

Joint Union Survey of Unpaid Work Members

March 2025

1. Introduction

In March 2025, Napo and UNISON undertook a joint union survey of our members working in Unpaid Work (UPW).

Unpaid work is an integral part of the Probation Service, but there is major challenge to community delivery, often in remote locations, which runs the risk of separating UPW and its staff from colleagues working in more mainstream probation activities.

So, the unions wished to hear directly from UPW members about their working lives and what it was they felt was good, bad or indifferent at work.

The results of the survey, set out below, give a very disturbing picture of the way in which our members in UPW feel about their working conditions, the equipment they use, their health and safety, the way in which they are managed, and their pay and conditions.

Our members' testimony provides compelling evidence that UPW is in need of a radical overhaul to improve working conditions, health and safety, management and pay and conditions.

Napo and UNISON are therefore calling for an UPW Improvement Plan under ministerial authority, with trade union and staff involvement, to agree a programme of work to urgently address the failings identified by this survey.

2. Synopsis

This report sets out the results of our joint union member survey under the following headings:

- Participation
- Headline Findings
- Member Testimony
- Conclusions and Action Plan

3. Participation

- 125 UPW members participated in the survey
- 84 were UPW supervisors
- 34 were UPW placement co-ordinators
- 11 were UPW operations managers
- 5 gave other job titles

4. Findings

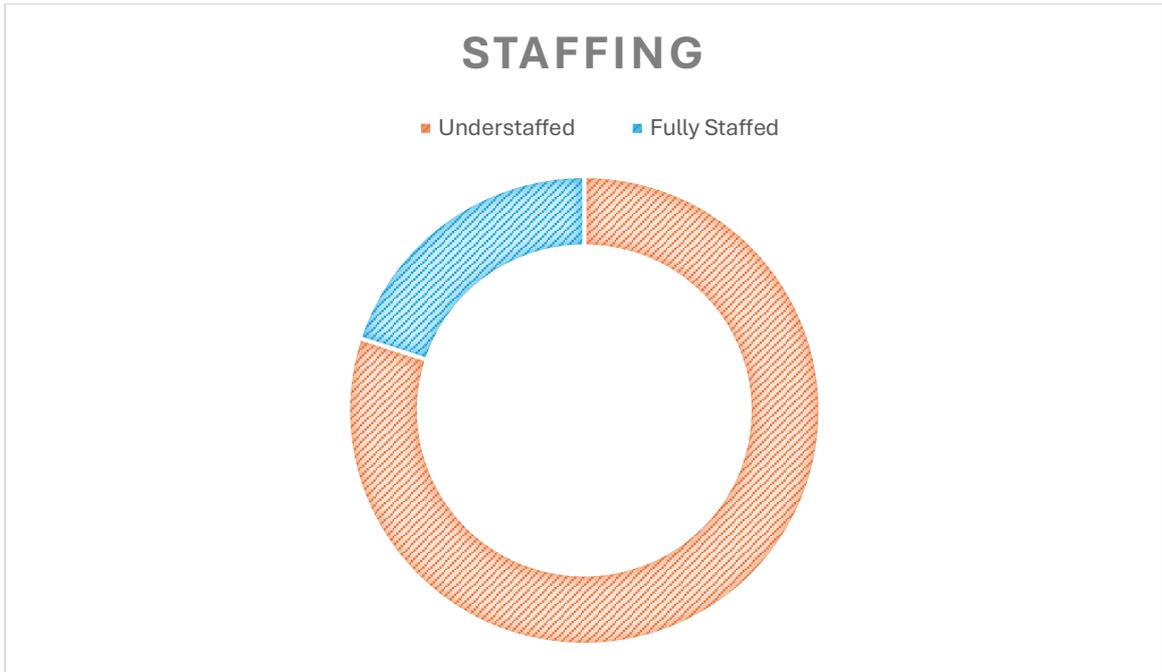
The key survey findings were as follows:

Pay

- 17% of respondents said that they had been downgraded upon reunification in 2021
- 53% had not been downgraded

