

Housing
Executive

Challenges of Move-on Accommodation

for Housing Applicants
subject to PPANI

Ipsos MORI



Challenges of Move-on Accommodation for Housing Applicants subject to PPANI

The following report was commissioned by the Housing Executive to explore the accommodation challenges housing applicants subject to PPANI (Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland) encounter, within the Northern Ireland social housing system.

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01

Introduction

1 Introduction

Background

Ipsos MORI Northern Ireland were commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to conduct qualitative research into the challenges encountered in providing move-on accommodation for those housing applicants subject to Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI).

Research aims

The specific research aims and objectives for the overall study are to:

- Deliver an evidence base on difficulties associated with move-on accommodation enabling key stakeholders to provide appropriate action;
- Help reduce the reliance on B&B/Hotel accommodation for the homeless applicants who are subject to PPANI;
- Help the Housing Executive increase throughput in Approved Premises;
- Contribute to reducing spend on B&B/Hotel accommodation for those homeless applicants who are subject to PPANI.

The key objectives to be addressed are to:

- Explore the trends and nature of temporary accommodation provision for individuals subject to PPANI;
- Identify structural challenges for PPANI organisations in assisting housing applicants subject to PPANI to permanent move-on accommodation from Approved Premises (and other providers where housing applicants subject to PPANI may be placed);
- Identify general personal circumstances/difficulties amongst individuals subject to PPANI that lead to challenges in such individuals securing and/or sustaining permanent accommodation;
- Identify any wider/societal challenges which impact on the availability of suitable permanent accommodation for individuals subject to PPANI;
- Identify best practice and/or innovative schemes across the UK and Ireland which are effective in assisting clients subject to public protection arrangements in securing permanent move-on accommodation.

Context

Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland (PPANI)

Under Article 50 of the Criminal Justice Order (NI) 2008, Public Protection Arrangements were created to assess and manage the risks posed to the public by certain sexual and violent offenders, including individuals who have committed violent offences which include those within a domestic setting, offences against children vulnerable adults and those violent offences which have been aggravated by hostility e.g. hate crime¹. As a result of these arrangements, a number of agencies and departments have been brought together to work collaboratively to assess and manage the risk posed by individuals with relevant convictions. These public protection arrangements in Northern Ireland are known as PPANI.

A number of core agencies cooperate under PPANI, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The PPANI membership also includes relevant organisations within the third sector such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)². In working together across agencies, the core PPANI agencies can better understand some of the key issues involved when identifying risk, and therefore can provide better public protection to the people of Northern Ireland.

The PPANI Strategic Management Board (SMB) includes senior decision makers from the core PPANI agencies, along with the PPANI Coordination Unit, who meet on a quarterly basis to provide assurance that agencies have discharged their duties in delivering the arrangements operationally. Work is undertaken by Sub-Groups including Accommodation, Communication, Education, Training & Research, Policy & Practice and the Victim's Advisory Sub-Group. The 2008 Order also requires the Department of Justice (DoJ) to appoint two Lay Advisors to PPANI SMB. Lay Advisors are appointed as 'critical friends' and to provide a challenge function to the professionals involved in the delivery of the arrangements.

Local Area Public Protection Panels (LAPPPs)

LAPPPs are the multi-agency forum tasked with the operational delivery of the Public Protection Arrangements. The key responsibilities of LAPPPs include Multi-Agency Assessment of all relevant offenders and the development of appropriate individual risk management plans for those offenders set at Categories 2 or 3 risk of serious harm following assessment. The core agencies involved in the LAPPPs are the PSNI, PBNI, HSCTs and the Prison Service. The LAPPP cannot proceed if these organisations are not in attendance. Information relating to risk is presented to the Local Area Public Protection Panels (LAPPPs) for assessment. Either the PSNI or, PBNI will assume the role of Designated Risk Manager (DRM) of each case.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)³

In England, Wales and Scotland risks posed by sexual and violent offenders living in the community are managed by MAPPA. Similar to PPANI, it is a set of arrangements whereby the Police, Probation, Local authorities and Prison Services work together with other agencies to manage risk associated with this

¹ PPANI Annual Report 2019-20 <https://www.publicprotectionni.com/publications/>

² <https://www.publicprotectionni.com/about/>

³ <https://mappa.justice.gov.uk/MAPPA/view?objectID=18827184>

population. Individual cases are subject to risk management plans which assess and map out specific actions required to minimise risk.

02

Review of Programme Management Information

2 Review of PPANI Quantitative Data

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the quantitative data relating to service users and the average length of stay over the last five years. The data provides a snapshot of those who are subject to PPANI restrictions as of June 2021.

Number of individuals and nights

Since January 2016 a total of 74,754 nights were spent in PBNi Approved Hostel accommodation, at an average length of stay of 227 days, ranging from 1 day to 1,925 days (5.3 years).

In June 2021 46 individuals subject to PPANI were resident in the hostels, 45 males (98%) and one female (2%). In total, those who were still resident had spent 20,745 days living in the hostels. The following table provides a breakdown of current residents by hostel and average length of stay.

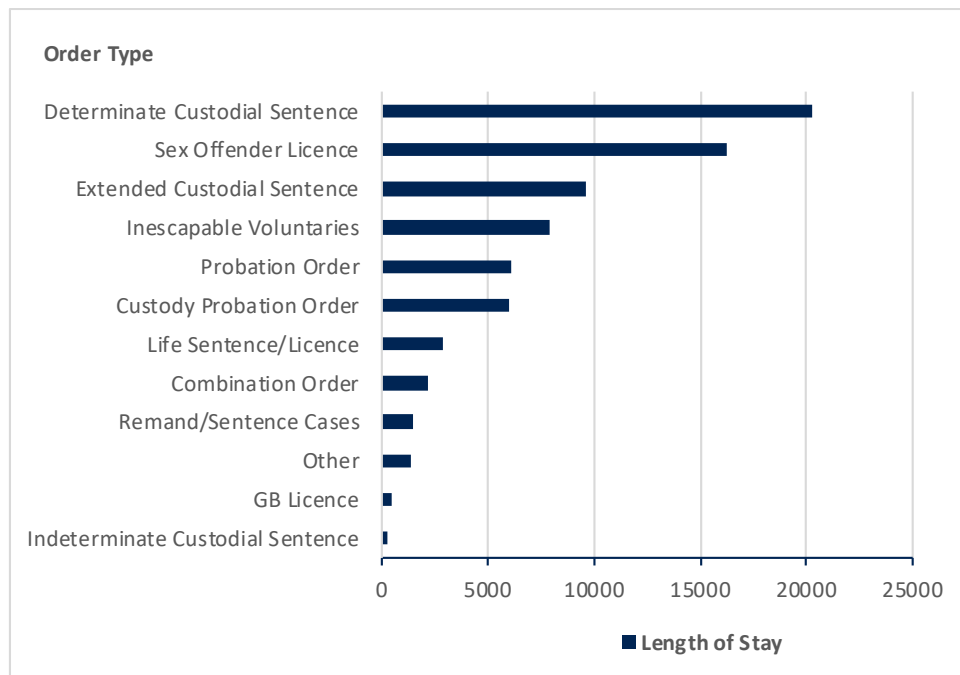
Table 2.1: Current Residents and average length of stay

Hostel	No. of PPANI Residents	Average Length of Stay
Hostel 1	<5	108
Hostel 2	9	723
Hostel 3	4	140
Hostel 4	11	587
Hostel 5	<5	158
Hostel 6	7	270
Hostel 7	11	441
TOTAL	46	347

(Individual hostels in the table have been anonymised to prevent the identification of individuals. Furthermore, in any case where the number is 4 or less this has been presented as <5 to further reduce the possibility of individuals being identified).

The following chart provides an overview of the total number of days spent in PBNi Approved Premises over the last five years by type of order that the offenders are subject to.

Figure 2.2: Order Type and total number of days resident



Those who had Determinate Custodial Sentences accounted for the most number of days resident at a hostel over the past five years with 20,307 days or, 27% of the total number of days over the last five years (74,754 days). Sex Offender Licences accounted for around one fifth (22%) of the total numbers of days over the last five years at 16,283 days in total. Those who were subject to indeterminate custodial sentences and GB Licences accounted for the least number of days at 0.3% and 0.6% respectively.

