject to set 'National Standards' and 'Service Level Measures' that dictated expectations of practice that almost entirely focused on process outputs and timeliness. Whilst these have become pejorative terms, their introduction was seen as necessary at the time (Phillips, 2011) and provided a benchmark by which effective practice could be measured. Taking learning from the financial sector these standards form and inform a three-line approach to accountability and assurance.

In probation, the first 'line of defence' is Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Services (HMPPS) Contract Management team and the HMPPS NPS line management function. The second 'line of defence' is provided by the Operational and System Assurance Group (OSAG) which provides internal assurance on the quality of delivery through regular targeted audits. HMI Probation forms part of the third line of defence with its main function being to independently inspect Probation Services. (Phillips, 2023 p.125)

Phillips (2023) proposes that the current accountability process flows from the bottom-up and PPs are left feeling accountable to the organisational hierarchy for an administrative process undermining their engagement with people on probation. Although this typology of accountability can support organisational legitimacy by providing assurances of efficiencies, it does little in the way of ensuring good practice and potentially encourages PPs to employ coping mechanisms to alleviate the pressures of accountability processes (Sabbe et al., 2021). The Probation Service has become primarily concerned with the management of risk posed by others and notions of risk are key to holding professionals to account (Kemshall et al., 1997

p.227), highlighting public mistrust, undermining organisational legitimacy and metamorphosing into a culture of blame (Loraine Gelsthorpe and Morgan, 2007).

This is particularly true of audits following perceived failures in practice as with the SFO reviews. Given failures in practice rarely occur in isolation and require a successive interplay of contributing factors (Reason, 2004), a retrospective accountability process that looks at failings from a solely prescribed set of expected standards threatens to encourage behaviours where organisations and individuals are 'more careful in creating a paper trail and not more careful in doing their work' (Dekker, 2012 p.153).

Society has a contradictory relationship with failure in which a need for self-protection incites individual justifications for failings against a quickness to proportion blame on others (Syed, 2016). Applying this to an organisational accountability and assurance process that is concerned with organisational legitimacy and reputation, the process seeks to justify the organisation and find fault with the actions of individuals. If failure 'can be pinned on a "few bad apples" it may play better in PR terms' (Syed, 2016 p.240). This is not to say individual accountability and even blame are never justified on the contrary it is an imperative element of organisational legitimacy and assurance where clear acts of negligence are present (Syed, 2016).

2.6 Learning from Failure

Notwithstanding the purpose of accountability and audit processes to provide organisational assurance, these processes also drive overall performance including learning from failure and adverse events. For the Probation Service, the SFO process fulfils this role and drives continuous improvement (MOJ, 2021). Undoubtedly, a significant aim of such inquiries is to facilitate organisational learning (Walshe, 2002, cited in Aylett, 2016) and it is an incumbent feature to learn from circumstances of error (Aylett, 2016). However, organisational learning is an under-researched area, particularly in the public sector (Rashman, Withers and Hartley, 2009) and almost non-existent for the Probation Service.

We can draw on comparable areas of study similar to the influential work of Eileen Munro who used studies from other fields concerned with public safety. What is apparent from Munro's work is that organisations need to accept that errors can and will occur. She goes on

to propose that consideration of why rather than just what happened is needed for organisational learning to occur (Munro, 2019). To understand the decisions and actions of an individual it is necessary to understand the environment in which they occurred. Therefore, any review process needs to consider the context in which failures have occurred and the human error being accepted as inevitable (Gillingham and Whittaker, 2023).

Contextualisation of failures as human error is well established in the field of Health and Safety known as human factors. The White Paper produced by the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors (CIEHF, 2020) sets out nine principles for incorporating human factors into investigations of failure amongst which are to adopt a systems approach, understand contextual factors associated with the failure and avoid searching for blame. Traditionally, investigation reviews are seen as bureaucratic and focus on processes with an inherent scepticism of a hidden agenda of blame (Gillingham and Whittaker, 2023) that is counterproductive to learning and improvements (Dekker, 2012). Therefore, the need to distance from a paradigm or perception of a blame culture is essential to developing a culture of learning in which staff need to feel safe to engage with the learning process (Schein, 1992) (Edmondson, 1999).

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research Aims and Questions

This study aims to develop a narrative understanding of how PPs involved in the supervision of people on probation perceive the SFO review process. It also explores the views of a cohort of DMs consisting of those responsible for conducting the SFO reviews and senior leaders with overall responsibility for the selected Probation Delivery units (PDUs).

The study also aims to explore what influences these perceptions and what this suggests about the organisational response and culture surrounding SFOs.

To achieve these aims, the study has been framed in the structure of four research questions:

- What do PPs and DMs understand about the aims, objectives and intent of the SFO review process?
- How do practitioners and DMs experience the process?
- What influences how the organisation responds to the SFO process?
- What are practitioners' and DMs' beliefs about how the process affects the organisational culture and probation practice?

The research questions are intended to provide a framework for the study by defining the project, setting its boundaries, providing direction for the researcher and creating a measure of success (Robson, 2011). The implementation of defined framework research questions provides clarity of the research design and the data needed to meet the research aims (Lewis and Nicholls, 2014).

3.2 Research design

Due to the scarcity of academic study relating to the SFO process and how it is experienced by those involved, I employed a contextual and exploratory approach to develop an understanding of the narratives and experiences surrounding the process; '[n]arratives and words allow us to understand perceptions and provide a rich, complete and authentic data set' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.459).

A qualitative approach has the advantage of developing a deeper understanding of these narratives as opposed to what could be garnered from a quantitative one (Tewksbury, 2013).

Hatch (2002) would argue that qualitative research is best suited when trying to understand the perspectives of those in the environment being explored. The application of a contextual approach allows for the description of how a phenomenon is experienced by individuals and the explanatory approach allows for the development of an understanding of what influences these perceptions (Ritchie and Ormston, 2014).

3.3 Research methods

This is a small-scale qualitative study designed to develop a narrative understanding of how PPs and DMs perceive the SFO process and what influences these perceptions. To achieve this within the constraints, data collection was achieved via two methods: focus groups for the PPs and semi-structured interviews for the DMs. The methods are similar and allow for a conversational style of data collection. However, the primary reason for electing to use the different methods was due to the sample sizes of the groups and the fact that the use of focus groups is an efficient way of collecting data from several people (Robson, 2011).

3.3.1 Focus Groups

The primary concern of the research was to develop a narrative understanding of how PPs perceive the SFO process therefore focus groups were elected as the primary method of data collection. This is because it allowed them to reach a greater number of PPs within the constraints of the study. Focus groups also have the advantage of developing a shared narrative in which the participant's responses are triggered by what they hear from others (Finch, Lewis and Turley, 2014). The exchange of ideas in the focus groups was enhanced by their homogeneous nature. Robson (2011) states that the advantages of homogeneous groups are that they promote an exchange of ideas, promote communication through a sense of safety and can result in group thinking.

The focus groups were considered homogenous because they consisted of PPs concerned with sentence management functions and a dedicated group for each of the selected PDUs. The sample was of mixed grades and experience of practitioners (see Table 1 below) and one participant from Region Two was allowed to join the focus group for the other PDU in their region due to availability. This did not undermine the commonality of the groups and only enhanced the richness of the discussions.

The risk of focus groups is that quieter members can be sidelined by more vocal members (Layder, 2023) and it is incumbent on the facilitator's skills to manage the group dynamics to ensure all participants are heard. This was particularly evident in these focus groups due to the lack of confidence displayed by some of the less experienced participants which resulted in a need for me to actively draw them into the conversation with the use of open questions such as 'Can you tell me about your experiences?' Being a loan researcher added to the challenges in the face-to-face group. The subject matter was emotive and elicited some strong reactions in the groups. The move to Teams and the technology and associated etiquette aided in the facilitation by removing the additional tasks of note-taking due to the auto-transcription function.

Where the face-to-face group relied solely on the audio recording, the MS Team functionality had the added benefit of allowing for an observational review of the focus groups and interviews when editing which created the opportunity to identify subtle interactions in the group that may have otherwise been missed.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews followed a very similar format to the focus groups in terms of flow and questions albeit they allowed for a more focused interaction with the individuals. Semi-structured interviews combine both structure and flexibility (Yeo et al., 2014) but the data is derived more from the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Whilst the intention was to still develop a narrative understanding of the participant's perception the study also sought to compare and contrast the decision-maker views to those held by the practitioner group. Semi-structured interviews were used because of the disparate nature of the decision-maker group who, unlike the practitioner group, was more heterogeneous with very different experiences and involvement in the SFO process. The sample size was much smaller in comparison which allowed for more in-depth discussions.

It was initially envisaged that all of the focus groups and interviews would be face-to-face and take place in local probation offices as in-person groups would allow better engagement. However, it became apparent early in the study that this was not feasible due to time commitments and work pressures of the participants. These constraints were further exacerbated by the size of the probation regions with multiple office locations across

significant geographical areas. Eventually, only the first interview and focus group took place in-person and the remainder was conducted via Microsoft Teams. On reflection, the move to use video technology did not appear to harm the data collection as demonstrated by the similarities of the responses and engagement across the board. Since COVID-19, the use of video call technology has become commonplace with all participants appearing familiar and comfortable with its use. The decision to switch to an online methodology allowed for more participants to be able to engage with the process thus increasing the data collection in support of the development of a collective narrative.

3.3.3 Schedule of Questions

To ensure the consistency of data collection the interviews and focus groups both followed a framework of questions. A schedule was used for both (see Appendices A and B) consisting of opening comments, key questions, prompts and closing comments (Robson, 2011). The use of a schedule allowed the flexibility to capture individual experiences and narratives whilst ensuring the key elements of the study were captured. Such tools are best used in qualitative studies when the interviewer and researcher are the same person (Robson and McCartan, 2016) because they allow for the discussion to be led by the participants yet steered by the interviewer's overall understanding of the research aims.

3.3.4 Sampling

The Probation Service is currently experiencing a crisis (Carr, 2023) in staffing and workload pressures which has the potential to influence how staff groups both perceive and respond to additional levels of scrutiny and pressure. To mitigate and understand this potential effect, I elected to recruit the samples from two contrasting regions.

The East of England (Region 1) was selected because of the relatively recent experience of a high-profile SFO alongside the region's recent HMIP inspections in which staffing pressures were raised as a concern (HMIP, 2022a). In contrast, the Northeast Probation Region (Region 2) was selected because of perceptions of a more stable staffing group and better scoring HMIP inspections (HMIP, 2022c).