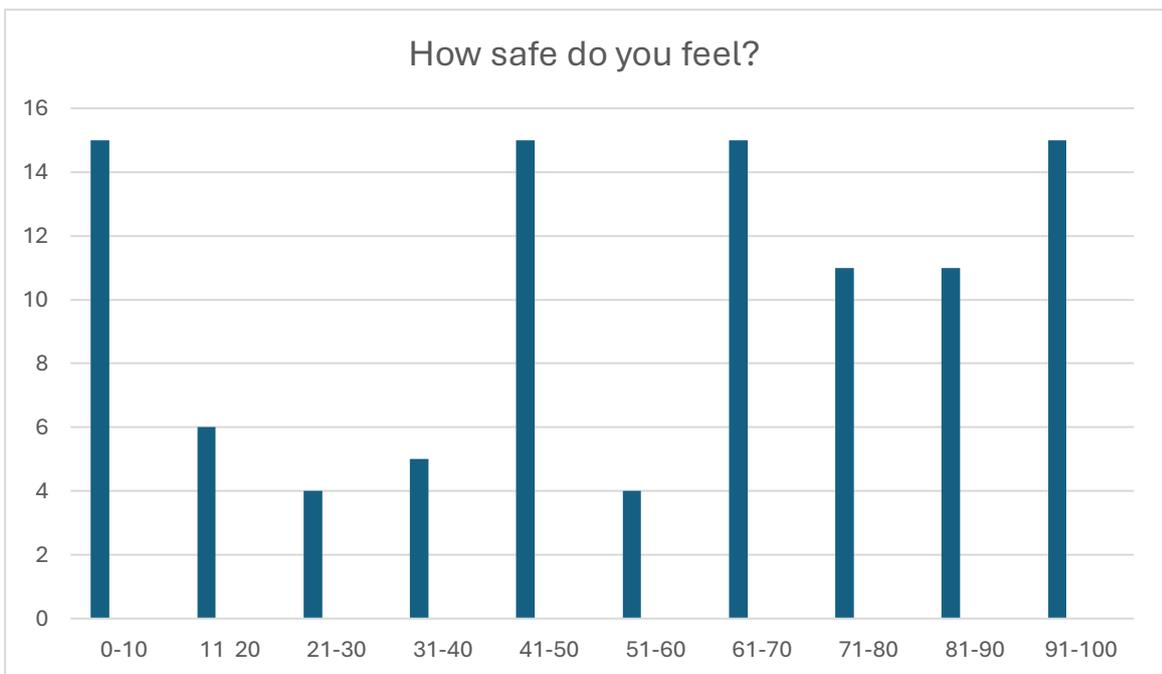
Staffing

- 80% of respondents said that their teams were understaffed



How safe do you feel at work?

- We asked members to give a rating of how safe they feel at work, where 0 was completely safe and 100 was completely unsafe.
- 56% of our members told us that they feel more unsafe than safe.
- 15% of all respondents told us that they scored their lack of safety between 90 and 100 and 37% of respondents scored it between 71 and 100.



Verbal/Physical Aggression

- 61% of respondents confirmed that they had been subjected to verbal or physical aggression.

Lone Working

- 49% said that they worked as a lone worker on a daily basis
- 21% reported working as a lone worker for more than half the week

Average Group Size

- We asked members about average group sizes. The most common group sizes were between 7 and 8 (over 50% of respondents).
- However, our members comments about group sizes raise further concerns:

“My average group size is 7. To achieve this, managers are oversubscribing meaning there can sometimes be 16 on the list. Last Sunday for example I had to deal with 13 POP'S lone working on my own, two being accessed as high risk, my nearest colleague was 7 miles away. I felt overwhelmed and this isn't the first time. This is an ongoing issue and these major concerns are swiftly swept under the carpet.”