Age and Length of Stay

The youngest service user was 21 years and the oldest was 81 years. As shown in the following table, on average, younger service users tended to stay in the PBNi Approved Premises for shorter periods of time. An average of 163 days for those aged under 45 years, compared to 391 for those aged over 45 years.

Table 2.2: Current Residents and average length of stay (by age category)

Age Groups	No. of individuals	No. of stays	total days	Average days per stay
20-24	7	7	802	115
25-29	34	49	6,763	138
30-34	41	52	7,991	154
35-39	29	43	5,069	118
40-44	29	34	9,869	290
45-49	29	33	10,038	304
50-54	26	33	8662	262
55-59	18	21	4934	235
60-64	16	23	6214	270
65-69	15	17	5821	342
70-74	6	7	4340	620
75-79	6	7	1682	240
80-84	<5	<5	2569	856
TOTAL	259	329	74,754	227

(In any case where the number is 4 or less this has been presented as <5 to reduce the possibility of individuals being identified).

Almost one fifth (17%) of service users subject to PPANI were aged 60 years or more, this compares to 2% of the general PBNI caseload in 2021⁴.

Just over one quarter (27%) of service users had more than one stay in PBNI Approved Premises. Feedback from staff and other key stakeholders highlighted that service users returned to hostels if their accommodation proved to be unsuitable or if they were returned to prison and were homeless upon release.

Conviction and Length of stay

Over the last five years there has been 252 stays in PBNI Approved Premises by Sexual Offenders, with an average length of stay of 270 days. Of these 105 were category 1, 100 category 2 and 30 category 3. The average length of stay by category is summarised in the following table.

⁴ <https://www.pbni.org.uk/about-us/statistics-research/pbni-caseload-statistics/>

Table 2.3: Sex Offenders average length of stay by category

SO Category	Number of stays	Average length of stay (days)
1	105	353
2	100	243
3	30	158
Not set & unknown	17	122
TOTAL	253	270

In June 2021 38 sex offenders were currently resident in PBNI Approved Premises, two of whom were classified as category 3 and a further 14 were category 2.

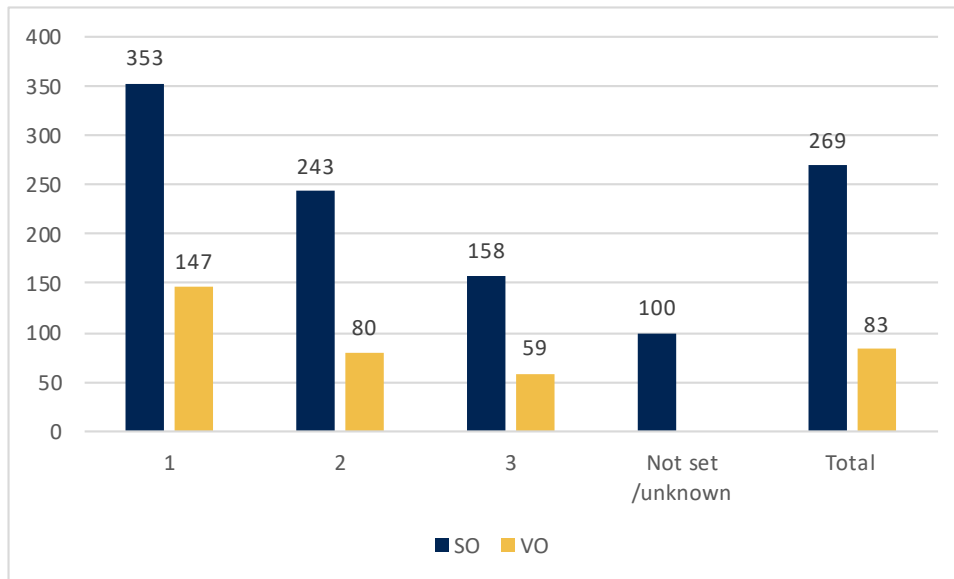
Over the last five years there has been 76 stays in PBNI Approved Premises by Violent Offenders, with an average length of stay of 88 days. Of these 9 were category 1, 49 category 2 and 18 category 3. The average length of stay by category is summarised in the following table.

Table 2.4: Violent Offenders average length of stay by category

VO Category	Number of stays	Average length of stay (days)
1	9	147
2	49	80
3	18	59
TOTAL	76	83

As of June 2021, two category 3 violent offenders were residing in PBNI Approved Premises.

As shown in the following chart, on average sex offenders spent 186 days more in PBNI Approved Premises than violent offenders.

Figure 2.3: Average length of stay, sex offenders and violent offenders

As noted above the difference in length of stay between sexual and violent offenders was most marked for those rated category 1. When category 1 offenders were excluded from the analysis the difference reduced to 120 more days on average. Interestingly, for both sex and violent offender's category 1 offenders had the longest average length of stay (at 353 and 147 days respectively).

Summary

The analysis of hostel use amongst offenders who are subject to PPANI highlighted some notable differences amongst services users. Firstly, it was noted that 2% of PBNI Approved Premises service users were female, this compares to 11.8% of the general PBNI case load who are female⁵. The review of the data also highlighted that sexual offenders tended to have significantly longer stays in PBNI Approved Premises than violent offenders (270 days compared to 83 days). Older offenders also tended to have longer stays than young offenders, for example, an average of 163 days for those aged under 45 years, compared to 391 for those aged over 45 years. Furthermore, on average sex offender service users also tended to be older than violent offenders (at an average age of 47 years compared to 36 years).

⁵ <https://www.pbni.org.uk/about-us/statistics-research/pbni-caseload-statistics/>

03

**Cost of Approved
Accommodation**

3 Cost of Approved Accommodation

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the cost to provide Approved Hostel accommodation to offenders who are subject to PPANI restrictions over the past five years. These figures are based on costs set out in the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Report Northern Ireland ⁶.

Total costs

The below tables provides a breakdown of the average cost associated with housing a resident in each of the Approved Premises listed, on a weekly basis.

Table 3.1: Approved Premises funding levels (average per resident per week in £)

Hostel	Housing Benefit	Supporting People	TOTAL
Hostel 1	£107.74	£376.03**	£483.77**
Hostel 2	£158.13	£133.64	£291.77
Hostel 3	£112.49	£539.95	£652.44
Hostel 4	£112.92	£376.03**	£488.52**
Hostel 5	£178.25	£508.28	£686.53
Hostel 6	£109.63	£305.32	£414.95
Hostel 7	£170.91	£392.97	£563.88

(Individual hostels in the table have been anonymised to prevent the identification of individuals).

*Note: ** Figures not provided for these hostel accommodations, cost calculated as an average of other hostel accommodation.*

The average spend associated with housing residents in the same Approved Premises, across a 5 year period between 02/01/2016 to 08/07/21, is outlined overleaf.

⁶ Lawful Duty: Public Protection III: A thematic inspection of the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland. 2019. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/5e6a048a-62a5-4f40-a271-3b27bfba9e13/facts.aspx>

Table 3.2: Approved Premises average and total funding levels (02/01/16 to 08-07-21)

Hostel	Average spend over period 02/01/16 to 08/07/21	Total spend over period 02/01/16 to 08/07/21
Hostel 1	£6,526.81	£117,482.52
Hostel 2	£5,837.79	£239,349.24
Hostel 3	£12,485.31	£811,544.85
Hostel 4	£11,197.76	£470,306.09
Hostel 5	£19,893.14	£1,810,275.53
Hostel 6	£2,985.35	£26,868.16
Hostel 7	£13,550.78	£853,699.26
Total	£72,476.93 (average)	£4,329,525.64 (total)

(Individual hostels in the table have been anonymised to prevent the identification of individuals).

Table 3.3: Total and average costs per order/ per category (02/01/16 to 08/07/21)

Average cost per offender		£13,159.65
Total cost per order		
	SO only	£1,352,753.36
	VO only	£307,714.78
	VO/VOPO	£78,891.15
	SO/SOPO	£2,582,452.78
Average cost per order		
	SO only	£18,044.67
	VO only	£4,734.07
	VO/VOPO	£7,171.92
	SO/SOPO	£14,590.13
Average / total cost by PPANI category		
	Category 1	£18,605.69 / £2,121,048.31
	Category 2	£11,582.05 / £1,725,725.68
	Category 3	£7,346.46 / £352,630.04

Therefore as summarised above the average cost of Approved Accommodation for PPANI offenders was in the region of £11,135. The range of costs varied considerably depending on the length of stay, depending on age of offender, risk category and type of crime.