I employed a purposive sampling approach to ensure the selection criteria would capture a rich data set and allow for a deep understanding of central themes (Ritchie et al., 2014). The

research required the recruitment of two very distinct groups. Firstly, PPs, consisting of probation officers and Probation Service officers, are responsible for the management of people subject to probation supervision because they are the most likely to be identified and open to scrutiny in the SFO process. The second group I termed DMs because they are responsible for the delivery of the process and subsequent actions that may impact the PPs group. The DMS group consisted of SFO reviewers, their line managers and heads of the selected PDUs.

Following HMPPS National Research Committee approval, the Heads of P&Q for each of the regions who hold responsibility concerning local research approval were contacted to obtain local support and permission to conduct the research. The heads of P&Q also hold 2nd tier-line management for SFO reviewers and have overall responsibility for the quality of SFO reviews therefore, they also form part of the Decision-Maker sample.

The research initially intended to interview a total of 6 DMs from each region consisting of two heads of PDU (to correspond to the PDUs from which the sample PPs were drawn) three SFO reviewers and the Head of P&Q. This equates to a total of twelve interviews in all which is an ideal number of interviews for a small-scale qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006). In terms of PPs, because the study intended to develop an understanding of a shared narrative of perceptions it was envisaged that two separate PDUs from each of the two regions would be selected to provide for a fuller scope of knowledge and experience of the staff to be represented. The intention was for a total of four focus groups consisting of the optimal size of 6 to 8 people in each (Finch, Lewis and Turley, 2014).

Recruitment was achieved with the assistance of the Heads of P&Q who contacted their SFO teams and Heads of PDU for the region to identify volunteers that met the selection criteria. Once the individual PDUs for both regions were identified the relevant heads then solicited volunteers from their staff group. Each prospective subject was furnished with a participant information and consent form detailing the research aims and purpose and it was then up to them to confirm their eligibility and agreed participation.

The final sample for the focus groups consisted of a total of 11 participants for Region 1 due to staff availability and 12 for Region 2.

Table 3-1. Focus groups

Focus Group	PSO	PO	Other
Region One, Focus Group A (R1FGA) Conducted on Teams	3	3	Only one participant had experienced SFO.
Region One, Focus Group B (R1FGB) Face-to-Face in Office	0	4	(2 people dropped out on the day of the focus group) Two had experienced SFOs,
Region Two, Focus Group A (R2FGA) Conducted on Teams	2	3	Mixed experience 3 have experienced SFOs
Region Two Focus Group B (R2FGB) Teams	1	6	All participants except for the two newly qualified have experienced at least 2 SFOs. (one participant transferred from group a)

The final sample of DMs totalled 11.

Table 3-2. List of DMs

Region	Role	Unique Identifier
1	SFO Reviewer	R1DMA
1	SFO Reviewer	R1DMB
1	Head of Quality and Performance	R1DMC
1	Head of Probation Delivery Unit (HoS)	R1DMD
1	Head of Probation Delivery Unit (HoS)	R1DME
2	SFO Reviewer	R2DMA
2	Head of Quality and Performance	R2DMB
2	Head of Probation Delivery Unit	R2DMC
2	SFO Reviewer	R2DMD
2	SFO Reviewer	R2DME
2	SFO Reviewer	R2DMF
2	Head of Probation Delivery Unit	R2DMG

Across all four focus groups, there was a varied mix of operational grade and experience as well as a mixed knowledge of the SFO process. On reflection, the use of a voluntary selection process could have led to the recruitment of those individuals who already had a vested interest in the SFO process with strong views or experiences. For the most part, the DMs held the strongest views and were quick to volunteer which resulted in the filling of the desired number very quickly. For the PPs, this appears to have been mitigated by the selection of the PDUs to focus the sample pool as indicated by the mixed experience and knowledge of the

practitioner samples. In reality, I had little control over the focus group sample other than to specify that they were PPs engaged in sentence management in the selected PDUs that said, I was pleasantly surprised by the variety in the final sample.

3.4 Data analysis

Microsoft Teams has the benefit of an auto-transcribe function that is transferred to a Word document for editing and then subsequent coding. The face-to-face interview and focus group were recorded on a digital recorder and then uploaded to MS Word using the in-built auto-transcription tool before following the same editing process.

The transcripts were subsequently edited using a verbatim approach to mitigate any potential researcher bias (Lacey and Luff, 2009). Whilst taking into account the meaning of the data, the editing process removed any filler words (ums and ahs) because they hold little value to the aims of the study (Stuckey, 2014) alongside the correction of any errors in the transcript created by the auto-functionality of the tool.

The editing process allowed me to familiarise myself with the data and begin to develop an initial framework of key themes and ideas that are grounded in and supported by the data (Spencer et al., 2014). The finalised transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo to aid in the coding. A thematic analysis of the data was conducted by systematically working through the data (Spencer et al., 2014) using an inductive approach to identify patterns and themes taking into account the richness of information (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Using the identified themes, I developed a framework of codes and themes to be applied to the data (see Appendix E) to construct a cohesive representation of the data (Tewksbury, 2013).

Throughout the coding process I remained open to new themes emerging, adopting an adaptive approach (Layder, 2023) and amending the initial framework to account for the new emerging ideas to help contextualise the research findings and answer the research questions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Before the beginning of the research, approval was obtained from the National Research Committee (NRC) and the Institute of Criminology (IOC) Ethics Committee. Such approvals ensure that the study was subject to a level of governance and abided by a set of principles

that safeguard the participants' rights and well-being whilst dictating the conduct of the researcher (Layder, 2023).

Whilst the research participant may not be considered vulnerable given that the sample was to be taken from current probation staff groups, I was mindful that the research subject could be considered emotive which had the potential to trigger a degree of anxiety or even lead to a biased response that articulates a particular organisational perspective. Therefore, it was important to ensure all participants gave informed consent and were aware of the confidential nature of the research (Robson, 2011).

All participants were furnished with a participant information form (Appendix C) and were required to sign a consent form (Appendix D) confirming their understanding of the study and how the data was to be recorded and used. Participants were informed that every effort would be made to maintain their anonymity with the use of coded identifiers (see Tables 1 and 2) and a further verbal agreement was sought from the focus groups to maintain confidentiality.

Particular attention was paid to the challenges presented in maintaining the anonymity of the DMs due to the specialist and individual roles they hold. To mitigate this whilst the individual regions have been identified, the specific PDUs were anonymised. Participants were made aware of these challenges and additional verbal agreements were obtained to ensure their understanding and their agreement to participate.

3.6 Insider Research

I remain conscious of the issues around response bias throughout the research because of the potential impact of my standing in the Probation Service as a current Head of Service or what Robson (2011) terms an inside researcher. Whilst there is an inerrant risk to this, my position as an inside researcher also offers the benefit of credibility and ease of rapport with the participants (Bennett, 2015) who felt that I had a degree of understanding of the challenges they faced. I was able to lean into my own experiences and explain why I was conducting the research whilst being clear that my role was one of a researcher. For the most part, the participants appeared not to be unduly concerned with my role in the organisation

but during one of the focus groups a participant did ask a direct question and I had to remind them of my role as a researcher in the process.

A further consideration as an insider researcher was that I may know some of the participants personally. Attempts to mitigate this were made with a conscious decision not to conduct the research in the region where I work and for the local gatekeepers to identify research participants on my behalf. Two of the DMs were personally known to me but this manifested as a benefit as it felt more relaxed and they were able to express that they felt able to speak more freely because of the trust developed from the existing relationship.

A final ethical consideration for the research was my own potential bias as an individual who operates in a role that corresponds to that of a decision-maker. Therefore I adopted a reflexive approach to both the data collection and analysis to avoid any conscious or systemic bias (Ormston et al., 2014). I held regular reflective discussions with my university supervisor discussing my findings and data analysis to further mitigate any bias I may hold.

3.7 Potential Limitations

Good qualitative research is primarily concerned with the validity and reliability of the study in which reliability is concerned with the repeatability and validity with the extent to which findings are well founded and accurately reflect the phenomenon being studied (Lewis et al., 2014 p.354). This study addresses some of the concerns in the research design and data analysis however, some potential limitations should be noted.

Due to the nature of the research being conducted as part of a master's degree, the study is time bound which restricts the sample size to a manageable level. Whilst the study attempted to engage a broad range in the sample set, it relied on the availability and voluntary engagement of participants which encouraged participation from those with strong views on the subject matter.

The sample size means that it would be difficult to argue a generalisability of the findings which would require a much larger and longitudinal design. However, the homogeneous nature of the sample in which probation staff have a level of shared experience, nature and are subject to a nationally driven organisational culture means that the findings are

interpretive and therefore should a similar study be carried out again in the future it is reasonable to assume that a similar result would be found.

The research is also concerned with organisational culture and how this influences the perceptions of the sample. Organisational culture is dynamic (Schein, 1992) and influences staff perceptions (Phillips, 2011; Burke, Millings and Robinson, 2017). Therefore, the research data is a snapshot of culture as it existed. This does not undermine the validity of the research but rather recognises that the findings are representative of a snapshot in time of how the SFO process is viewed by the research sample.

Chapter 4. Findings and Discussion

This section of this study discusses the three key themes that emerged from the data: contested purpose, emotional context and legitimacy of the process. For more details about the codes and sub-themes that emerged in the data analysis process, see the attached NVivo codebook (Appendix E).

4.1 Contested Purpose

The first two questions of this study relate to DMs' and PPs' understanding of the purpose and aims of the SFO process. The theme of a contested purpose is derived from the responses received. Initially, the idea of a contested purpose is explored before developing the discussion further by exploring the sub-themes of learning, accountability and HR, media and high-profile cases, assurance and influence and finally victims. The notion of a contested purpose is developed from the participant's perception of how the purposes and influences explored in these sub-themes conflict with each other.

The purpose of the SFO process is clearly defined by the MOJ, (2021, p5) which states that reviews will identify and report on systemic, operational and individual actions to drive continuous improvement (learning) to assure the public, ministers and victims that the Probation Service takes seriously the learning from SFOs and implements the actions identified. When asked both the DMs and PPs groups were able to identify these organisational defined purposes. However, they placed varying degrees of importance on them with continuous improvement or learning being the most prominently referenced.

I guess it's about learning what went wrong and stopping it from occurring again. (R2FGA)

However, there was an almost universally expressed view that multiple aims of the review process were at odds with each other.