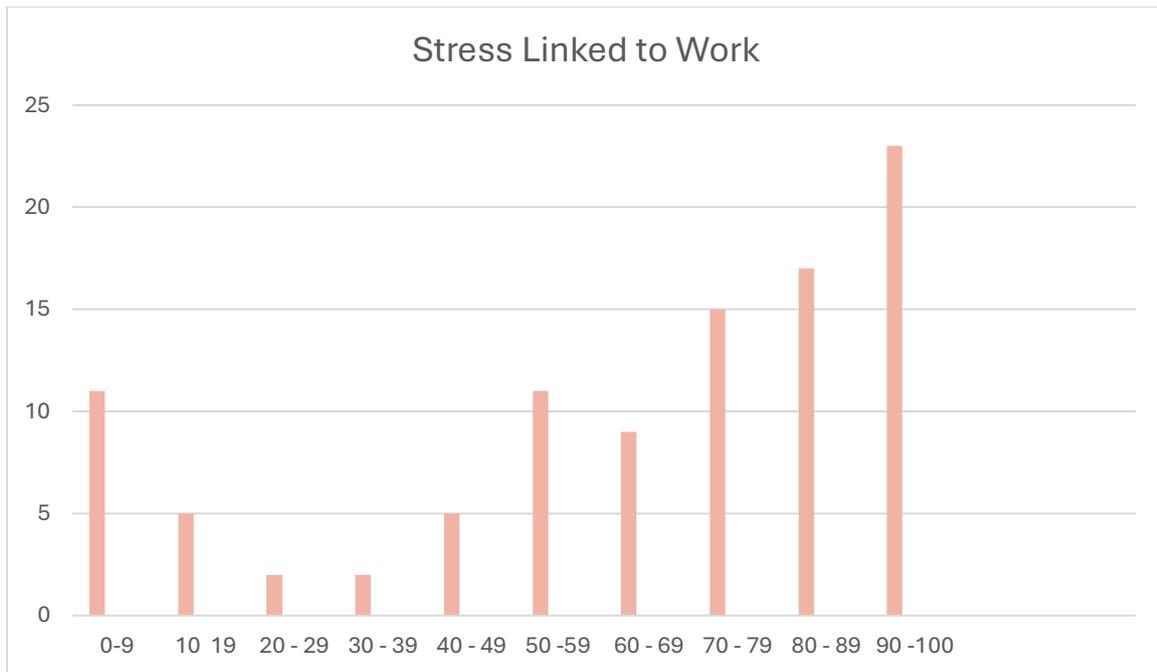
“7 per supervisor but can have up to 25 attend with one supervisor then have to arrange cover from other areas.”

“14 are allocated to groups with only 8 allowed to stay which causes challenges from the others went sent away”

“7 (Should be 8 but due to new vans not being suitable to carry 8)”

Stress Levels

- We asked members to score their stress linked to work between 0 and 100, with 0 being work causing no stress and 100 being work causing maximum stress.
- 23% of respondents scored their work related stress between 90 and 100, a further 17% scored their work related stress between 80 and 89.
- 75% of respondents rated their work related stress between 50 and 100.



Recording on Sphera

- 37% said that they had recorded violence or stress on Sphera

Vehicles

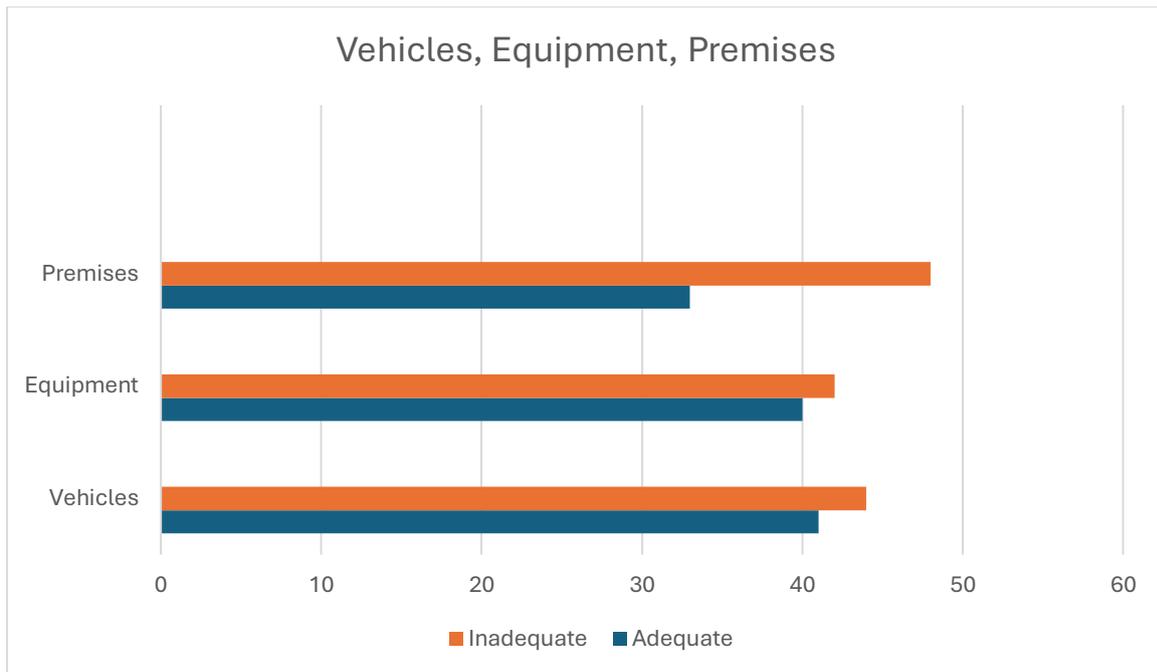
- 44% described their vehicles as inadequate
- 41 % said that their vehicles were adequate
- 40% reported that they were not confident that the minibuses they were asked to drive were within the legal weight limit