04

Review of literature

4 Review of literature

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of published literature relating to best practice in the provision of move-on accommodation for violent and sexual offenders following their release from custody. The broader topic of the provision of stable accommodation for those re-entering communities after release from prison, and the key considerations for those involved in public protection are also discussed. The remainder of the chapter focuses on challenges in finding accommodation for violent and sexual offenders, before the limited evidence of best practice is discussed.

Examples of specific initiatives are provided as well as overarching themes which have contributed to positive outcomes in finding accommodation for high-risk offenders. While there is considerable evidence to suggest that finding stable accommodation for violent and sexual offenders is not without challenges, there is less available evidence on strategies in place for the successful transition of this population from temporary accommodation (such as hostels) to long-term housing.

Methodology

The aim of the rapid literature review was to examine the evidence base relating to best practice in the provision of move-on accommodation for housing applicants subject to public protection arrangements across the UK and Ireland.

4.1.1 Search strategy

A strategic search strategy was conducted by accessing a number of relevant search engines:

- Social Care Institute for Excellence Library
- Cochrane Library
- IngentaConnect
- Google Scholar
- Jstor.

A combination of the following search terms were used:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • Public Protection | • (moving on) Accommodation |
| • (ex) Offenders/leaving prison/custody; | • rehabilitation; |
| • Best practice/effective. | • Risk management |
| • Community re-entry/ reintegration | • Prison release |

Standard search strategies were employed to maximise the possible results from each search. For example, the above keywords were combined with search commands “AND” and “OR”. A snowballing approach was also used to source relevant literature within the references of key papers. In addition to the literature which was retrieved via the above search engines, relevant grey literature was also retrieved from government and voluntary organisations’ websites.

4.1.2 Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were those which were outlined in the Project Initiation Document (PID) and include:

- Studies / evaluations of initiatives aimed at providing accommodation for individuals subject to Public Protection restrictions / Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements;
- Reports relating to services provided in the UK or Ireland;
- Studies which provide evidence of the effectiveness of the services provided;
- Studies that describe the processes / structures used to deliver the services (e.g., agencies involved, referral processes, etc.); and
- Studies published in a peer reviewed journal (as a proxy for quality) or, good quality grey literature (e.g., independent evaluations).

4.1.3 Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria as set out in the PID were:

- Publications prior to 2000;
- Services / initiatives that were not specifically aimed at individuals leaving custody who are subject to Public Protection conditions;
- Studies which did not provide an evaluation or evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention;
- Studies not published in English.
- Discursive materials (e.g., policy discussion papers); and
- Studies relating to services outside of the UK or, Ireland

Most papers which were published prior to 2010 were excluded, except for two which contained relevant information relating to the research objectives, specifically with regard to best practice in housing provision. Due to the limited evidence base relating to best practice within the UK and Ireland, a small number of relevant research papers published outside of the UK and Ireland (Australia and the United States) were included.

4.1.4 Screening of relevant literature

Abstracts from the relevant literature were reviewed by two members of the research team to assess each paper's suitability against the inclusion criteria. In addition to this, full papers of relevant studies were retrieved for in-depth review. Once a list of relevant papers was compiled, full papers were reviewed, before the data was summarised. Throughout this process, if novel papers were identified as relevant they were later reviewed in full against the selection criteria.

The role of stable accommodation

Reducing recidivism

Both within the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally research into ex-offenders, including high-risk offenders, tends to focus on managing risk and recidivism. Successful reintegration into the community is often measured by levels of re-offending. It has been widely acknowledged that accessing stable accommodation on release from prison reduces rate of recidivism among ex-offenders⁷. Housing has been identified as one of the key factors that can reduce re-offending, by as much as 20%⁸.

Stable accommodation can prevent reoffending through a number of mechanisms. Firstly, a stable home is more likely to prevent an individual from becoming homeless and living on the streets, where they are more likely to reoffend. Maintaining a tenancy may also give an ex-offender a sense of purpose and reduce anxieties around housing instability, which in turn can prevent offensive behaviour from occurring.

Challenges associated with temporary housing

Temporary accommodation such as Approved Premises / Hostels are normally used to house high-risk offenders who are released from prison on licence. Temporary facilities have limited spaces and are designed to be used in the short-term before ex-offenders 'move on' to settled accommodation.

There is evidence to suggest that living in temporary or 'transitional' housing, such as hostels can make high-risk ex-offenders feel that their living situation is still similar to that of being in prison – that is, that they still feel it is a form of punishment⁹. For some ex-offenders, living in temporary housing has been identified as a barrier to finding employment as potential employers may hold perceptions of their living arrangements and may also find it difficult to contact potential candidates by phone to their accommodation¹⁰.

A research study into managing risk and recall for those on supervised license in Northern Ireland reported that some offenders who were released into hostel accommodation felt 'set up to fail' by being forced to associate with other offenders in the hostel environment. For some, this resulted in breaches of probation or licence conditions, or recall into custody. Conversely, for some ex-offenders, leaving supported or temporary accommodation is when they are most likely to encounter problems as they no longer have the same amount of support as they might have had in Approved / hostel accommodation. This lack of support once stable accommodation has been acquired has been found to potentially cause ex-offenders to later be evicted or to return to engaging in criminal behaviour¹¹.

⁷ House of Commons Library briefing paper (2017). Housing support for ex-offenders (England and Wales) <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02989/SN02989.pdf>

⁸ Gojkovic, Mills & Meek, 2012. Accommodation for ex-offenders: Third sector housing advice and provision. Third Sector Research

⁹ Kras, Pleggenkuhle & Huebner 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

Accommodation was not the only cause of recall for this group, as it was found that lack of family or social support and a lack of previous employment experience also contributed to the likelihood that offenders released on license would be recalled¹².

Homelessness

According to St. Mungo's, homeless charity, many (ex-)-offenders struggle to find accommodation on leaving prison, which increases the likelihood that they could end up homeless¹³. The charity has offered several reasons for this. Those who have been in custody may struggle to provide the necessary documentation required by private landlords such as bank statements, references or rent deposits. Furthermore, even with the correct documentation many landlords are unwilling to let their property those who have been in prison. St Mungo's believe that more support should be given by local authorities to those leaving custody to prevent homelessness.

It has been found that those who have experience of the criminal justice system disproportionately experience homelessness, which can be a major contributor to re-offending¹⁴. Anecdotal evidence provided by St Mungo's staff has suggested that some ex-offenders who find themselves homeless may actively seek to return to prison, due to the routine and security offered there¹⁵. Whilst many of those who are subject to PPANI must have Approved Accommodation, due to their increased risk to the public, leaving prison brings many challenges for ex-offenders, which in turn can cause instability and lead to repeat offences. For example, optimism or hope to be reunited with friends and family may be cut short by changes in plans, exposure to previous addictions, difficulties acclimatising to public life or by the terms and conditions of their licence.

Offenders often have additional support needs including, financial, educational, employment, family or relationship issues or health and substance misuse, each of which can impact on their ability to secure and maintain permanent accommodation. Offenders who are subject to PPANI may also be more likely to have had problematic tenancies in the past, for example, having rent arrears, previous evictions or having been barred from certain types of accommodation.¹⁶

A report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation expressed concern for high rates of homelessness in 2018-19 among cases supervised by the National Probation Service (NPS) in England, who manage high-risk offenders, many who had been convicted of sexual or violent offences¹⁷. The Chief Inspector of Probation emphasised the importance of increasing places in Approved Premises and not moving people on until appropriate accommodation is available.

¹² The 'Manageability of Risk' and Recall on Supervised License: Post-Release Pathways for Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders in Northern Ireland. Irish Probation Journal, 2017.

[http://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/0/6E80A40B6DF9B0CC802581D300460346/\\$File/IP17%20full%20Version.pdf](http://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/0/6E80A40B6DF9B0CC802581D300460346/$File/IP17%20full%20Version.pdf)

¹³ Written evidence from St. Mungos. Retrieved from: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/support-for-ex-offenders/written/32156.pdf>

¹⁴ Working with prison leavers. Resource for homelessness services. HomelessLink (2018). <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Working%20with%20prison%20leavers%20March%202018.pdf>

¹⁵ ¹⁵ Written evidence from St. Mungos. Retrieved from:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/support-for-ex-offenders/written/32156.pdf>

¹⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government. Homelessness prevention and meeting housing need for (ex) offenders A guide to practice. (2009).