They are an internal review looking at the organisation but then written for the victim(s) it's two ends of the spectrum. (R2DMF)

They have many purposes [...] but it depends, on who you ask [...] it should be about learning but then you have the victim [...] then you have HMIP and PPG (Public Protection Group) asking for it to be a more business document. (R2DMD)

It is because of this conflict or contested purpose that many of the participants (particularly the DMs) expressed feeling confused about the aims of SFO reviews. 'I'm no longer clear, to be honest, it used to be about learning but I'm not sure it is now.' (R2DMG). This is driven by the environment in which the Probation Service and therefore SFO reviews operate and as Nash (2005) argues, there is pressure for governments to be seen to do something which explains the views shared by some of the participants that SFOs have become politicised further compounding their contested purpose.

The SFO review services many audiences... it's very politicised...you know victims, PPG, ministers [...] because they are written for so many different audiences it's a very confused process and document now.
(R1DME)

The view that the process itself has become confused with the final document becoming too long and convoluted to meet the needs of the multiple audiences and aims was expressed by most of the DM group and was summarised nicely by R1DMB who said, 'I have to write so much now, I have to explain everything'. This element of the contested purpose was not shared by the PPs, however. This is because they do not generally have sight of the entire document. This is problematic in itself and will be discussed further in the legitimacy section of the findings.

Nonetheless, the PPs still expressed elements of confusion and felt that the process was in conflict between the aims of organisational learning and the need to provide assurances to ministers, victims, etc. despite these assurances being around organisational learning. Certainly, the findings of this study are that whilst participants were able to express an understanding of the organisational defined aims of SFO reviews, there was a commonly held perception that SFOs have become cumbersome, confused and risk failing to deliver on their intended purpose. This contested purpose is symptomatic of the current state of post-unified Probation Service. R1DMD, when asked what this said about the organisation, stated, 'It says to me that there is a crisis in identity [...] We are going through a period of change'.

Before moving on to the themes of emotional context and legitimacy it is prudent to further explore the sub-themes of contested purpose to understand how PPs and DMs perceive the aims of the SFO review process and what influences these perceptions.

4.1.1 Learning

The theme of learning features throughout the findings of this study largely due to its perceived importance but also because of its multi-faceted nature and the potential conflict between organisational and individual learning. Undoubtedly, learning should be a primary aim of reviews; after all, it is incumbent on organisations to learn from errors and a major aim of inquiries to facilitate organisational learning (Walshe cited Aylett, 2016). This is a view shared by the majority of DMs and PPs, who all indicated that learning and practice improvements were a primary aim of the SFO review process.

It's learning [...] so we have to look at all of our practice, I think there's no getting away from that. If something horrible happens [...] then there does need to be an investigation [...] and it's about getting the learning. (RSDMB)

I'm guessing the organisation's aims would be to learn from what went wrong and try to ensure that type of incident doesn't occur again. (R2FGA)

However, to what extent learning was achieved appeared to be less certain, in part due to the expectations of the review process.

I think it is driven by learning, but I think there are realistic expectations around the actions that come out of that. (R1DMB)

This sat alongside views that the process has become formulaic.

We become very mechanical in how we write, it's very factual, by the numbers. (R2DMC)

It feels like there's almost a checklist of actions that everyone seems to get. (R2FGB)

When combined, this resulted in the process being viewed as a bureaucratic one which is, of course, a traditional feature of investigation reviews in which reviews are met with inherent scepticism (Gillingham and Whittaker, 2023).

This scepticism manifests as a lack of engagement with the learning outcomes of SFO reviews. The SFO reviewers expressed a feeling of disconnect between them and the operational staff born from a lack of trust, an issue that will be discussed later. The SFO reviewers from both regions identified a disengagement by some Heads of PDU.

Engagement in learning is limited sometimes we don't even get a response. (R1DMA)

The SFO reviewers noted a disconnect with the PPs who appear to be fearful of the SFO team:

They're gonna point out everything I did wrong, I might get the sack because of them. (R1DMA)

The study found that across both regions there were efforts to re-address this and strengthen the relationship between the SFO reviewers and the operational staff. Across both regions, there was a programme of briefings aimed at myth-busting the process alongside sharing the learning from SFO reviews.

We have a really good setup [...] our P&Q head feeds the themes into our continuous improvement agenda. (R2DMG)

We have something called NERD, there's so much good material pulled through as continuous developments. (R2FGA)

It's about trying to normalise it [...] not being accepting of the same mistakes but normalise the process [...] We use the SFO team to help and assist. (R1DMA)

Nonetheless, there was cynicism across most participants (particularly the PPs) about how effective SFO reviews are in identifying and influencing learning. Despite, assertion to the contrary. 'This is about continuous improvement and not blame' (R2DME) and PPs believing '[i]t's about learning and practice improvements, it shouldn't be a witch hunt. (R1FGA) There remains a narrative that blame associated with the SFO review process that continues to undermine the 'good intentions' of learning.

4.1.2 Accountability and HR

This perception of the SFO review process as blaming appears to stem from the inherent need for accountability – to hold someone responsible when things go wrong (Dekker, 2012) – and a conflict between accountability and learning is a significant factor in the perceptions of a contested purpose to SFO reviews.

This is not to say that accountability should not be an aim of the process but rather it is an integral part of the learning process (Syed, 2016) with both the PPs and DMs recognising the appropriateness and necessity of this.

What I mean by accountability is we are a public service here to deliver a service [...] that comes with expectations [...] when things go wrong it needs explaining'. (R1DMB)

We are a statutory agency and have obligations. (R2DME)

Every government organisation has checks and balances, it is almost like you have to. (R2FGA)

The process is scary but still really necessary. (R1FGA)

However, this support for the process was diminished because PPs believed accountability sat squarely with them, something that is explored further below. This is despite several of the DM groups suggesting otherwise.

Various levels of the organisation are accountable. (RSDME)

However, by design SFO reviews look at practice (HMIP, 2020c) and therefore focus on the work of the PPs resulting in a commonly held view that the process seeks to single out PPs to assign responsibility. This perception that the SFO process looks to hold PPs responsible directly correlates with a narrative of blame.

I would agree with the others, I haven't actually experienced an SFO, but every SFO I've heard about is blame and they use learning as a cover-up [...] so when we were talking about accountability like the first words that were coming to me were like, who's to blame. (R1FGA)

The perceptions of blame featured significantly throughout the study with emotive terms such as 'scapegoat' (R2FGA) and 'hung out to dry' (R1DME) being used. This is despite there being very limited experiences or knowledge of individuals being made subject to HR or disciplinary proceedings.

I haven't witnessed it in the North. (R2DMD)

Don't know of anyone when I think of it. (R2FGA)

Nonetheless, there was a persistent and commonly held view even in the DM group that whilst separate, there is a connection between the HR conduct and disciplinary process and SFO reviews.

I think people link Conduct and Disciplinary and SFOs although the two are separate. (R1DMD)

There is a clear link between Conduct and Disciplinary and the SFO Process. (R2DMC)

The connection is not without merit or reason given that SFO reviews can uncover poor practices which should be addressed. 'Sometimes and rightly so capability and accountability issues emerge' (R1DMD). However, it is about finding a balance between the aims of learning and accountability.

Poor Practice does occur but it's about balance with conduct and disciplinary [...] In the past conduct and discipline have been centre stage over the good bit, the learning bit (R1DMc)

The result of this common narrative is a belief that the SFO process is about blame.

In a nutshell, I think staff feel it's about blame. (R1DMA)

It's always like you're waiting for an outcome [...] are you going to be sacked. (R1FGB)

Blame or perception of blame linked to incident investigation is a feature in the academic literature with blame being seen as counterproductive to organisational and individual learning. The need to move away from blame is recognised as paramount to developing a culture of learning and practice improvement (Reason, 2004; Syed, 2016; Munro, 2019; CIEHF, 2020)

The need to change the narrative was clearly recognised in the DM group as indicated by R1DMA who stated: 'We are looking to move away from blaming the individual to look at the organisational structure, impact and learning'.

However, the SFO reviews have multiple audiences and, alongside providing learning for the organisation, need to provide assurances to ministers, victims and their families that learning is being taken and improvement measures are being implemented. , the process is subject to external influences that dictate how the organisation acts and behaves.

4.1.3 Media and High-Profile Cases

The most influential of these external elements that underpin the narrative of blame is the media. The link between media and blame is inherent in the literature relating to the 'risk society' which is indicative of a lack of trust in statutory organisations and drives a need for governments and their agencies to be seen to do something (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999; Garland, 2001; Nash, 2005; Hough and Roberts, 2017).

This study found a strongly held belief that there is a link between media, high-profile SFOs and a potential for PPs to be blamed.

With SFOs, I think the blame game comes partially from the media, Yeah, because they want someone to blame and that's always how the media works. (R1FGAB)

Some participants expressed frustrations with how the media portrays SFOs and the work of the Probation Service.

The media representation of issues, which is always trivialised and yeah has a lack of understanding especially in some of the more sensationalist kind [...] I think nothing is ever that straightforward and as easy, is it? (RSDME)

When coupled with the belief that the media's portrayal influences the organisational response '[t]he media and how it's reported has an influence on staff perception and staff are treated' (R1FGA) and contributes to the sense of fear and mistrust between PPs and the organisation.

This is particularly true of high-profile cases in the media which tend to single out practitioner failings.

I'm just thinking about recent media cases [...] and once again it's all about the practitioner [...] and a lay member of the public see that and don't think there's probably organisational issues, but probably that the practitioner was a bit shit. (R1FGA)

The media reporting of staff being dismissed – '[y]ou got a high-profile case and you see in the media [...] you know people have been sacked' (R1DMC) – was a common response across the research findings. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude a correlation between media coverage and the perceived connection between SFOs and Conduct and Disciplinary and is viewed as something that undermines the aims of learning with the organisation appearing to act defensively at the expense of PPs.

When the few stories hit the press, they can say well, look, you know we sacked two members of staff or we've done this or we've done that and we've put things in place [...] for me that seems to take away from, I mean I don't believe there's a genuine necessarily kind of focus on learning [...] I think it's about defensibility. (R2DMG)

So, it's meant to be about learning and not individual accountability or culpability but the minute something high-profile happens, it's right which staff are involved, I want a conduct and disciplinary investigation launched immediately [...] I think it's difficult for the organisation to do but I think what staff want to hear is ok, this has gone wrong, but we've got your back. (R1DMB)

That said, some participants were of the view that the need to find blame was not an innate feature of the organisation but rather a reflection of society.