Equipment

- 42% said that the equipment which is provided to UPW groups is inadequate
- 40% said that the equipment was adequate.

Premises

- 48% said that the premises which they worked out of were inadequate
- 33% said that their premises were adequate



Rest Breaks

- 53% of supervisors said that they were unable to take a rest break during the working day
- 29% did not know if a rest break was included in their hours

5. Member Testimony

As part of the survey, we asked members to make any comments they wished to add to their answers. The following is a selection of those comments. They provide a sobering assessment of the organisational health of the UPW workforce. The verbatim responses are grouped by the following subject headings:

5.1 Facilities/Equipment

- My actual place of work where I store my van is not fit for purpose (Winter specifically) No heating, poor lighting. I'm expected to maintain tools and carry out other tasks in this environment and it's just not suitable.
- The tools are old and poorly maintained. The vans and tools are dirty. PPE especially are dirty and unclean. Management do not challenge staff who are responsible for tool and PPE maintenance.
- Boot policy causes great stress, giving out dirty boots, causes friction. Tools in poor state of repair and many not fit for purpose.

- The facilities where I am based are appalling, dirty and operate from shipping containers predominately. The freezing conditions around loading/unloading vehicles in the winter is often intolerable - a number of the locks used freeze regularly in the winter months.
- Also the uniform since moving from CRC is disgraceful. Most staff are forced to purchase their own boots, and in most cases pants. Going from CRC to NPS has been the worst experience I've had.
- The equipment is cheap rubbish - buy better not more. The only issue with our building is we aren't allowed heating and it's freezing in there I stand outside to warm up.
- Tools given aren't robust or last long. Takes an age to procure equipment.
- The base we work from is wholly inadequate. No toilets, no lighting, no security. We just rent a car park in the city centre. The tools are often of poor quality which makes our job harder.
- Stressed at work due to inappropriate wet weather gear not fit for purpose and having to work in it all day ending up ill or off work, working conditions and management seem to be more interested in bums on seats than staff welfare and wellbeing.
- Our base is unfit for purpose as there is no private office for confidential conversations/meetings. It is never heated on a weekend and some week days and is often below legal working temperatures.
- Some sites have appalling toilet facilities. One site has an outdoor portaloo toilet which for female staff members with a group of 8 male POPS is particularly unpleasant. Many times I've had to sit on the floor with POP's in a corridor when there have been no chairs or areas for breaks. No heating on during winter months in most of the locations I work.
- Equipment is usually poor and most of the day can be spent either fixing or trying to make equipment work.
- Our unit has currently failed a fire inspection in terms of the second floor does not meet the necessary fire regulations to be used as an office so no work can take place up there which means on occasion working downstairs without any adequate heating.

- All our PPE and tools is budget orientated and ordered by people that don't know the difference between a spade and a shovel. Seriously. They have a few supervisors that did the tasks for a living prior and are ignored when offered their knowledge. It's run by chair people not by Trades people these days

5.2 Group Sizes

- The chronic understaffing situation has to be the worst thing for me. As a Supervisor having 15 listed on a weekend knowing you can only take 7 is quite frankly ridiculous. Senior Management should come along and see the confrontation it causes when you have to tell someone who has made the effort to come that you have not got the space to take them. This turns the role from non confrontational to confrontational in a split sec.
- I have worked as a supervisor for many years and feel that the risk of pops and overall risk to us has changed significantly. To manage the offenders as a punishment in my opinion the max ratio should be 6 offenders to 1 supervisor.