¹⁷ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

Challenges in securing accommodation

The literature shows that the challenges associated with providing accommodation for high-risk groups such as violent and sexual offenders are wide-ranging and are common across all regions in the UK as well as internationally.

Availability and allocation of social housing

One major contributor to the complex challenge of securing accommodation for high-risk offenders, is the availability of social housing stock. Social housing is in high demand across the UK, including Northern Ireland. Those responsible for the provision of social housing must consider each applicant's individual circumstances (including whether an applicant has dependants, additional health needs, social needs, or whether or not they are at risk of homelessness – which is also determined by whether or not they are intentionally or unintentionally homeless). According to the Housing Executive's most recent annual report, (2019), 99.7% of their housing stock was occupied. As of March 2020, there were 38,745 applicants on the housing waiting list. As of March 2020, there were 38,745 applicants on the housing waiting list. Of these applicants, 27,745 were classified as being in housing stress and 20,951 were deemed to be homeless.¹⁸ In Northern Ireland, for those seeking accommodation in areas of exceptionally high demand, NIHE have no option but to provide placements in temporary accommodation such as hostels, hotels or B&BS¹⁹. This highlights the level of demand for social housing in Northern Ireland.

Offenders who apply for accommodation are often not found to be in 'priority need' above other applicants. Some of the categories of priority need as outlined in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988²⁰ include pregnant women, those with dependants and those with physical or mental health issues. In Northern Ireland any prisoner who is released having served four years or more of a sentence is accepted as having a priority need due to being vulnerable and institutionalised. In other parts of the UK local authorities usually decide whether or not an applicant can be determined as vulnerable, having been in prison, therefore assessed as having a 'priority need'²¹

Community acceptance

Community acceptance (or lack thereof) is a prominent issue in the UK and further afield²². The topic of reintegration into communities of violent and sexual offenders can be highly emotive and a cause for concern among residents within local communities. A report by Criminal Justice Inspection for Northern Ireland (CJINI)²³ provided one example of community response to offender accommodation, as it highlighted that some Approved Premises were subject to 'physical attacks and campaigns of community objection'. Such displays of objection for offenders who were in supervised accommodation, indicates

¹⁸ Housing Executive 49th Annual Report. [https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate/annual-report-2019-2020.aspx?ext=.](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate/annual-report-2019-2020.aspx?ext=)

¹⁹ Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 Annual Progress Report 2017-18. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/410e152e-7d24-4082-83df-7dd8ede6e159/homelessness_annual_progress_report_2017-18.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

²⁰ [The Housing \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1988 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukui/1988/0000/contents/made)

²¹ Gojkovic, Mills & Meek, 2012. Accommodation for ex-offenders: Third sector housing advice and provision. Third Sector Research Centre. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-77.pdf>

²² Grossi, L. M. (2017). Sexual offenders, violent offenders, and community re-entry: Challenges and treatment considerations. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 34, 59-67.

²³ Lawful Duty: Public Protection III: A thematic inspection of the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland. 2019. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/5e6a048a-62a5-4f40-a271-3b27bfba9e13/facts.aspx>

the potential for further acts of protest, if offenders are released into longer-term stable accommodation within communities.

Support from members of the public may not be the only challenge in terms of community acceptance as there is evidence that those involved in managing sex-offenders and placing this group in accommodation have struggled to gain support from those involved in housing, such as estate agents. One committee in the US which was tasked with finding space for a facility for sexually violent offenders under supervised conditional release received little support from local estate agents²⁴. Despite considering all risk elements, including minimum distances from schools, community centres and nursing homes, the committee failed to find a suitable location or build the facility that had been intended to house the sex-offenders. The lessons learned from this particular case highlighted a need to raise awareness and educate both the public and key relevant authorities about the need to house sex offenders and the consequences of failing to source stable accommodation (homelessness and recidivism).

Residence restrictions

Offenders who are subject to PPANI (or MAPPA in the rest of the UK), may be restricted under their supervised Licence or other Preventative Orders (e.g., Sexual Offences Prevention Order, Risk of Sexual Harm Orders, Violent Offences Prevention Orders) as to where they can reside, in order to reduce any potential further risk of harm to the public. Restrictions imposed are proportionate and specific to the individual offender. For example, those who have committed sexual offences against children, will usually be restricted from living within a certain distance from 'child centred locations e.g. schools, playgrounds, community centres or known households where minors are living. It is however important to note that any restrictions have to be proportionate and specific to the individual offender. This can make it increasingly difficult to find placements for high-risk individuals, especially if victims of their crimes are living in close proximity. For this reason, they may need to be housed outside of their home area. There is evidence to suggest that social support (a factor which could be compromised by residence restrictions) is key to successful re-entry to society²⁵.

Local Area Public Protection Panels, who assess the risk that sexual or violent offenders pose to the community, consider any action that needs to be taken in relation to housing provision, in line with the conditions of an individual's license.

Scotland's National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders provides an overview of the nature of the comprehensive checks which must be made as part of what is called an Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA)²⁶. In addition to database checks, ERAs are carried out when any sex offender is to be housed in new accommodation. ERAs include database checks and physical checks of the property where a new tenant may move into (for example, common areas and hallways) and surrounding properties and gardens where any evidence of potential victims may be identified (for example, children's toys or curtains). If a property is not deemed appropriate after an environmental risk assessment has been carried out, alternative housing solutions will be considered. Similar checks are

²⁴ Stojkovic S & Farkas MA 2013. So you want to find a transitional house for sexually violent persons: An account of political failure. *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 25(6): 659–682

²⁵ Bonnar-Kidd, K. K. (2010). Sexual offender laws and prevention of sexual violence or recidivism. *American journal of public health*, 100(3), 412–419.

²⁶ National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders in Scotland. 2019. Scottish Government. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-accommodation-strategy-sex-offenders-scotland-2/>

carried out by the PSNI Offender Investigation Unit (OIU) prior to a prisoner's release from custody, or where a new address is provided.

Category of risk and securing accommodation

A report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation detailed a reduction in funding for 'supported housing' in England. Supported housing, including floating support services were provided for individuals on community sentences and prison licences, under the Supporting People programme and was delivered in conjunction with local authorities and health services²⁷.

A higher level of cover was provided by some supported housing projects, to manage those who posed a higher risk, such as sexual offenders. As some of the supported housing projects and floating support schemes have closed, access to supported housing is facilitated through centralised local panels in some areas in England. For those who pose a higher risk, it has been reported that they may not receive the same priority for accommodation.

Wider initiatives developed to facilitate the re-entry of offenders into the community, including moving offenders out of temporary hostel accommodation and into secure longer-term tenancies, have focused on those who pose a lesser risk to the public in terms of potential harm. Examples include the Diamond Initiative, which was a £12 million integrated offender management scheme. It used a multi-agency approach to reintegrate short-term prisoners (those serving less than 12 months in custody) back into the community. An evaluation of the scheme²⁸ found that recruitment and staffing levels were an ongoing challenge. Identification of potential participants was also identified as a challenge and was reported to be severely limited by the working of the referral system to the scheme. The Local Justice Reinvestment (LJR) pilot was informed by programmes such as the Diamond Initiative²⁹. The LJR pilot was part of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) commitment to test new approaches to criminal justice through Payment by Results (PbR) commissioning. The pilot informed the Transforming Rehabilitation strategy³⁰.

In 2013, the Ministry of Justice created 21 privately owned Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to manage low and medium risk offenders, allowing the National Probation Service to continue to manage those who pose a higher risk to the public (including violent and sexual offenders). Individuals managed by CRCs were able to avail of 'Through the Gate' services which aimed to help offenders find employment, stable accommodation as well as providing financial and emotional support³¹.