It goes beyond the organisation actually I think there's a kind of morbid fascination and people don't know what we do. (R1DMB)

This view aligns with the academic perspectives of the risk society and of course, an element of the risk society is public and political accountability (Nash, 2005) and the intended purpose of the SFO review is to provide the associated assurances. Therefore, an intrinsic element of the process design would be to identify and proportion responsibility. 'It's like the whole process is prepping in case it hits the media' (R1FGA).

4.1.4 Assurance and Influence

Media coverage is important because it influences and expresses public opinion which in turn influences political responses (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Garland, 2001). This perspective was voiced by one R2DME, who stated 'It's politics, it's public opinion and impacts on elections' and it is this issue of assuring that further contributes to the thematic of a contested purpose.

Certainly, the findings of this study suggest that the potential for ministerial scrutiny contributes to the perception of a contested purpose. The Probation Service has operated in a political environment for much of its history and is vulnerable to political interference (Millings et al., 2023). , SFOs are also politicised. It was recognised by some of the participants that one intended purpose of the SFO process was to reassure ministers.

You know as an organisation an SFO happens and what have you done about it? Because I need to tell the minister and I need to go back and/or there's something going on in the media. We need to reassure the public which in theory is quite right. (R1DMC)

However, this response speaks to a level of anxiety and uncertainty that exists around SFOs (particularly high-profile ones) in which ministerial and central oversight and influence are seen as applying undue pressure and undermining the integrity of it being a learning process.

You know there are clear examples of national or political pressure from government or ministers to take certain lines so that certain things happen. (R1DMD)

Again, this is not to say that this is wrong but just to note that the increased level of accountability and scrutiny that the organisation experiences as part of the civil service has impacted the SFO process.

Something changed when we joined the civil service, a real culture shift, we have always been accountable, but it felt like a greater degree of scrutiny and a complete lack of independence. (R1DMB)

This has resulted in increased feelings of vulnerability amongst staff. 'There's a closer link to ministers [...] I don't think we are well respected; we are an easy target.' (R1DME) and this further highlights the perceived conflict between learning and providing ministerial and public assurance.

4.1.5 Victims

The final conflict in the theme of contested purpose is that of assurance to victims. SFO reviews were originally intended as an internal review document designed to inform organisational learning and improvement (MOJ, 2021) but in 2018, the policy was changed to give victims or their families a greater degree of transparency (HMIP, 2020a) and allow access to the SFO review report and its actions.

The policy change was not in itself contested and this study found victims and empathy were a significant element in a practitioner's thought process when an SFO occurs. In contrast, however, there was a general sense from the participants that victims were not adequately considered in the process as it currently exists and become lost in the process.

As a reviewing manager, I do really think that the kind of primary audience now for what I'm writing is the victim and the victim's family and that's where the layer of accountability sits. (R1DMB)

Whilst most of the SFO reviewers expressed that they try to write the SFO reviews with the victims in mind, this is hindered by external pressures that want the reviews to include all points of action.

But then reviews go to HMIP [HM Inspectorate of Probation] or PPG [Public Protection Group] and they are picked apart, they want incessant jargon and jargon that the victim would be confused by. (R2DMB)

I think people lose sight of the victim in this, as an organisation we need to do better [...] it's trying to serve two purposes, an internal management review and to satisfy the victim's family, quite frankly I don't think it does either [...] I think we can get lost in all the technical stuff, victims just want to know what went wrong and what are we doing about it (R1DMA)

This results in a document that is confusing and lacks transparency for the victim because it is trying to do too much, a view supported by the Heads of Service who hold responsibility for disclosing the review reports to the victims.

They say the SFO is about transparency for the victim but none of the process expectations aligns with that. (R1DME)

I think it's confused and I think that's how it's received [...] I think the victim just wants to know what could have been done differently and what are we doing so it doesn't happen again. (R2DMG)

Ultimately, this study suggests the SFO process is characteristic of traditional reviews and is bureaucratic and process-focused (Gillingham and Whittaker, 2023). It is confused with different weightings being placed on its different functions (HMIP, 2020a). Therefore the process is counterproductive to learning and improvements (Dekker, 2012) because it is seen as unjust, a factor that also contributes to findings concerning legitimacy.

SFOs and the wider work of the Probation Service ultimately involve people and the bureaucracy forgets this.

You have to talk to people like they're people and it's not designed for people, it's process and mechanical. (R2DMC)

4.2 Emotional Context

The understanding that the SFO review process is ultimately about an interplay between a bureaucratic process and the individuals involved was encapsulated in this study's second

theme of emotional context. By their very definition, SFOs can be devastating and traumatic experiences for the victims and their families (HMIP, 2020) and are likely to be emotionally charged events. However, for the PPs, the process can also trigger strong emotional responses of fear, self-blame and guilt, something that is missing in the current literature. Aside from Phillips (2011; 2023), work on the impact of inspection on the emotional impact of audit is almost non-existent in the literature.

The second theme of this study, emotional context, was separated into three main sub-themes of self-blame which looks at PPs' initial response to SFOs occurring. This is followed by a discussion on how staff are supported through the process. Finally, the findings around the emotions associated with the process itself which predominantly were characterised as fear were explored.

4.2.1 Self-blame

The notion of self-blame was something that was shared by almost all of the participants who had experienced a SFO and it was apparent that self-blame was closely linked to PPs feeling responsible for the actions of those they supervise.

I have experienced many SFOs over the course of my career and they're very unpleasant. You know something awful has happened and you, naturally every practitioner [...] feels responsible even if they're not [...] I don't know anybody that doesn't feel some degree of hurt, responsibility or accountability, regardless. (R1DME)

This sense of responsibility appears directly linked to the enduring welfare ethos associated with probation practice (Burke, Millings and Robinson, 2017) and the importance of the supervisory relationship (Reed and Dominey, 2023). PPs build strong relationships with those they supervise and therefore when an individual goes on to commit a SFO it can trigger an emotional response akin to grief.

From talking with staff, I really thought about it, that shame, guilt, grief almost at the point it happens. (R2DMC)

This is particularly true when it happens unexpectedly.

It's the ones that take you by surprise, that can hit you a little bit harder as well. (R1FGB)

The emotional impact of the one-to-one supervisory relationship and how staff manage this is an emerging field of study (Phillips et al., 2016; Phillips, Westaby, et al., 2020; cited: Reed and Dominey, 2023). However, the emotional stresses are compounded when an SFO occurs with PPs questioning their own practice.

One of mine came out of left field, never expected it I was like God did I miss something; did he give any clues? (R2FGA)

Could I have prevented this awful thing? [...] I think that's what most people who work for probation that's what they're thinking did I do something wrong? Could I have stopped this? (R2DMC)

In one of the focus groups (R1FGB), the idea of self-blame triggered an emotionally charged discussion between the group members.

I know a lot of my colleagues and I speak for myself that we care and we don't want any further harm to be caused [...] so you sort of call into question your practice. (Practitioner1)

Yeah, you know because we care we take on the human effect of the tragedy. (Practitioner2)

This response highlights the 2nd stage of emotional response experienced by PPs. Firstly, it's shock, then empathy for the victim – 'I remember thinking this poor woman' – then self-blame.

I could feel myself getting upset, I had worked with this person for years [...] It felt like I hadn't done everything I could even though I knew I had. (R2FGB)

The final stage of emotional response is one of fear of what might happen to the practitioner themselves.

First I thought what the hell, then I thought of the victim, then I started worrying about what was going to happen to me. (R2FGB)

This fear directly correlates with the narratives that exist in the organisation about the SFO process which are influenced by PPs' experiences and the experiences of others.

4.2.2 Support

How individuals experience an investigative process is an important factor in the narratives that develop around organisational culture and how they engage with and respond to findings (Syed, 2016). The sense of fairness in the process is something that contributes to

this study's findings of legitimacy but also contributes to the feelings of fear associated with the SFO process.

For the participants who had experienced an SFO, this study found the issue of a lack of staff support to be a significant factor in how individuals felt about the process and a sense of helplessness.

I think it gets forgotten we don't get enough support or probation don't know how to support us [...] it's quite traumatic, goes on and on and you don't know when the end is, you've got no control over the process. (R2FGB)

In the perceived absence of organisational support, R1DME spoke about how individuals support each other.

You're trying to hold it all together [...] at the time I didn't realise how much it impacted me [...] I didn't feel supported at all (by the organisation), so we supported each other.

Some participants expressed a view that recently the process has shifted to being more supportive.

I think it now done you know; it's very much done in a kind of a more nurturing way. (R1FGB) a view supported by one HoS to comment 'The practitioner involved told me they actually found it empowering.' (R2DMG)

A negative perception of the process and a lack of support remained with participants expressing a view that the process conflicts with a supportive approach and it falls mainly to immediate line managers to offer the pastoral care to staff.

Yeah, from my manager but nothing from the organisation. (R2FGB)

Whilst my manager was there for you know the human side, in reality, I'm still going to be scrutinised and that brings anxiety. (R1FGB)

The lack of support is of concern because it feeds into the fear narrative and a belief that the SFO process will lead to blaming of the individual which in turn drives secrecy and self-protection. 'The process feels like an interrogation and doesn't support the individual to be open' (RSDMC, HoS). This perspective fits with Dekker's (2012) view of the retrospective accountability process driving behaviour of defensiveness rather than improvements.

4.2.3 A narrative of fear

The final emotional context was one of anxiety expressed as fear. Fear was certainly the most consistent emotion or feeling expressed throughout this study and intersects with many of the other findings of blame as described in contested purpose, or issues of trust and transparency that will be explored in the legitimacy theme. However, what is clear is that the narrative of fear is pervasive and synonymous with the SFO review process with SFOs being seen as something that should be avoided at all costs despite being largely out of the PPs' control.

There's always been this view, this whole thing around, oh you don't want an SFO, you know they're gonna pull you apart. (R2DMF)

This associated fear is not new and is inherent in the audit-derived culture in the Probation Service (Phillips, 2011). Whilst many things contribute to organisational and personnel narratives, these are influenced by staff's negative experiences of the process, especially when those processes are seen as blaming (Munro, 2019).

Our staff were made to feel inadequate, our managers were interviewed multiple times, they brought in an independent investigator because they were forensically trying to analyse everything that went wrong [...] That was one of the most damaging things in my career. (R2DMC)

The perception is that the purpose of the process is to find fault and blame because something has gone wrong and there must be a reason for it.

Yeah, it's the world we live in, there has always gotta be someone to blame. (R1FGB)

Which leaves the PPs feeling like the process is looking to find some blame or as Dekker (2012) would call it a scapegoat and this blame invariably falls onto the practitioner. This aligns with Kemshall et al. (1997) view that PPs are held accountable for the risk posed by others within the risk society or more precisely PPs being held responsible for the actions of the offender they supervise.