5.3 Workloads/Staffing

- PC role work load is too much. we have to cover so much like Inductions, IP's, projects, RA's, Fleet, Equipment, Beneficiaries, Covering sites.
- All staff in upw are over worked, short staffed and have to juggle 100 things at once and there is no sign of slowing down, just getting worse and risks of people are getting worse also.
- The upw team have been subject to significant staffing shortages for over 4 years- we are currently running at 5.2 fte and have a target staffing of 9 fte. They won't let us have agency supervisors to fill those numbers - they won't give us true data - they don't share with us budgets and what our staffing should be- we were put on a recruitment freeze from September 2023- September 2024 even though we were not up to staffing targets - people are stressed, leaving in droves, cannot cope with the work- we feel unsafe at work and have simply had enough.
- We can't recruit more supervisors as the pay does not adequately reflect the nature and difficulty of the job we do.
- The projects are rubbish and the constant litter picking is not passing any sort of pro-social or practical skills on to the pop so better facilities for staff better projects and to be allowed to supervise and also better supervisors to be taken on with skills to pass on as the staff retention is an absolute joke.

- We Supervisors seem to be the muck on everybody else's shoes. We are least thought of and put on more and more. Coordinators work has been pushed onto us gradually over the years I feel we have enough to do. They who work in offices have proper breaks in nice warm environments and a brew whenever they feel the mood for one or a snack. Not for us. We are expected to work in any weather without quality clothing and adequate footwear.
- No our rest break/dinner is supposed to be taken at the end of the day when we have sorted our vans out back at the depot. For example the people on probation are out for seven hours, we start at 7.30am (officially) do a van check, load all the boots that we need for the day and equipment we need into the van. We are pretty rural so our first pick up could be 8 00am, then 8.15am, then 8.30am and then 8.45am then travel to our work site so at the end of their shift we have to drop them off after 7 hours so we do the same drop offs again then head off back to the depot so by the time you're back at the depot all you want to do is sort the van out and go home and not take our lunch break in a depot at the end of a day's work. That's why I and my colleagues believe if we as supervisors were coupled up would help us all tremendously as one supervisor come the end of the shift could head off straight back to the depot with the boots and the equipment and off load everything while the other supervisor drops the people on probation off at their respective drop off points. This would help with anxiety, stress etc and also help us stop rushing about in peak time traffic which could result in speeding offences and more seriously cause a crash. If the Supervisors were coupled up together this would make the job more manageable, enjoyable and overall help with people's wellbeing.

5.4 Vehicles

- The van situation with the weight ambiguity is quite concerning. In my opinion the Service has made a massive mistake in getting these Renault Master vans. They also have a mysterious battery drain and I have been left stranded once already with a flat battery with no reason. There are other cases of this at other units. There is a theory that there has been too many add on features that drain the battery (Diesel Heater, Rear Lighting, Spotlights, Weight Monitors) to name a few.
- Vehicle are not fit for use, we have a welfare & hire vehicle and we are unable to put tools on them due to not being able to carry petrol.

- Vans are, to put it bluntly dustbins on wheels. We are understaffed both office based (as PPC) and field based as a Supervisor.
- The vans should be properly looked after and inspected regularly and not by supervisors.
- New vehicles purchased are not fit for purpose due to weight limit issues and like for like replacement would be much better. We will have to change the way we work on behalf of local authorities due to the extremely poor decision to purchase the new inadequate vehicles. No consultation happened during the process and the new vehicles are an ongoing embarrassment to the service.
- We are not listened to regarding the van weights the van is overloaded daily. We have been promised scales so we are working within the law but then told the scales are not to be used and switched off. It's all about targets being met and not safety.
- All the new minibuses that were ordered came without any ramps or means to load the vehicle with heavier items. If a supervisor is working solo then there is no adequate way for them to lift heavy items into the van.

5.5 Health and Safety

- We are getting more high risk people on probation but no extra safety precautions have been put in place to safeguard us. I have been threatened on multiple occasions.
- Told by senior managers and evident from people on probation that there is a lot more high risk people on unpaid work, there has been no discussion of what is happening in terms of safety precautions, as lone working devices were introduced when we had hardly any high or medium risk.
- Pops who are threatening and abusive are not dealt with properly and appear to return to do their hours with a slap on the wrist or moved to another supervisor.
- Supervisors are expected to work with a group of up to 7 potentially high risk PoPs with no body cam, just a people safe device which sometimes fails.
- I am often a lone worker with up to 8 POPs with varying degrees of behavioural, emotional, drug induced, alcohol induced issues. Exposed to foul language, sexist comments constantly, but have only felt significantly 'threatened' on a handful of occasions. The size of the group is largely

irrelevant. It only ever takes one individual to change the entire dynamic of the working day.