High-risk offenders with additional needs

Representatives who work within the Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in England have identified a particular challenge in providing suitable accommodation for older individuals and those with other specific care needs who are under MAPPA³². These individuals may require placement in

²⁷ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

²⁸ An evaluation of the Diamond Initiative: year two findings. 2011. London Criminal Justice Partnership. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/slp_reducing_reoffending_board_-_may_2011_-_info_item_-_diamond_year2_final_120411.pdf

²⁹ Local Justice Reinvestment Pilot: Final process evaluation report. 2015. Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449630/local-justice-reinvestment-pilot-process-evaluation-report.pdf

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Transforming rehabilitation: progress review. House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. 2019. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/1747/1747.pdf>

³² Bows, H., & Westmarland, N. (2018). Older sex offenders—managing risk in the community from a policing perspective. *Policing and Society*, 28(1), 62-74.

care homes who are often unwilling to accept them or, may require types of specialist care which is difficult to provide within Approved Premises or in a location where the relevant authorities can undertake the monitoring which is required to ensure public protection.

When released into the community older sex offenders are more likely to have poor physical and mental health, in part due to their age but also as a result of health issues developed as a result of their lifestyle or socio-economic situation³³. As a range of restrictions are usually placed on those who have committed sexual offences (such as living a certain distance from schools, not living in a household with young people under the age of 18), living with family members may also not be an option. Housing has been found to be one of the key challenges when managing older sex offenders.

The issue of being less likely to be offered accommodation is compounded by the fact that those who are viewed as undesirable tenants by some housing providers may also have complex health needs – for example they may need ground floor accommodation or wheelchair access³⁴. For those involved in managing older sex offenders, they may find that this group need to live closer to health facilities such as GP surgeries or hospitals. Considering risk for older offenders placed in care homes has also presented difficulties, where offender managers have had to consider the risk to young relatives who are visiting their grandparents who reside in the same facility as a sex offender, or the risks posed to other residents of such facilities.

The recent CJINI inspection report found that some managers of Approved Premises (temporary accommodation) in Northern Ireland had found that their residents had increasingly complex histories such as addiction, mental and physical health challenges³⁵. As a result, some of these individuals did not cope well living in the community and returned to temporary / hostel accommodation after community placements broke down. This adds to the pressures of available beds within approved, temporary premises (hostels).

The report suggests that the overall occupancy rate of Approved Premises averaged 93% (mainly prisoners who were released on supervised life sentences). Other prisoners such as bail applicants and those applying for home leave were reported to be unlikely to obtain a place in Approved Premises. Increases in online sexual offenders and those convicted of historical offences create challenges in forecasting the number of offenders who require supervised accommodation and have resulted in demographic changes which need to be considered (i.e., an ageing offender population who may require health care packages as well as residential supervision).

Policy and systemic barriers to housing provision

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts follow-up response on the Ministry of Justice Transforming Rehabilitation³⁶ strategy, identified what was described to be ‘serious’ problems with regard to accommodation practice for prison leavers, including those who are deemed to be high-risk or vulnerable (including those convicted of sexual offences, and individuals with mental health and/or social care needs). Ex-prisoners were highlighted to be a distinct group with specific needs, and it was felt that for this reason an accommodation and action plan for prisoners on release was essential.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lawful Duty: Public Protection III: A thematic inspection of the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland. 2019. Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/5e6a048a-62a5-4f40-a271-3b27bfb9e13/facts.aspx>

³⁶ Transforming Rehabilitation. A Strategy for Reform. Ministry of Justice. 2013. <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-rehabilitation/results/transforming-rehabilitation-response.pdf>

In England and Wales there is no current national approach to addressing the housing needs of offenders. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Community Interventions Residential and Support Services Division which was formed in recent years has committed to producing a comprehensive framework for the delivery of accommodation services, which will sit within a broader 'reducing reoffending' strategy. An action plan detailing specific actions agreed for the development of a national cross-government strategy to address the housing needs of offenders was published in 2020³⁷.

Different CRCs have developed their own individual accommodation initiatives (albeit these groups are tasked with concentrating on low to medium risk offenders). Not all these initiatives have been joined up with the National Probation Service (NPS) (who are responsible for the management of higher-risk offenders). This lack of strategic approach may exacerbate existing challenges in finding accommodation for offenders, including violent and sexual offenders. It was found that dividing the probation service in this way created issues surrounding resource³⁸ and introduced many points of contact between different parts of the probation and justice systems.

The NPS have started to develop parallel accommodation pathways within some areas, particularly for high-risk groups, linking directly with local authorities and housing providers. For those convicted of violent or sexual offences, or those with complex needs, it has been suggested that devising an accommodation pathway (and beginning the work and negotiations which this requires at a local level), should begin as early as possible and continue once individuals have been placed in Approved Premises and into long-term accommodation³⁹.

A recent paper published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation⁴⁰, noted that while there is a wealth of data available for individual NPS and CRC local district units (which can also be sub-categorized by several variables such as gender, age and offence), most areas who used data to make a business case for particular projects did not have detailed delivery plans setting out how accommodation needs would be addressed. Instead, services in operation were reported to have been developed 'incrementally' without clearly specified pathways for how the needs of different groups would be met. It has also been suggested that some offender-specific services may have closed or been merged with more general homeless services, which are not designed to meet the specific needs of different offender populations.

A key point which was raised which is relevant to this review, is that service performance was judged by numbers of individuals seen and interventions completed rather than specific accommodation outcomes achieved. This highlights the challenge of how accommodation strategies can be deemed truly effective, if limited information exists on the processes involved in securing long-term accommodation and the proportions of individuals who have successfully maintained their tenancies long-term. The definition of 'long-term' is also unclear but seems to refer to tenancies which have been maintained for a minimum of three months.

³⁷ A response to: An inspection of accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison. HM Prison & Probation Service. 2020.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913711/Accommodation_Thematic_AP_FINAL.PDF

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

Examples of good practice

Much of the evidence of best practice highlights the importance of multi-agency cooperation in the sharing of information and responsibility, ensuring clarity on processes, working to support individuals to live independently, and raising awareness on the role of stable accommodation in public protection. One paper which evaluated a housing initiative in London (Vision Housing) reported very little literature on the impacts of specific housing initiatives⁴¹. While this paper was published in 2013, evidence on specific housing initiatives remains scarce. Despite this, there have been a number of papers which have outlined positive characteristics of housing schemes.

One research study published by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which aimed to provide a guide to practice for homelessness prevention and meeting housing need for ex-offenders, highlighted specific positive examples of strategies employed to achieve greater capacity and diversity in housing provision⁴². Ten initiatives undertaken across England were included in the research as case studies, each of which involved individuals at different stages of the justice or housing process (including post-release and move on stages).

Promising practice identified across these studies included:

- Overcoming reluctance of housing providers to work with offenders, through working in partnership (criminal justice agencies and other agencies and the housing providers). For example, managing tenancies or supporting offenders to do this or reducing concerns around actual and perceived risks associated with particular offenders.
- Development of move-on initiatives to protect capacity in short-term accommodation. An example of this includes Erasmus Housing (Middlesbrough) who worked with English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) to deliver a staged move on initiative (at Stage 1 individuals' needs were assessed and a key worker was allocated to support individuals to develop life skills which would help them maintain accommodation, as well as supporting them to engage with other agencies. Stage 2 involved living in ECHG-provided self-contained accommodation before being assessed on readiness to move into 'settled' housing).

Wiltshire Accommodation Support Scheme for Young People is another example of an initiative which aimed to reduce the temporary use of bed and breakfast accommodation for young offenders (16-17 years old). Through multi-agency partnership, the project accepted between 60-80 referrals per year, meeting its targets. Multi-agency partners shared the burden of dealing with challenging situations (such as geographic boundaries). Non statutory agencies who were able to provide housing and support were involved and mentoring, advocacy and practical support to help young people to sustain tenancies. Housing providers were also trained in restorative approaches to reduce evictions and to ensure that key partner agencies could intervene at an earlier stage should problems arise which could lead to eviction.

While such initiatives have been highlighted as potentially good practice, there are no published evaluations which determine the effectiveness of such activities. They also highlight the range of agencies that are often required to provide support to offenders.

⁴¹ Ellison M, Fox C, Gains A & Pollock G 2013. An evaluation of the effect of housing provision on re-offending. *Safer Communities* 12(1): 27–37

⁴² Homelessness prevention and meeting housing need for (ex) offenders, A guide to practice (2009). Communities and Local Government https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/595212/Homeless_prevention_and_meeting_the_needs_of_ex-offenders_archived.pdf

- Improving understanding among landlords of the local social benefits of engaging with offenders and how the provision of accommodation can reduce re-offending and ensure community safety (e.g., through housing potentially dangerous or high-risk offenders). This can be achieved through criminal justice agencies.
- Supporting housing providers in revising evictions procedures, so that tenancies can be preserved where possible by early alerting of relevant criminal justice and support agencies.
- Multi-agency involvement in planning and commissioning the provision of accommodation for offenders with complex needs.