It is this level of accountability and the associated scrutiny along with perceptions of blame that formulate the fear narrative. However, even in processes such as SFOs, how individuals experience the process also depends on how that process is administered. 'I think it really

depends on the people doing the review' (R2DMG). When handled poorly it can have a devastating and lasting impact as demonstrated by a practitioner from R1FGA who shared her experience with the SFO process.

I'm going to share this because I just think it is a long time ago [...] but at the point, I was going through my interview, you know, I actually felt quite confident, to be honest, because I felt I've done everything that I could possibly have done with this case and the ACO phrased one question one way and then phrased it a different, way and he actually it's very unprofessional, But he But actually went gotcha and that has stayed with me my entire career. (R1FGA)

This was a historic experience and some of the participants who shared experiences that felt blaming noted a perceived change in how the process is handled now.

For me, it felt very much like I was being blamed although, I think it's [the process] changed a lot now. (R1FGA)

Recently people say is surprisingly ok [...] not saying it's not stressful but the process is managed better. (R1DMD)

This is likely to be a positive reflection on the work by the regional teams to humanise the process. However, historical accounts are enduring and hold weight in the organisational narrative.

It may have been 15 years ago, but you never stop living it. (R2FGA)

Much like internal historical experiences, they leave a legacy that feeds PPs dual perceptions of fear and how individuals respond. The fear of being disciplined or blamed.

She was literally on the SPOs floor distraught and saying oh my God I'm gonna be sacked. (R2FGA)

And the fear of being scrutinised or exposed.

My worry stems from if I have one it's going to be all fingers pointed at me. (R1FGA)

Part of the issue with the narrative of fear is that the SFO process is internally not spoken about which gives more gravitas to the media perpetuated narratives.

It's so taboo, it feels quite hidden [...] not spoken about because of the fear and it might trigger us. (R1FGB)

This lack of transparency is also damaging to how the process is accepted by staff and will be discussed in the final theme of legitimacy. It is incumbent on the organisation to dispel the myths and develop an openness around SFOs.

There is a clear desire expressed by both Heads of P&Q to drive a cultural change of narrative and subsequent cultural shift.

We have done a lot of work [...] change the rhetoric and remove the fear of SFOs [...] trying to change the culture to make it a learning experience rather than an 'AtmosFEAR' as it's called'. (R2DMB)

However, there was a recognition that changing the narrative and subsequently the culture was a challenging task.

It's not an overnight fix, it's been 10 years of fear, fear, fear and the change needs to come from the top [...] but I want to facilitate that change to help the organisation or certainly the region to move away from that perception of blame or scapegoating' R1DMC (Head P&Q)

A negative perception appears to be persistent as demonstrated by the view that new staff quickly adopt the common perception that SFO equals bad and more needs to be done to address the myths.

I think what I've found in the reviews I've done... is about 70% of the people that I've interviewed and newly qualified [...] I don't think their perception is good, I think it is viewed with a degree of anxiety and fear of consequences [...] I think it comes from the grapevine and when I interview people, they're oh! That wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. (R1DMB)

A view shared by the PPs was that it would be beneficial to share more positive stories and experiences of going through the SFO process.

I think sharing the good experiences would help, perhaps if the narrative changed then maybe that would alleviate some of the anxiety when an SFO is triggered. (R2FGA)

4.3 Legitimacy

The final theme was one of perceptions of the legitimacy of the process. There was a strong interplay between the previous thematic of contested purpose and emotional context and perceptions of legitimacy. This is because the process aligns with Phillips's (2011) bottom-up

accountability and so requires those involved to view the process as being legitimate to be accepting of the outcome (Lucas and Lovaglia, 2006).

Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) propose that legitimacy is formed of a dialogical nature and they provide a framework of principles of which procedural justice is a subset (Figure 4.1). Whilst Bottoms and Tankebe's work is largely focused on the legitimacy of policing, the final theme of this study will draw on these principles to address this question of the legitimacy of the SFO process with probation staff. Starting with effectiveness, it will look at perceptions of the effectiveness and relevance of SFO action plans before moving to themes of distributive justice in terms of experiences of audit and scrutiny alongside perceptions of balance and fairness of the process. Finally, this section explores elements of procedural justice in relation to transparency, trust and the PPs having a voice.

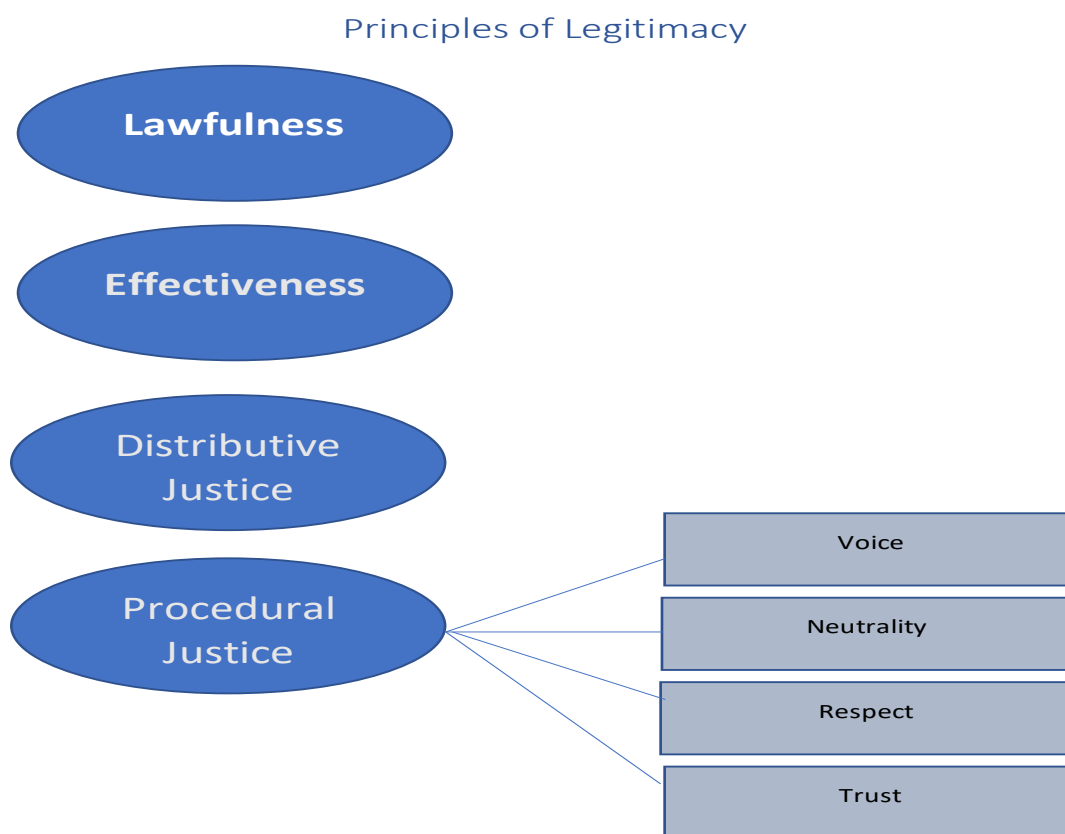


Figure 4-1. Framework of principles

4.3.1 Effectiveness

For a process to be considered legitimate, it needs to be viewed as being effective by those involved (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2017) and when considering the effectiveness of the SFO

process this could be twofold: the process itself and the outcomes it produces. In the theme of contested purpose, the effectiveness of the SFO process itself has already been called into question because the process tries to do too much for too many. The findings of this study indicate that there is a perception amongst probation staff that the process fails to achieve its desired outcomes because of conflicting aims and the reports being considered unwieldy. A view shared by many of the DMs interviewed was that '[i]t's elongated, there's a hell of a lot in there' (R1DMC).

This is a view that contributes to the process being perceived as too complex to function effectively.

The mechanics are just not there to make this work the way everyone wants it to. (R1DMB)

When asked what they would do if they had a magic wand, almost all of the DMs responded with a view that the policy and subsequent process need to be reviewed and simplified.

The whole process needs an overview and needs to get back to basics. (R2DMB)

It needs simplifying again because it's become confused. (R2DMG)

Contributing to the confused nature, the process itself is viewed as bureaucratic which for some feels like it misses the point of view, something aptly articulated by one of the Heads of Service who stated:

What we have done is over-engineered and overcomplicated the SFO process [...] We measure process and policies and milestones against the process policies. What we don't do is measure what the offender manager was trying to achieve. (R2DMC)

The perception of the SFO process being viewed as bureaucratic aligns with Gillingham and Whittaker (2023). Fundamentally, this contributes to an undermining of the legitimacy of the process for probation staff in which actions are set to justify the existence of the process rather than driving desired outcomes.

This might be my bias, but it feels like justifying the SFO role's existence and they have to find lots of actions. (R2FGA)

This results in a process that must have defined outcomes or actions that are perceived to be unnecessary and repetitive.

It's like there's a checklist of actions and everyone gets the same.
(R2FGB)

The repetitive nature of the SFO review action plans is a commonly held perception that calls into question the effectiveness of the process as demonstrated by comments made by a number of the DMs.

Invariably we end up writing the same thing, you could just change the PDU name. (R1DMA)

I have a real bee in my bonnet about the action plans, they all look the same just change the name [...] There is this kind of script that isn't really about learning for me. (R1DME)

The overwhelming sense, particularly from the DMs, is that SFO reviews have become a process concerned with outputs rather than outcomes and, as articulated by R2DMC, 'I think the problem is we manage SFOs like we manage all processes and because of that what we are doing is managing outputs rather than outcomes'. Ultimately this contributes to a perception of ineffectiveness and a process that applies the same outcomes without change threatens both the legitimacy and engagement with the process as a mechanism of improvement.

This can be viewed as a lack of faith in the process to highlight and/or address the real learning with action plans being seen to focus on practice process and policy and lacking relevance at least in terms of preventing future SFOs.

Certainly, the fact that action plans were largely seen as focusing on minor elements of practice rather than factors that contributed to the SFO occurring or rather could have prevented the SFO was an issue highlighted by DMs and PPs alike.

In every review, I have done there has been practice that could be improved, but whether it had a significant impact on whether we could have stopped that person going out and committing a sfo I'm not sure.
(R2DMF)

So, there's a 13-page action plan, but fundamentally I think there isn't anything that directly says had we done this differently it would have impacted the outcome. (R2DMG, Head of Service)

In the end what difference would it have made, again the action plans are all about bits of practice. (R1FGA)

That said, some reviewers did state that they should be considering the context of learning and the relevance to the commissioning of the SFO.