5.6 Management

- Senior management need to get a grip with what EVERYONE from middle managers , PPCs and Supervisors are having to deal with. Things have got and are getting worse across all areas of our business.
- Always feel stressed and apprehensive when taking others supervisor teams because the no consistency when applying rules. Line managers aware and nothing is done until a big incident happens.
- Placement Coordinators role is ever expanding taking on more and more work away from UPW supervisors who are stood around in the mornings and upon returning back doing nothing and completing more work from the admin team, now PPWS has come in also yet PC's still expected to source new UPW projects, keep current projects up to date with compliance, conduct site visits etc. Placement Coordinators should be band 4 and have some line management responsibility of UPW supervisors in the ever absence of Op's managers as they are ignored when UPW supervisors are addressed/advised of not adhering to H&S matters, non compliance to projects packs etc, when reported to management they do not act on this!
- Some staff over step their role and take on management role. Management allows this. We never have face-face supervisor meetings - when PCs do. Our team is ill-informed and never consulted in project decisions. We are told what to do, never asked of involved with decision making. The team morale is very low.
- I believe that a set shift patterns for supervisors would go a long way to improve not only delivery but also help build up working relationships with POPS. In my area of Coordinator I feel that I can't plan a diary as I have my days constantly changed and asked to prioritise other things from day to day. The whole management structure in UPW does not value the good staff they have. Things have to change !
- Management just want numbers . Not bothered about health and wellbeing. Do not get any breaks as always in watch and guard. Supervisors not listened to . An atmosphere of coercion and ignorance. Nothing that is said is listened to. Everything is taken personally.

- There is little support other than random phone calls dressed up as welfare checks whilst out on groups. The aspiration of joint working between PC's and Supervisors is non-existent, the support from a manager aside of tick box phone calls is woeful. No team meetings are conducted, so no platform to debate issues or necessary changes/improvements. We have 'regional' meetings; merely a diktat for managers with no ability for staff to have any form of meaningful input. The last time I had any meaningful form of supervision meetings can be measured in years. Senior management implement changes without appropriate forms of dialogue and most changes are reactive.
- Plus the Senior UPW manager has no idea of what really goes on in UPW daily Duties. SHAME/HEART BREAKING. I know so many staff who have left, or even took a pay Band drop to get away from the UPW management.
- Just think that the senior leaders and managers are more interested in facts and stats and not the day to day running of CP. Those new minibuses are a prime example of no consultation with CP staff on the ground and a total waste of resources. The management team have been recruited from outside the organisation so do not have a clue how things operate.
- Our job is a hard job but is being made nearly impossible due to managers who have never worked in probation being in charge of making rules that affect our daily tasks.
- I have had a few incidents where I have had aggression aimed towards me in last year. I have correctly reported it to Managers and nothing seemed to be done. Pops have just been allowed to complete their hours.
- Serious lack of communication in our area. Our team doesn't collectively work on processes, it's one person seeking information from individuals on their own instead of discussing as a group - but this fits their agenda and not what it best for the team / organisation. Process changes are not communicated out to PDUs despite them having a direct impact on their daily workload.
- MY WORKPLACE HAS NO STRUCTURE AND THE MORALE IS VERY LOW. MANAGEMENT IS VERY POOR, STAFF ARE CLAIMING WORK DAYS WHEN THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO DO SITE VISITS YET WE NEVER SEE ANYONE. OUR CO-ORDINATORS USED TO VISIT THE SITES IF IT WAS A NEW JOB NOW WE HAVE NO GUIDANCE. IT'S A SHAMBLES AND I FEEL UNSAFE WITH WHAT'S HAPPENING ESPECIALLY WITH NO CAMERAS ON THE VANS.