The research report cautioned that the individual studies included in the findings referred to information which may be relevant to addressing housing need for (ex) offenders but highlighted a lack of robust outcome evaluations.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPP) for Avon and Somerset Dangerous Offenders Housing Protocol (DOHP)

One of the case studies reviewed as part of the Homelessness Prevention and Meeting Housing Need for (ex) offenders report was the MAPPP for Avon and Somerset Dangerous Offenders Housing Protocol⁴³. Partners of the programme included all local authorities within the region, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Avon and Somerset Probation Area, HMP Bristol, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and various housing associations.

While housing associations do not have a formal duty to provide accommodation, they are expected to cooperate with those who deliver MAPPPA to consider carefully housing options which might include allocation within their own stock or nomination to an RSL. Cooperation included elements such as providing detailed information on the availability, type and location of housing and offering advice on the suitability of accommodation.

The purpose of the Protocol was to formalise the duty for local authorities and RSLs to cooperate to assist in housing high-risk ex-offenders. The DOHP aims were to find settled accommodation for potentially dangerous offenders by encouraging local authorities to accept referrals through the protocol, establish whether a homelessness duty existed, and determine priority need within a three-month timescale. The DOHP also intended to share the burden for prioritising potentially dangerous offenders for housing across the region to prevent an over-concentration of this group in one geographical location.

The Probation Service Area Accommodation Officer (AAO) made the referrals through the protocol. The AAO proactively promoted the protocol to local authorities in order to meet the aims of the initiative. Activities to publicise the protocol, and to meet the objectives included:

- Emphasising the importance of the protocol as a tool for community safety through improved risk management.
- Delivering presentations and training to outline the rationale for the protocol and associated processes

⁴³ Ibid.

- Agreeing information-sharing procedures between the probation service, local authorities and RSLs
- Provision of floating support to help offenders to sustain tenancies
- Monitoring and publication of data on numbers of local authority referrals, successful referrals and the distribution of referrals
- Reviewing the DOHP every two years, inviting input from all parties involved to make recommendations of amendments to the protocol in keeping with best practice and legislation changes.

Of 21 cases who were referred through the DOHP in 2006/07, 18 cases were formally accepted and offered accommodation within the three-month timescale. Of nine local authorities in the region, eight offered accommodation which was an indication that the cross-boundary agreement that had been put in place to prevent over-concentration of this offender group in one area, had been effective.

Project Beta

Project Beta is a partnership between the NPS in England, local authority housing departments and Tyne & Wear reform prisons. It is delivered by local authority staff in Durham and NPS staff in Darlington⁴⁴. Those considered for Project Beta are prisoners in custody who have been sentenced for 12 months or more and who have been assessed as posing a high risk of harm and/or a high risk of re-offending – these individuals are under supervision of the NPS and this group has been found to be more difficult to place in accommodation on release.

Project Beta staff work with service users (in custody) in the North East of England, arranging a first visit no later than six months before their prison release and maintaining contact with the prisoner until their release. This differs from some of the housing support provided to low to medium risk offenders, where prison visits take place within two months of their release. An action plan is agreed with the service user and the project staff will meet the service user on the day of their release to ensure that everything they need to maintain agreed accommodation is in place (such as ID, benefits).

Through this partnership, the majority of accommodation is found with private sector landlords, but some social landlords have accepted the ex-offenders as tenants. The Project Beta support continues for three months after tenancy is in place and wrap-around services are in place to ensure a successful long-term tenancy. After one year in operation, 89% of service users maintained their tenancy for three months, of whom 80% maintained the same tenancy for six months.

Hull and East Riding Accommodation Project

The Hull and East Riding Accommodation project⁴⁵ work in partnership with Humbercare, an organisation established to work with the Humberside Probation Trust to 'educate, rehabilitate and promote the mental and moral improvement of offenders, or any other persons in need and the

⁴⁴ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://www.hull.gov.uk/sites/hull/files/media/MAPPA%20Annual%20Report%202018%20-%202019.pdf>

rehabilitation of persons discharged from penal institutions.’⁴⁶ Humbercare primarily provide housing support services.

Those involved in delivering the project feel that working with local agencies such as the public and voluntary sector to provide safe, secure and stable accommodation to complex service users is a key step to enhancing desistance and giving offenders a sense of social purpose. Some of the accommodation for offenders is sourced directly from private landlords – Humbercare act as a managing agent for other accommodation.

A senior probation officer in the North East Division of the NPS, reported a couple of considerations which are relevant to the Hull and East Riding Accommodation Project and its’ success in encouraging service users to ‘settle’ or behaviours to improve when sustaining a tenancy in a settled accommodation, having ‘moved on’. Examples of positive practice include:

- Minimal quality standards in move-on accommodation, provided by Humbercare. Humbercare provide basic furniture, curtains, bedding and white goods and ensure decent standards of decoration, cleanliness and security, which in turn has made service users feel valued. This has been directly associated with a reduction in damage to properties.
- Collaboration with resettlement services in prisons to develop a ‘housing passport’. This service aimed to provide access to group work, where offenders could learn how to manage a tenancy through topics such as fire safety, budgeting, understanding utility bills, waste management, anti-social behaviour, understanding a tenancy agreement and community integration. Offenders can begin to work through each topic in prison and once released into the community. Stamps are given for each completed topic and those who have successfully completed the passport will be offered priority council accommodation within Hull City Council. This support is believed to overcome anxiety which some offenders can feel, having never lived independently – anxiety which can lead to behaviour that is offensive.

Through supports offered to offenders, 172 people were housed through this scheme between January 2018 and June 2019. Within this group, 85 have moved on and 87 remain in settled accommodation. The project receives funding from the NPS and the local authority. More recent data published last year by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation indicated that in the first two years of the Hull and East Riding Accommodation project, 202 NPS service users (higher risk offenders) have been housed, 114 of whom remain in settled accommodation.

The Single Homeless Project (SHP)⁴⁷

The SHP is a homelessness prevention charity which delivers the housing advice service in 25 targeted boroughs in London. The charity has a number of Housing Advice Workers (HAWks) who work to deliver support and guidance to medium-to-high support clients, from within NPS probation offices. The HAWks work with experienced colleagues who provide floating support to enable individuals to access and retain tenancies. Staff who have expertise in accessing the private rented sector work in collaboration with HAWks, with the private rental sector being the main option for long-term housing for almost three

⁴⁶ <https://www.humbercare.org.uk/about.php>

⁴⁷ Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (2020). <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/FINAL-Accommodation-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>

quarters of NPS service users in London (who do not meet the criteria for 'priority need' for social housing).

Services include advice and support, guidance on finances and debt and pre-tenancy training. In 2018-19 the project achieved housing for 785 ex-offenders (helping 232 to obtain private rented tenancies, 226 to maintain their tenancies, 231 to access temporary accommodation, 63 to move into supported accommodation and 33 to obtain social housing).

The SHP is another example of the direct benefits associated with the provision of support for service users, particularly around access to, and maintenance of tenancies.

MAPPA Housing Panel – Northamptonshire

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation report⁴⁸ noted that accessing housing for individuals under MAPPA is difficult, for many reasons. It can be even more challenging where an offender does not have a local connection (for example friends or family who they could stay with should this not break any condition of their licence). It can also be challenging when an assessment has concluded that an individual should be managed elsewhere (this could be as no suitable accommodation, which also meets the requirements of the individual's licence, is available in the area).

In England, MAPPA covers many housing authorities, some of whom outsource their housing provision, which has been found to make it more difficult to agree on who should house this group of hard-to-place individuals. Some specific regions have developed housing protocols which aim to address this challenge. In Northamptonshire, a MAPPA housing panel meets to discuss the needs of Level 2 and 3 offenders who are difficult to place. To overcome the lack of clarity around responsibility, an agreement is in place among the local authorities, that where an individual must be placed in accommodation outside their home area, this responsibility will be allocated to authorities on a rota basis. This process has been found to work well, with all difficult cases in the region having been provided appropriate accommodation.