Then again, it's for me to make that judgement and what we should be looking at is it a missed opportunity. (R2DME)

The combination of the focus on what is seen as irrelevant practice and its repetitive nature affects how the SFO process is viewed.

One thing I got picked up on was my assessment and maybe I should have listed some items to say something was coming in the next section, so it was a bit petty. (R2FGB)

I think there is an unrealistic expectation around the actions that come out of the reviews [...] I would guess that people feel like some of the actions pedantic, unreasonable and unachievable. (R1DMB)

The overwhelming sense from the interviews and focus groups was that this negative view of process outputs only serves to further undermine engagement with the process and therefore its effectiveness. The importance of buy-in was something that was commonly expressed.

You need buy-in, because an action plan if its gonna make a difference you need buy-in, people need to believe in it, think it's worthwhile and wanna invest their time in it'. (R1DME)

This conflict about relevance and repetitiveness could be attributed to the discord discussed in the theme of contested purpose in that the SFO review process is attempting to be a management review of practice as well as providing assurances to victims around actions to prevent further victims.

However, relevance and repetitiveness are only part of the negative narrative that exists about the effectiveness of the SFO action plans. What also appears to exist is a view that the reviews themselves do little to influence positive changes in practice and when it does occur, changes are short-lived. This is a view commonly expressed by DMs and PPs when asked how they thought SFO reviews affected organisational practice.

To be honest the answer is no, I think I should probably caveat that with it might sometimes in the short term. (R2DMG)

Everything gears up for about six months then it stops and that corporate knowledge, well you know we have quite a transient

organisation with people moving so that corporate knowledge fades into the past and we have similar issues again. (R2FGA)

This short-term nature of SFO learning is a contributing factor to the repetitiveness of the action plans however, what was predominantly clear was a view that in general SFO reviews have little impact on probation practice outside of the individuals concerned.

Might with the individuals concerned but does that make a huge difference I'm not sure? (R1DME)

Much like the view that high-profile cases have an exaggerated effect on staff perceptions of blame, there was a commonly held view amongst participants that significant changes in organisational practice only occur in cases that are high profile and attract high levels of scrutiny.

Look we get SFOs all the time, don't we? [...] It's the high-profile ones, the ones that catch media attention, they're the ones that change practice. (R2FGB)

Do they change practice, No Not unless HMIP is involved those cases seem more important somehow. (R1DMB)

Certainly, it was only in the context of high-profile cases such as Damien Bendall (HMIP, 2022b) or Joseph McCann (HMIP, 2020b) that participants were able to identify significant changes in probation practice and policy.

Yeah, we have the recall decision trees, they weren't a thing before McCann. (R1FGA)

Like after Bendall, was it PQUIPs can only hold certain cases? (R2FGB)

However, this is not to say that these changes are always viewed positively and, like the connection with blame associated with high-profile SFOs, such cases are met with scepticism.

McSweeney and the whole civil orders thing [...] anyone whose got a civil order, that OASys assessment needs to be countersigned [...] that comes from you know wanting to give assurance upwards without considering the reality. (R1DMD)

SFO reviews and the resulting actions were not generally perceived as being effective even when they resulted in systemic changes to probation practice. Similar to the findings of Phillips (2011), such changes are viewed as an assurance measure further embedding the perception of the SFO process as a bureaucratic tool as part of an assurance process rather

than one of learning and driving improvements and therefore undermining the first principle of legitimacy.

4.3.2 Distributive Justice

The second principle of legitimacy is that of distributive justice which concerns how people are treated by those in authority and concerns feelings of fairness and balance. Bottoms and Tankebe (2017, p.77) note a common finding 'that how people are treated in there in their encounters with officials (procedures) seems to shape overall judgements of legitimacy more than the outcome of the encounter' which suggests that perceptions of being treated fairly hold more weight than the actual outcome of a process. Given that the SFO process is one where PPs are potentially held accountable for failings (something that was highlighted in the accountability element of the contested purpose theme), the need for this process to be seen as equitable and just is an important one. The perception of legitimacy and procedural justice directly influences the emotional impact of workplace procedures (Clay-Warner, 2006). However, before exploring the perceptions of balance and fairness further it is prudent to consider the impact of the audit elements of the process and how they potentially influence the perceptions of fairness.

4.3.2.1 Audit

Whilst this study has already established that PPs can find the SFO process blaming and the level of scrutiny involved, what has yet to be discussed is the influence of the Q&A process on the review process and particularly how this affects the SFO reviewers themselves. All SFO reviews undergo a Q&A process with 20% being independently audited by HMIP. This aligns with Phillips's (2011) top-down view of the audit process but also influences perceptions of the process being driven by central oversight.

So much is driven centrally. (R1DMC)

Of course, this is inherent in the 3 tier design of accountability that exists in the SFO process (Phillips, 2011) and is essential to legitimacy, at least in terms of providing external assurances of effectiveness. Internally how the Q&A process is perceived is important. Almost universally, the DMs expressed a view that the Q&A process was flawed and contributed to the issues already discussed.

I don't think the central team actually think it's about learning; they are extremely pernicky in their Q&A. (R1DMC)

However, what was notable was the apparent disconnect between the SFO reviewers and the auditors which served to undermine SFO Reviewer self-confidence.

Reviewers can get so demotivated by the feedback, you know they spent three months writing a review, lived and breathed it and get feedback that says requires improvement. (R1DMA)

This is not an uncommon response to being subject to audit it does mirror somewhat the practitioner's experiences and the issues of trust expressed between the PPs and the SFO reviewers.

However, for SFO reviewers the result is a lack of confidence and a shift in practice that risks further undermining the legitimacy of the process.

It knocks your confidence. (R2DMB)

You know you end up constantly second-guessing yourself. (R2DMD)

What happens is they end up writing it the way it's expected to be by the powers that be. (R2DMC)

But perhaps the most significant challenge is one of transparency and a perceived lack of dialogue between the reviewers and the auditors.

The real issue with the central QA is differences in interpretation of policy [...] and they seem reluctant to listen. (R1DMC)

They never speak to anyone. [...] and when issues are raised the response is very defensive. (R2DMB)

The need for a dialogue between those in power over others (auditor/SFO Reviewer) is fundamental to Bottoms and Tankebe's (2012) model of legitimacy and procedural justice and when those involved do not feel like they have a voice it undermines that sense of legitimacy. The lack of voice in the process was also expressed by the PPs which will be explored further under procedural justice.

4.3.2.2 Fairness, Balance and Context

In relation to this study, elements of fairness and balance have been touched on throughout and are directly related to perceptions of PPs' feelings of blame. In the contested purpose element of this study, the issues of accountability have been explored and whilst it is generally

accepted that there needs to be a process of accountability, this needs to be positioned across all levels of the organisation.

I think accountability should be at various levels (individual, organisational and National) [...] There needs to be a balance to it and all too often politics gets in the way. (R2DMC)

However, a common view expressed was that in the SFO process, this balance is off and the individual PPs are the ones most scrutinised because the focus is on the individual rather than the wider systemic issues or context.

We really should be looking at moving away from blaming an individual to looking at the overall structure and organisational impact and learning. (R1DMA)

This is of course an inherent issue and finding in the literature which predominantly advocates for a whole systems approach to learning from failures (Aylett, 2016; Syed, 2016; Munro, 2019; CIEHF, 2020) in which there is an acceptance that human errors can and will occur but rather than focus on the what happened, there needs to be a contextual understanding of why it happened for improvements to occur.

DMs and PPs alike recognised that even with the best intentions mistakes will happen, especially in the context of probation practice.

It is impossible to eliminate human error. (R2DMC)

It's no secret we all work so hard and are overworked, stressed with high caseloads, it's really difficult to manage that and we have to accept SFOs are going to happen. (R1FGA)

However, the perception is that the SFO process focuses on the actions of individual PPs and ignores the wider situation. There was a belief that there was an interest in the wider contextual issues.

My colleagues might not agree with me, but I do think the central team are interested in the context, you know they want to see what happened but then want to know why. (R1DMC)

In Region 1, clear steps were being made to be more holistic in how reviews are conducted with the introduction of a 'human factors' approach which appears to be welcomed by those involved.

This human factors I really like the idea [...] you know it's trying to understand the case as they (PP) saw it [...] you are really getting to the nub of what was going on (R1DMB)

Nonetheless, the perception of individual responsibility and blame persists and this is because of the final element of legitimacy and a lack of transparency and voice.

4.3.2.3 Procedural Justice

The most undermining element concerning the perception of the legitimacy of the SFO process is one of transparency. Issues of transparency have been touched on in other areas of this study's findings, in particular how perceived secrecy feeds mistrust and negative narratives. Certainly, the literature concerning procedural justice indicates the importance of trust and having a voice (Posthuma, 2003) in which a dialogue is important (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012).

The need for the SFO process to be collaborative was a view shared by some of the DMs.

We should be going in with a genuine collaborative way to try and understand why something did or didn't happen. (R1DMA)

There was a recognition that the process was shrouded in mystery and not greatly understood by those outside of the SFO team.

I think unless you work in the unit, you don't really understand the process. (R2DMF)

Yet the need for the process to be open and transparent not only affects the trust element but would also facilitate a shift in the narratives that exist. This was a view shared by a number of participants.

I think we need to speak about it, to normalise it. (R1FGA)

As stated by Clay-Warner (2006), experiencing a process as procedurally just influences the associated emotional response. This is something that was observed during one of the focus groups where one participant stated:

Just listening to the others today, I'm so much more relaxed about it. (R1FGB)

However, the fundamental issue of transparency relates to the process itself and those who had experienced expressed strong views that they felt like they were being done to and had little control or say in the process or its outcomes.

We have no control over the process, we are excluded from it' 'Yeah, you know it's like we are the ones responsible, but we are not really part of the process, it's like we don't matter. (R2FGB)

This is because the PPs involved in the SFO review are only given access to the resulting actions that apply to them and thus must trust in the SFO Reviewer.

Practitioners have to trust us because they don't see the report. (R2DMD)

However, trust is a psychological state (Camerer, 1998, cited in Lucas and Lovaglia, 2006) that in terms of procedural justice requires a belief in transparency and a voice in the process so that the information presented can be challenged and corrected (Greenberg and Tyler, 1987). Much like the SFO Reviewer's perspective that there is a lack of dialogue with the Q&A process, there is a view that a dialogue is missing from the SFO review process itself with participants stating that '[t]he problem is you have to give the person the right to reply' (R2DMC).