- Stress relates to poor management/leadership not the actual job. We are kept in the dark about what is going on. Always the last to know but expected to carry on without a manager or guidance. Staff are treated very differently causing major stress and anxiety to the ones being victimised.
- Poor management, serving the needs of ministers before others. Total cowboy outfit.
- In the past 3 or so years UPW has become a laughing stock and no wonder other staff in probation have no respect for UPW and the pop as it has gone from the best to the worst, all down to the current management team. The bullying culture is well and truly alive as most people in UPW have had it happen to them, but when it is reported it gets swept under the carpet so I guess it's not what you know it's who you know and nothing will be done apart from losing your own job. The staff has been completely decimated by the current management team but this has been allowed to happen by whoever makes the decisions at the very top. If this was a private company it would have went bust in the first week as the current team have no idea about how UPW works and they will tell you that to your face, but here they are telling you what to do and if your face fits then you will be fine and to get a manager's job. You don't even need an interview so what chance would a well experienced UPW staff member have to move on.
- Our day to day management is appalling to say the least. One rule for one and one rule for others. Moral is very low. Management aggression has to stop. Shouts and swears constantly. Senior managers don't listen to supervisors at all.
- I feel stressed due to management mood swings. Dealing with high risk offenders. With no support. One rule for one supervisor and another for the rest of us.

5.7 Training

- Extra work and training is constantly being requested but no time allocated to complete it. Management doesn't seem to realise our role is to supervise, which we cannot do to an acceptable standard if we are on phones/laptops trying to complete mandatory reading. Also a lot of the training is aimed at probation officers - if we are expected to do the work of probation officers or health and safety managers we should be being paid at a higher grade.
- As Coordinators, we are expected to induct up to 12 high risk PoPs and complete 3 way meetings with them when we have had no training on how to complete any of the tasks we are asked to do - especially 3 way meetings.

Lack of training and lack of support is awful. Lack of understanding and/or care from senior leaders is awful.

5.8 Enforcement

- I have an understanding of Delius and far too many POP's are not dealt with robustly by their OM's for not attending, there are so many POP's that have way too many acceptable absences with no reasons. If this was dealt with more effectively lists would be smaller, instead of POP's turning up once in a blue moon to appease their OM

5.9 Rest Breaks

- Supervising the team during break times . The break out room provided to seat and eat / drink / rest . However some members will smoke . Unless the supervisor takes all team outside at same time .. there is a balance with teams . They are outside smoking or are supervised inside . Supervisors can't be everywhere . The bigger the team the more variables occur , resulting in stress.
- Supervisors have to have breaks with people on probation present at all times. The extra payment for this was removed years ago.
- I have to supervise a group during my lunch break. I do not get separate lunch or breaks from the group.
- We work 7.24 hours each day, no rest, no recuperation. Management stating we get a paid break is that the day is all set up for the POP. We cannot leave the site so I personally think a compromise is most definitely needed.
- How can you have a rest when supervising up to 7 pops ?
- We Supervisors have to Supervise up to 8 pops a day from 07.30 to 15.30 without a break only time we get a minute is to go to toilet.
- I do not have a rest break as such as I still have to supervise the Pops. I have worked for Probation for a long time and find that it's not as good as it was since privatisation it's gone downhill. It's a shame.
- A rest break should be taken but not all sites work the same, the set up for some of the sites makes it more difficult to supervise alone as the toilet is on

the other side of the building and separate from work area and/or lunch break facilities.

- Due to the nature of the supervisors work we are constantly supervising even if the PoP are having lunch we need to be aware of anything that can happen between others on the van. Countylines, cohesion, and violence so taking a meaningful break isn't always possible.
- We supervisor for 7.5 hrs we don't have rest break we have lunch break but still supervising.
- I am aware that we are legally entitled to a break after working for 6 hours, we do not get one!
- No personal breaks on a 9.25 hour day as unable to leave pop's unattended.
- As a female supervisor working with males, often unable to have breaks and bathroom breaks are quick so not to leave a group unsupervised. Double groups with two supervisors on shift would support each supervisor on shift.
- When having a break, we have to ensure that people on probation are still supervised.

5.10 Pay and Conditions

- We had a lunch allowance taken away from us when we moved over to Government, yet we supervise the whole 7 hours with the people we supervise. With the CRC we were paid the same money even if we booked a weekend on annual leave, now if I book a Saturday or Sunday or both off as annual leave we are NOT allowed to claim unsocial hours, meaning I lose money for simply taking leave.
- No meaningful change to pay since I began the role 20 years ago. Unable to recruit and if they do they can't retain staff as they are asking for far too wider a skill set against the remuneration in place.
- Pay for Coordinators does not match the tasks we are asked to do. We believe we should be band 4 due to the volume of tasks and responsibilities that are handed to us. Something needs to change.
- We have also had our Flexi time removed and we must ask colleagues if they can cover a holiday. Civil service policies are not part of this department it's being run like a private company by certain members of the management team.