Circles of Support and Accountability

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) are a community-based volunteer sector initiative who provide services to sex offenders to significantly reduce sexual offending and to help reintegrate sex offenders into communities. Volunteers work in close partnership with criminal justice agencies⁴⁹. Circles UK was launched in 2008 and has been funded by the Ministry of Justice. Circles UK have supported the development, quality, coordination and effectiveness of CoSA in England and Wales⁵⁰.

CoSA is based on the Good Lives Model (GLM) which is based on developing desistance through building an individual's strength and capabilities as a means to reducing recidivism. Through this lens, it aims to equip an individual with skills as well as managing risk and restricting activities. The first Circle was established in Canada in 1994.

One systematic review of outcomes of CoSA for sex offenders in the UK found that support with various aspects of reintegration, including housing support, was linked to positive psychosocial outcomes⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ <https://www.circles-uk.org.uk/>

⁵⁰ McCartan, K., Kemshall, H., Westwood, S., Solle, J., MacKenzie, G., Cattel, J., & Pollard, A. (2014). Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA): A case file review of two pilots. *Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293400/cosa-research-summary.pdf

⁵¹ Clarke, M., Brown, S., & Völlm, B. (2017). Circles of support and accountability for sex offenders: A systematic review of outcomes. *Sexual Abuse*, 29(5), 446-478.

Circles volunteers have helped individuals (referred to as 'core members' of the circle) access employment, education, housing support (including assisting with moves to independent accommodation) and have encouraged them to seek medical help and have provided financial advice. The review found several positive psychosocial outcomes reported in the literature such as increased pro-social behaviour, improvements in self-soothing, emotion-regulation, locus of control, improved links with family and other support networks, in addition to general positive changes in attitudes and motivations. It was also concluded that costs associated with providing the Circles are outweighed by the benefits. This is in line with other examples from the literature (such as findings from a randomized experiment in Minnesota⁵²), where it has been acknowledged that investment in support for offenders before and after release from custody (in rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives) is less costly in the long-term compared to the costs associated with reoffending.

International examples of positive outcomes

The challenges in housing provision for individuals leaving prison in other countries are comparable with those in the UK and Ireland, including violent and sexual offenders with complex needs. In Europe, the US and Australia, accessing transitional and long-term accommodation is equally dependent on funding, cooperation between housing providers and probation services, acceptance from residents in local communities⁵³ and levels of support provided to potential tenants themselves.

The Corrections Victoria Housing Programme (CVHP)

A review paper published by the Australian Government⁵⁴, focused on the CVHP and relevant literature to housing support strategies, within Australia and internationally. It found that the CVHP had been successful in reducing housing disadvantage for the individuals who were offered accommodation and exceeded its target for the number of tenancies provided to offender clients by 80%.

The programme is delivered by Corrections Victoria and the Victorian Department for Health and Human Services and provides access to housing, as well as individualised post-release case management and support. The services aim to address disadvantage and to assist offenders who have been released from custody to reintegrate into the community. Programme stakeholders deemed the CVHP as an effective pathway into high-quality housing which otherwise would not have been available to this group of service users, particularly in the case of sex offenders and offenders on parole.

An evaluation of the programme suggested that it should be extended, with the establishment of protocols for long-term follow-up of the service users to support cost-benefit analysis⁵⁵.

⁵² Duwe, G. (2013). Can Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) work in the United States? Preliminary results from a randomized experiment in Minnesota. *Sexual Abuse*, 25(2), 143-165.

⁵³ Bonnar-Kidd, K. K. (2010). Sexual offender laws and prevention of sexual violence or recidivism. *American journal of public health*, 100(3), 412-419

⁵⁴ Willis M 2018. *Supported housing for prisoners returning to the community: A review of the literature*. Research Report no. 7. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rr/rr7> <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rr/rr7>

⁵⁵ Ross S, Diallo Roost F, Azpitarte Raposeiras F & Hanley N 2013. *Evaluation of the Corrections Victoria Housing Program: Final report*. The University of Melbourne

Washington State's Re-entry Housing Pilot Programme (RHPP)

The aim of the Washington State's RHPP was to reduce recidivism among high-risk and high-need prisoners who needed accommodation upon release from custody⁵⁶.

An evaluation of the pilot found that providing housing alongside wraparound services increases the chance of successful reintegration – service users were significantly less likely to reoffend or be recalled to prison for new offences. 208 offenders were provided with safe housing and support services across a variety of housing types. The programme was found to have a positive impact on the income of service users (as length of time in the program increased, participants' mean income per month also increased).

Evaluation of this programme also found that the type of accommodation provided was not of significance and in fact those who were assigned to live with others may be more successful in moving through the programme⁵⁷. This contradicts much previous evidence which has suggested that shared living programmes for offenders may lead to exposure to previous negative behaviours and lead to reoffending.

Shared Living Arrangements – Colorado

Another US research study into shared living arrangements (SLAs), found advantages to this housing model with regards to sex-offenders⁵⁸. The Colorado Division of Criminal Justice Office of Domestic Violence and Sex Offender Management looked at sex offenders who lived in SLAs, those who lived alone and those who lived either with family and friends, in homeless shelters, or jail/work release programmes. Unsurprisingly, those who lived in the more restrictive environments (jail and work release) had the lowest number of criminal convictions. It was found, however, that sex offenders living in SLAs accrued only 'slightly more' criminal convictions. Furthermore, for those living in SLAs a shorter amount of time passed between a sex offender committing a crime and their probation officer finding out – with roommates of sex offenders in SLAs reporting these violations in terms of supervision more times than roommates in any other kind of living arrangement.

One review paper concluded that while it is commonly assumed that having offenders living together or associating together could result in 'pro-criminal' behaviour, both the SLAs in Colorado and the Washington State's RHPP found advantages to this kind of living arrangement⁵⁹. Benefits include stable accommodation and positive peer support. While shared accommodation is not widely available, it can also financially benefit service users as they rebuild their lives in communities where affordable housing options may be limited.

While this study is considerably out of date, some of the findings may still be relevant to move on accommodation in Northern Ireland.

Summary

It is apparent that there are few robust evaluations of models for the provision of move-on accommodation for (ex) offenders. However, it is widely acknowledged that stable accommodation is key

⁵⁶ McKernan, P. 2017. Homelessness and Prisoner Reentry: Examining Barriers to Housing Stability and Evidence Based A Strategies that Promote Improved Outcomes. Volunteers of America. <https://www.njreentry.org/application/files/8115/5654/6843/Homelessness-and-Prisoner-Reentry-2017.pdf>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Colorado Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Justice Sex Offender Management Board. (2004). *Report on safety issues raised by living arrangements for and location of sex offenders in the community*. Colorado:

⁵⁹ McKernan, P. 2017. Homelessness and Prisoner Reentry: Examining Barriers to Housing Stability and Evidence Based Strategies that Promote Improved Outcomes. Volunteers of America. <https://www.njreentry.org/application/files/8115/5654/6843/Homelessness-and-Prisoner-Reentry-2017.pdf>

to preventing re-offending. Temporary accommodation or transitional housing can be a beneficial starting point for prisoners released on licence before they are able to access permanent accommodation, such as the Approved Hostels provided in NI. Supervision and support provided through this kind of housing model can be key to managing high-risk individuals, but some feel that the environment can be detrimental to rehabilitation as it often forces ex-offenders into circumstances where they are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. Only one study (Washington State's RHPP) found that shared accommodation had the potential to reduce re-offending.

There are many factors which pose a challenge to high-risk offenders when trying to secure a permanent home. Individuals may lack the necessary skills to access housing or employment. This group are often not considered to be in priority need of social housing, which is limited across the UK. For those who have committed violent or sexual crimes, licence restrictions may rule out certain geographical areas, making the search for a secure home more challenging.

Despite being categorised as a high-risk group, in GB violent and sexual offenders are managed more closely under public protection arrangements and therefore cannot access a wider number of housing initiatives which have been offered to offenders who are considered to pose a lesser risk to the public (for example, Through the Gate services). The new structures within the NPS have also been found to be problematic when it comes to housing provision and a lack of strategic management of accommodation more generally has been found to be negatively associated with housing outcomes for prison leavers, including high-risk offenders. Processes to evaluate how specific accommodation outcomes are achieved are also lacking, making it difficult to determine where schemes have been successful.