This compounds the sense of not being listened to and a lack of control which for one practitioner resulted in a feeling of isolation.

I felt completely isolated [...] it left me feeling quite angry (R2FGB)

However, this appears to be a common experience of the process. The introduction of human factors and a fishbone review which involves everyone appears to have addressed this need.

With the fishbone, that was great, we had everyone involved in the case all talking about it, I felt really listened to. (R1FGB)

However, as expressed by R1DMC, 'I really like the human factors, but it needs to come from the top-down and that includes the central team and HMIP' For this to be really impactful on staff experiences and perceptions of the SFO process it needs to be a position adopted by the entire organisation. The acceptance of human error and the adoption of a whole systems approach is a position advocated across the literature and is fundamental to developing a learning culture (Munro, 2019; CIEHF, 2020).

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to develop an understanding of how PPs and DMs perceived the SFO process by answering 4 questions. What follows is a summary of the findings for each of those questions followed by a set of recommendations and potential implications of these findings.

5.1.1 Question 1

The first question was to establish what the participants understood to aims and objectives of the SFO process to be. The findings are mostly captured in the theme of contested purpose. What was apparent is that probation staff have a clear understanding of the aims as set out by the MOJ (2021), stating the process to be about learning from failure, accountability and assurance about this learning and, more recently, about providing reassurance and transparency of the process to the victims and their families.

Despite this clarity of understanding, this study suggests that the purposes have become muddled, resulting in a process seen as bureaucratic, over-engineered and confused.

5.1.2 Question 2

The second question set out to understand how PPs and DMs experienced the process and found that the process has a variety of experiences. For all involved, it was viewed as traumatic and the severity of this trauma was dependent on the support the PPs received during the process. There was a high level of anxiety around the process and the language of fear was used throughout the study with many being of the view that the SFO process was about identifying and proportioning blame. This is not an unusual perception and is common with traditional accountability processes (Gillingham and Whittaker, 2023). However, some saw a shift in this and shared positive experiences of the SFO process. Clear attempts are being made in the participating regions to change the narrative and relieve the anxieties that exist around the process.

Nonetheless, the narrative of fear is persistent and, as demonstrated in the final theme, there remains a question of legitimacy surrounding the process that threatens to undermine its ability to drive changes in practice. Certainly, for many the process was experienced

negatively and viewed as an exercise in assurance in which the resulting action plans held little value and/or relevance to preventing future SFOs from occurring.

5.1.3 Question 3

Question 3 sought to understand what influences the organisational response to SFOs and staff perceptions. There is a narrative of fear and blame and it is clear that the role of the media and political oversight are significant factors in both how the organisation responds and in driving the negative narratives. It was evident that high-profile cases that garnered media attention were the most influential in driving negative perceptions, organisational responses and changes to probation practices.

For the DMs, another key influence was the input of the central SFO team and HMIP and the Q&A element of the process. The commonly held view was that this was counterproductive with inconsistencies in the feedback and an undermining of learning objectives to justify the existence of the process itself. There is a view that the process is flawed and the Q&A element perpetuates the bureaucratic and hindsight bias which further serves to undermine the legitimacy of the process with staff.

5.1.4 Question 4

The final question intended to understand what this said about the organisational culture and how the process impacts probation practice. What was clear was that despite some views that there is a genuine desire for the SFO process to be a mechanism of learning, the process was more concerned with proportioning blame and being an organisational defensive mechanism that have had little positive impact on practice.

There was a perception of a culture of fear in the organisation in which the organisation is more concerned with providing assurances to ministers, the public and victims by scapegoating individuals rather than identifying and addressing systemic issues. This has resulted in staff feeling undervalued and unheard.

5.2 Implications for Further Research

A starting point for future research would be to further explore the comparative nature of SFO reviews and that of SCRs (Aylett, 2016; Munro, 2019) and how that learning could be applied to how the Probation Service undertakes SFO reviews. Such research could have

implications for understanding how public sector organisations develop and implement cultures of learning in an increasing environment of negativity and intolerance to failure.

Due to the limitations of this study, a collective narrative could only be implied and a further qualitative study to capture a wider perspective could be undertaken. At the time of writing, there was a widely held belief that the narratives reported in this study exist throughout the Service and attempts are being made to address this. Finally, there is scope to explore how organisational culture in probation impacts staff retention and well-being.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

Ultimately, the findings of this study question the effectiveness of the SFO process in which concerns mirror those found previously (HMIP, 2020a; Jake Phillips, 2023) and suggest a whole-scale review of the current process be undertaken.

Whilst there is a general acceptance that the Probation Service should be held to account for failure, the current process tries to do too much for too many and in doing so has become confused and ineffective. One suggestion would be a clearer definition of purpose and a separation of learning and assurance with clear relevance to failures that contributed to the SFO occurring.

Finally, at the time of writing it is understood that a pilot is being undertaken to introduce human factors (CIEHF, 2020) as a means of creating a culture of learning in the Probation Service. This should be explored further and how the SFO process could adopt these principles to become a more holistic and legitimate process for staff. Certainly, where this has been successful in Region 1 this study found that it had a positive impact on staff perceptions and experiences. This will shift focus to embrace organisational learning and away from individual blame as failures are not down to bad apples and do not occur in isolation (Syed, 2016; Munro, 2019).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Focus Group script:

Opener

Introduction: 10 minutes

Hi, really nice to meet you all.

I would like to start by thanking you all for coming today and participating in this group discussion. I am really excited that I can do this research and believe it has the potential to make a real difference in how probation investigates and responds to SFOs,

You will all be aware of some of the more recent high-profile SFOs and how this was responded to not only by the organisation but more widely including the media.

For full disclosure, I have some lived experience with one of them and it was that experience that piqued my interest in this area and what impact SFOs have on culture and practice and staff experiences.

That said, it's really important to know that I am here doing this as a student and not has a Head of Service in probation.

Confidentiality:

Before we start, I think it's really important to create a space where we can talk freely and feel safe in doing so.

Can I confirm you have all read the participant information sheet and signed and understood the confidentiality statement?

Great, so in writing my research I will take all reasonable steps to anonymise your contributions, but I also think it's really important that we all agree that what we say in this group today isn't shared more widely by the participants. Can I have a show of hands to agree to that please?

Great thanks,

Housekeeping:

I do not see the focus group lasting more than 90 minutes. It will be recorded using the voice recorder in the middle of the table but please just ignore that, it is purely to help me remember what is said because with all the will in the world, I cannot type or write as fast as you will all speak.

I would like to encourage everyone to be involved in the discussion. Because there is so little known about the topic. There are no wrong or right answers and everything you say will be helpful. Please be respectful of each other and listen to each other and try to avoid speaking over each other. The important thing is that everyone has a voice.

And please don't assume I know anything.

Icebreaker/Introduction (10 minutes)

Ok, I am not sure who knows who is around the table, but I am keen to ensure all our voices are heard today. So can we start with a check-in, Just your first name, what you are holding emotionally today, what you have to put aside to be here and what you bring, and what experience have you had of the sfo process. I will go first. Adjust time per person based on group size)

Main discussion (1 hour)

What do PPs understand about the aims/objectives/intent of the sfo review process? 15 minutes

I am interested to know what you all believe is the aim or intention behind the sfo process. Can you tell me about that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Interesting, does anyone see that differently?➤ Is that the official view?➤ How is that communicated to you all?
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How do practitioners experience the process (15 minutes)

So that's the aim, I am wondering then how that differs from your perspective of what actually happens, can you tell me about what you think about how the sfo process lands with practitioners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Can you tell me about what worked really well in the process?➤ Is that from experience of having gone through the SFO process?➤ Is there something in particular that makes you feel that way?➤ Is it supportive
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What influences the response (15 minutes)

Really interesting, the process itself is only one part of our probation/hmpps responds to SFOs, what do we all think influences how the organisation responds to an SFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Is that different for high-profile cases?➤ So, what is the most important factor that shapes the response?
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What do practitioners believe about how the process impacts organisational culture and practice?

That's great, the final part I really want to understand is how this impacts both the organisational culture and practice. Do you think SFOs change the organisational behaviour, if so, how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ So, what does that say about the organisational culture?➤ What about learning? Do you think practice is improved following a SFO review?
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Conclusion and looking to the future. (10 minutes)

Thank you all for coming today, I really appreciate you giving up your time.

It has been very helpful for me, and you have raised some interesting points, some of which I had not even thought of previously.

Over the next week or so if something comes to mind and you think I wish I had said that or likewise there is something you really wish you hadn't said then please do email me.

What happens now, is I have the joy of transcribing what we have talked about today along with some other focus groups and interviews and then will try to make sense of it all in some way.

So, I would like us to finish by checking out, in three words, how you are feeling now.

Thanks again.

Appendix B

Semi-structured interview: guide and interview schedule

Opener

Introduction: 5 minutes

Hi, nice to meet with you and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am excited that I can do this research and believe it has the potential to make a real difference in probation response to SFOs.

You will all be aware of some of the more recent high-profile SFOs and how this was responded to not only by the organisation but more widely including the media. For full disclosure, I have some lived experience with one of them and that experience piqued my interest in this area and what impact SFOs have on culture and practice and staff.

That said, it's really important to know that I am here doing this as a student and not as a Head of Service in probation.

Confidentiality:

Can I confirm you have read the participant information sheet and signed and understood the confidentiality statement?

Great, so in writing my research I will take all reasonable steps to anonymise your contributions, but I also think it's really important that given your role it could be possible for some readers to make an educated guess as to who some of the contributors may be, are you still happy to proceed?

Housekeeping:

I do not see the interview taking longer than an hour. It will be recorded using the voice please just ignore that, it is purely to help me remember what is said because with all the will in the world I cannot type or write as fast as you will all speak.

There are no right or wrong answers so please talk freely and please don't assume I know anything.

Icebreaker/Introduction (5 minutes)

Can you start by telling me about yourself, your current role, how long you have worked in probation, and what brought you to probation?

Main discussion (40 minutes)

What do probation DMs understand about the aims/objectives/intent of the sfo review process?