- I have no chance to breathe from 8.36 - 16.00 I'm constantly on the go (as mentioned no break) it's really affecting my health and wellbeing, and I for one cannot wait to leave a job I once loved. I was proud to work for the service, but the way it's being run is borderline ridiculous. Imagine putting this in a job description. No breaks, No Flexi, No work- life balance, Holidays will be declined (business needs), No support, If you don't like all above you can leave (said to me personally), Unapproachable senior management. Appalling department to work for at present. There are some good people left, but honest hard working people aren't going to put up with this for much longer.
- On line sat at home completing ETE. Then to top everything off if I use my A/L on a weekend I can't claim unsociable hours which I would be £150 down for weekend. I accumulate half of my entitlement working weekends as I work 4 days in week, 37 hours a week.
- The pay is poor, you get paid more to cut grass privately, we do it while looking after a group. It can be a struggle to get basic things to make work life better, while silly amounts of money is spent on things that should be cheap.
- My Line Manager raised the need to have our role re-evaluated as after renationalisation we were merged and both of the areas still have very different job roles with different tasks as well as now undertaking much more tasks than before hence the workload stress, along with new paperwork, risk assessments and agreements being put into place so now there is no way to complete our job daily without always being behind. The UPW Manager informed us at our recent UPW Roadshow that there will be no job re-evaluation without any formal explanation or reason.

6 . Conclusions

It is very clear from the survey results and member testimony above that unpaid work is currently not being run efficiently or effectively by HMPPS on behalf of the taxpaying public. Worse still, unpaid work is not a safe place for our members.

Five years on from reunification, many UPW members responding to the survey look back favourably on their time working for a CRC compared with how things are now.

Across the board, HMPPS is failing both those on unpaid work orders and the staff employed to deliver those orders. It is difficult to single out any particular area of delivery for particular criticism, but management was the most commonly referred to as failing among a long list of things which are not working. An overhaul of UPW management practice looks long overdue. UPW staff need to feel valued by HMPPS and listened to.

Overall, the survey findings point to a service which continues to be chronically underfunded leading to members having to work out of unsafe premises with inadequate equipment and vehicles. HMPPS must respond to these failings as a matter of urgency, with an immediate health and safety risk assessment and associated remedial measures. The health, safety and welfare of UPW staff must become the first priority in turning round a failing service.

The inadequacy of appropriate facilities for female staff was a particular cause for concern from the survey results and needs specific input from HMPPS to address.

It is very clear that UPW supervisors are being denied their legal right to rest breaks and HMPPS must remedy this as a matter of urgency. The current denial of this right under the Working Time Regulations is both unsafe and damaging of staff morale.

Pay and conditions for UPW staff also attract significant criticism in the survey. HMPPS has mismanaged the procedures for staff to claim unsocial hours for many years and this comes across very clearly in the survey results. It is clear that the basic pay for UPW is not competitive, leading to staff shortages, and reinforces the unions' 2025 pay claim for a 12% increase in remuneration across the board.

7. Action Plan

In light of our survey results, Napo and UNISON call for the following action plan:

7.1 Ministerial Commitment to an UPW Improvement Plan: agreed at the highest level with funding to ensure its delivery

7.2 Creation of an UPW Sub-Committee to the Probation Service Joint Negotiating Committee: to act as the forum for employer and unions to review the current failings in UPW delivery and to agree a joint improvement plan

7.3 A joint review of UPW Management with timelines for recommendations: to review existing management resources, span of control, delegation and procedural justice

7.4 A joint review of UPW Funding: to determine where funding gaps exist and what resources are needed to address the deficiencies identified by our survey, particularly around premises, equipment and vehicles

7.5 Joint Agreement on Group Size Limits and Double Crewing: to ensure that the health, safety and welfare of our members and that of people on probation is adequately protected

7.6 A joint review of how pay and conditions are impacting on recruitment and retention of UPW staff: with a particular focus on rest breaks and compensatory rest, the payment of unsocial hours and overall levels of pay