<p>I am interested to know what you all believe is the aim or intention behind the sfo process. Can you tell me about that?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Does that differ from the official position or policy? ➤ Is that the official view? ➤ How is that communicated to you and the staff?
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How do practitioners and DMs experience the process (10 minutes)

<p>So that's the aim, I am wondering then how that differs from your perspective of what actually happens, can you tell me about what you think about how the sfo process lands with staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can you tell me about what worked really well in the process? ➤ What's your experience of how practitioners respond to the SFO process? ➤ Is there something in particular that makes you feel that way about the process? How could the process be different?
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What influences the response (10 minutes)

<p>Really interesting, the process itself is only one part of how probation/hmpps responds to SFOs, what do we all think influences how the organisation responds to an SFO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Is that different for high-profile cases? ➤ So, what is the most important factor that shapes the response? ➤ Do you think anything influences your individual response?
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What do practitioners believe about how the process impacts organisational culture and practice? (10 minutes)

<p>That's great, the final part I really want to understand how this impacts both the organisational culture and practice. Do you think SFOs change the organisational culture, if so, how?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ So, what does that say about the organisational culture? ➤ What about learning? Do you think practice is improved following a SFO review? ➤ If you could change the process, what would you do differently?
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Conclusion and looking to the future. (5 minutes)

Thanks again, I really appreciate you giving up your time.

It has been very helpful for me, and you have raised some interesting points, some of which I had not even thought of previously.

Is there anything you would want to add at this point?

Over the next week or so if something comes to mind and you think I wish I had said that or likewise there is something you really wish you hadn't said then please do email me. I will share with you the transcription of the interview once it has been completed and you can then take out anything you really don't want included.

Appendix C

Project title: **The organisational response to Serious Further Offences: Understanding probation staff perceptions.**

Researchers: **Steven Calder, Head of Service Barking, Dagenham and Havering PDU and Student MSt Applied Criminology, Penology and Management**

Probation Staff Participant Information Sheet

Who am I?

I am a qualified probation practitioner who has worked within the Service since 2004. In that time, I have held a number of roles Probation Officer, Quality Development Officer, Senior Probation Officer and I am currently the Head of PDU for Barking, Dagenham and Havering.

I am currently studying for the MSt in Applied Criminology, Penology and Management with the IOC, University of Cambridge.

Why am I doing this study?

The research is being conducted as part of my MSt study and aims to understand how the Probation Service as an organisation responds to Serious Further Offences, in particular how the responses and the current SFO review process is experienced and/or perceived by probation staff. I am particularly interested in what the current response suggests about the organisational culture and how understanding this better can assist in the development of a learning environment.

What will participation involve?

Participation will involve either participation in a focus group consisting of between 6-8 frontline PPs involved in sentence management that will last up to 90 minutes or a 1-2-1 semi-structured interview of up to 60 minutes.

Both will look at developing a collective understanding of how the current SFO process is experienced or perceived.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and this will not disadvantage you in any way.

Are there any risks involved in taking part?

All reasonable attempts will be made to anonymise participant details from any published materials. Whilst the interviews and focus groups are all with current probation staff it is recognised that some participants may find discussing the subject of Serious Further Offences as distressful.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

There will not be any financial reward for participation however, by engaging with the research you will be contributing to learning about how as an organisation probation responds to and reviews Serious Further Offences. The research aims to better inform probation practice and what is needed to develop a culture of learning.

Will what I say be kept confidential?

The information that you share in the interview or focus group will normally be kept completely confidential. All participant's details will be anonymised and focus group members will be asked to abide by a confidentiality statement at the start of the groups.

Whilst all reasonable steps will be taken to anonymise all participants given the bespoke nature of some of those being interviewed there is a possibility that some participants could be identified. For this reason, all participants will be able to contact me for two weeks following the interview or focus groups to amend any statements made.

The interviews and focus groups will initially be recorded however, this will be destroyed once the data has been transcribed. All transcription notes will be held securely and destroyed following the completion of the study.

Will my contribution remain anonymous?

If you agree I will be using quotes from the interviews and focus groups in my research report and any subsequent publications. This will be done in such a way that you cannot be identified (see above caveat). All participants will be given a pseudonym and details changed to limit any possibility of being identified.

The results of the interviews and focus groups will be collectively analysed thus, further limiting the risk of any participant being easily identified.

How do I agree to take part in the study?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to complete a consent form prior to participating in either the interview or focus group, confirming that you understand what the study involves and have had a chance to discuss any questions with the researcher.

What if I want to withdraw from the study?

You are free to stop the interview or leave a focus group at any time without giving an explanation. You can also insist that the content of your contribution so far is excluded from the study, without having to explain why. You may make this decision at any point up until **31st August 2023**, when I will begin writing the research findings. If you withdraw the records of your participation will be destroyed.

Where can I go for support should participation in the research cause me anxiety or distress?

If, once you have the focus group or interview, you feel anxious or distressed about some of the things that you have talked about, you will be able to access support by contacting Pam Assist (details will be provided prior to interview or focus groups)

What will happen to the findings of the study?

The resulting data gathered will be subject to thematic analysis to develop a collective understanding of the perception and experiences of the organisational response to Serious Further Offences. This will be published as part of an MSt dissertation with the University of Cambridge.

Following completion of the dissertation, its findings may be used to develop briefing and/or training materials to be shared with the relevant HMPPS departments.

What if I want more information about the study, or want to complain about some aspect of it?

The study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the IOC, University of Cambridge. If you would like more information or have any questions or complaints about the research, please feel free to speak to me directly, or write to: The IOC,

Thank you for your time in reading this information. If you have any further questions at any stage of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Steve Calder

07922 818 474,

Sdc61@cam.ac.uk

Appendix D

Project title: **The organisational response to Serious Further Offences: Understanding probation staff perceptions.**

Researchers: **Steven Calder, Head of Service, Barking, Dagenham and Havering Probation Delivery Unit and MSt Applied Criminology, Penology and Management.**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the following four statements.

Please note that these are essential conditions for the interview/focus group to take place.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the study (or have had it read out to me and have understood it) and have had a chance to ask questions. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I do not have to answer any of the researcher's questions if I do not wish to, and that I can withdraw at any time, without giving reasons, until 31st August 2023 . | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I agree to take part in the study, which means being interviewed by the researcher. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Please answer YES or NO to the following two statements by ticking the appropriate box.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. I agree to our interview being recorded. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to let the researcher use written quotes from our interviews and conversations, as long as this is done in such a way that all reasonable steps are taken to remove the possibility of my being identified. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. I agree to let the researcher use anonymised quotes in any future learning materials that be developed following the completion of the research.
- YES** **NO**
-

Name of participant: XXXX

Date: _____
 01/08/2023

Signature: _____
 XXXX

Name of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researchers contact details: Steven Calder 07922 818 474, Sdc61@cam.ac.uk

Appendix E

sfo perceptions

Codes

Name	Description
contested purpose	overarching theme where clear questions of purpose of process mentioned
accountability	being held to account for actions taken or not. assigning level of accountability, who is responsible
HR	connections to code, conduct and discipline
blame, hung out to dry, scapegoat	practitioner sense being blamed by the organisation, being held responsible for failing "hung out to dry"/ "scapegoated"
assurance influence	things that influence on sfo process and organisational response. issues of assurance involving sfo process. assurance as one of the defined purposes/aims of sfo process
hmip	HMIP inspectorate, audit and oversight, also influence on SFO process
media	all mentions of media, and general public
ministers	Ministerial and political involvement and influence on sfo process
victims	victims in terms of assurance as part of process. victims in terms of impact on perceptions and impact on practitioners
learning	learning as a purpose of the sfo process. shared learning and practice improvements as a result of SFO's
improvement activities	activities related to SFO learning, (not action plan specific)

Name	Description
emotional connection	emotional investment and impact of working with offenders, sfo and experience of audit
fear	expressions of fear about scrutiny, criticism, blame, hr, disciplinary, failure, exposed
anxiety	expressions of anxiety about the sfo process,
experience of process	disclosures about how participants experience the sfo process
perception personal narrative	specific personal disclosure of perceptions, narrative and experience
support	do staff feel supported importance of support, where is support received, experiences of support (yes/no)
reassurance	support but specifically detailing reassurance about case management or sfo process
narrative	organisational narrative, narratives or stories held by participants about the sfo process and organisational response
sfo type	sfo type including type of offence etc.
high profile	all mentions of high-profile sfo cases, those that reach media and ministerial level
type of report	typer of report, i.e. early look, full review, HMIP
self-blame	personnel expressions of self-blame, responsibility, guilt, shame, failure, closely linked to emotional connection to case management
pride	
legitimacy	an overarching theme exploring participant's view of the legitimacy of sfo process. in particular, effectiveness and procedural justice
buy-in	perceptions of engagement with process,
professional curiosity	trust in professionalism

Name	Description
scrutiny	audit and review including oversight of reviews and quality assurance
audit	[practitioners audit review]
hindsight bias	views of process being from position of hindsight
lack of trust	feeling of not being trusted
consistency	
HMIP	hmip quality assurance of process, different from hmip assurance/influence
PPG	"Demands from the centre" central audit, governance of reports and action plans and reviews
the process	sfo review process, understanding and perceptions and experiences
actions	actions undertaken as result of or during sfo process
action plans	action plans and recommendations recommendation's from sfo reviews
relevance	
repetitiveness	sub-code of action plans, repetitive nature of plans (sub-code due to number of mentions)
changes in practice	changes in practice and or policy following sfo reviews
policy	policy-specific sub-code of changes in practice
effectiveness	all reviews have same actions
balance	balance of actions and responsibility and actions assigned (different from blame)
contextualisation	context of sfo, factors that may or may not impact on areas of improvements
factors	individual, lack of context, focus on process and individual actions, pressures, workload, and staffing. Burnout

Name	Description
burnout	repetitive nature
WORKLOAD	workload as a factor, separate sub-code due to frequency of mention
human factors	big picture, understanding context, fishbone analysis
context but not described as human factors	discussing context settings akin to human factors but not specific
training and delivery of human factor process	delivery, training, briefings on SFOs and process.
staff knowledge and experience	skills, knowledge, training levels of sentence management staff
confidence	participant and practitioner confidence in self (not process)
recruitment	recruitment and staffing levels
fairness of process	perceptions of fairness of process
responsibility	individual, organisation, offender
equity of blame	assigning of responsibility, feelings of misplaced responsibility, responsibility not being shared
offender	recognition or not of the offender's involvement in the commissioning of the SFO
expectations of practice	
public protection	responsibility of duty to protect public, risk management

Name	Description
transparency	overarching code of transparency concerning sfo reviews and process
communication	how actions/outcomes are communicated.
transparency of process	specific mentions of how transparent and understood the process is
taboo, secrecy	sub-code of transparency of process. specifically mentions how sfo are not discussed
voice	perceptions of voice in process, being listened too by others/organisation having control
listened too	right to feedback
trust	
trust in sfo team	trust in sfo teams from practitioners and auditors