Across the small number of initiatives which have been presented in this chapter, some common themes are present in relation to examples of good practice. Cooperation between housing providers and authorities such as prison and probation services has been emphasised as a key element to delivering effective services, especially where housing providers are adequately educated on the social benefits of housing violent and sexual offenders. Agreed information-sharing procedures contribute to a more effective and joined-up approach across all agencies involved in managing risk and providing accommodation.

Establishing clear structures and specific accommodation pathways for offenders has been highlighted as an important consideration which can formalise the process of housing provision for this difficult to place group. It can also help to overcome disputes regarding responsibilities across neighbouring authorities when an offender must be placed in a different region to their local area.

Maintaining close relationships with offenders while under supervision in Approved Premises (for example, to be on hand to provide help and advice to offenders) has also been associated with better behaviour and a reduced likelihood that an individual would reoffend or be recalled. Staff working in Approved Premises have also suggested that work to 'move on' offenders should begin before they arrive at the Approved Premises – this is considered to be a shared responsibility between responsible officers (for example prison and probation officers) and Approved Premises staff.

The provision of support to offenders has been found to be directly linked to the likelihood that an offender will go on to successfully access and sustain a stable tenancy. Schemes have delivered different types of support to violent and sexual offenders, but it has been suggested that support to access suitable long-term accommodation should ideally be provided as early as possible (before release from prison) and continue after individuals have been placed into Approved Premises. Examples

of support include assistance with tenancy agreements and benefits claims, learning how to manage a tenancy (managing finances, learning about fire safety and waste management). Support with finding employment has also been beneficial and associated with an increased likelihood of sustaining a long-term tenancy.

There are some limitations to the evidence provided in this review. Where specific examples of good practice of the provision of move on accommodation have been highlighted in the literature, it is difficult to determine whether initiatives have been extended past a fixed period (such as a pilot) or become standard practice. Furthermore, some examples refer to case studies of low numbers of offenders, which means that findings cannot be generalised to larger populations. Some positive characteristics which have been described throughout the chapter relate to schemes or initiatives which are out-dated, and it is not clear if the schemes are still operational. Nevertheless, where such examples have been included it has been determined that they refer to examples of positive practice which can be translated to various other contexts.

05

Stakeholder interviews

5 Stakeholder interviews

Introduction

A total of 15 participants were interviewed, including a range of key stakeholders who are involved at various stages of the Move On service. This includes representatives from:

- NIHE
- NIPB
- Hostel staff
- PSNI (Risk Managers, Crime Prevention and Public Protection Unit)
- A Housing Association
- Housing Rights
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

Representatives from each of these organisations were invited to provide their feedback about their experiences in being involved with the Move On service. Due to the ongoing COVID 19 restrictions the interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams. The qualitative responses to the interviews were analysed thematically using a three-stage process established by Braun & Clarke (2006)⁶⁰, which involves, coding, sorting and analysing qualitative responses. The following paragraphs summarise the key findings from the interviews.

Inter-agency working

Those who engaged with the research had varying levels of involvement with the Move On process, but all were able to provide examples of their experience in relation to the provision on Move On accommodation.

All of those interviewed had experience of working with other agencies as part of the Move On process and were asked to provide comment on the extent to which they felt inter-agency working was effective. There was a broad consensus across the participants that inter-agency working was effective. It was generally noted that each agency had a specific role to play in the process and everyone knew their own roles and responsibilities.

Many of those interviewed noted that in addition to regular PPANI meetings there are also defined processes to allow agencies to share information about service users securely.

For those participants who had direct experience of working with NIHE, they felt that representatives from this organisation had a 'good understanding' of the needs of different agencies (e.g. Public Protection) and have 'gone out of their way' to provide the best support they can, even in situations where it has been particularly difficult to place certain offenders. One participant noted that when there had been a miscommunication (such as an 'inappropriate' housing offer), they were able to reach out to the PPANI representative within NIHE who has resolved the issue very quickly.

⁶⁰ Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101.

"I have some very good examples of [Inter-agency working].....there are designated personnel within the Housing Executive who deal with PPANI and LAPPP. And those individuals get the process, get the issues around sexual convictions and they also understand license conditions and SOPOs."

One participant from the PBNi reported that in terms of provision of accommodation for offenders, in their role they felt 'powerless', and would have to wait for NIHE to provide accommodation which would then be considered for approval. This participant also noted challenges around contacting housing advisors.

Other stakeholders acknowledged the additional communication difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with staff from many statutory agencies being required to work from home.

"When we try to speak to housing advisors it's extremely difficult to get hold of them. I understand that they are under extreme pressure."

It was suggested that while the PPANI representative from NIHE was helpful and had a good understanding of the processes involved in providing accommodation and managing risk, one participant felt there was a disparity in the level of knowledge of this representative compared to housing advisors more generally, who do not necessarily understand the processes involved in PPANI (until a probation officer provides this information). Providing education on PPANI processes among housing officers, was suggested to have a potential benefit, however, it was recognised that due to busy workloads, this may not be feasible.

"I don't know if realistically if that's something that could happen. That's a lot of information to give someone on top of the case load they already have."

Another participant agreed that while inter-agency working with NIHE was efficient, it was difficult to reach housing officers and that communication could be improved. This was thought to be largely due to channels of communications, for example, there was a perception that Housing Officers do not have access to a secure email system. It should be noted for clarification purposes that all Housing Officers do have access to and use secure email facilities.

Several participants explained that teams responsible for category 3 high-risk offenders were 'co-located' meaning that different branches such as PSNI, PBNi and social workers all work in the same office and therefore have daily contact with each other. Offender management was described by one participant to be more "joined up" due to the benefits of the co-located teams.

Whilst the members of the PPANI sub-group report that they work well together and there is effective information sharing, some of the participants reported that the process would benefit from improved working between themselves and other agencies. Lack of engagement from HSCT staff has been identified as a challenge, particularly for service users who have additional health and social care needs.

Some participants, from different organisations, referred to challenges when an offender moves from one trust area to another. It was reported that if an individual had a particular care package or specific supports, this would not automatically be received in a new trust area which can cause great difficulties for those with specific or, complex needs. When positive relationships have been established between health and social care professionals (such as GPs or drug counsellors), it can be detrimental to the individual when this level or, type of support is not readily available in another trust region.

“Moving Trust area can be very difficult, the services don’t always follow, it can be very destabilising for service users”.

It was suggested by one participant that the PPANI housing subcommittee would benefit from a closer working relationship with the HSCTs. Given the complex needs of many of the PPANI offenders and the generally aging prison population there is a need to ensure closer co-ordination and information sharing to between housing staff and HSCT staff, to ensure that health and social care services are provided in a timely manner to facilitate departure from Approved Hostel accommodation.

The Move On process

Participants were asked about their experiences of the overall Move On processes and factors that they take into consideration when finding accommodation for offenders who are subject to PPANI arrangements. Almost all of those interviewed noted that the process can be quite complicated and needs to be cognisant of the individual’s needs and the restrictions that they are subject to. Accommodation has been described as a key challenge for those who are directly involved with managing high-risk violent and sexual offenders.

Accommodation on release from prison

The participants noted that the process should (and usually does) start a couple of weeks before the individual’s release date. The PPANI Housing Sub-Committee will have a pre-release meeting to discuss housing options. Housing Rights Advisors will meet with (category 1) prisoners before their release to discuss housing options. The risk managers (either PSNI or PBNI) are then responsible for approving the accommodation, whether temporary (e.g. Approved Hostels) or permanent. Several participants reported that offenders who are released from prison with a violent offences prevention order (VOPO) or a sexual offences prevention order (SOPO) or other licence conditions, will require public protection approval of suitable accommodation.

It was noted by most participants that this process is not always followed. For example, on occasions, the relevant agencies are not given sufficient advanced notice of a prisoner’s release, which makes acquiring approved accommodation very difficult, especially at times when hostels are working at capacity.

“Ideally, we want to get them into some sort of, supervised accommodation. We want somewhere, where there is some level of oversight there. If we can’t get them into one of those accommodations, a lot of other providers will be reluctant to take Category 3 [offenders].”

A number of participants believed that accommodation for offenders who are subject to PPANI should be planned for more in advance that it currently is. It was noted that for the majority of offenders the release date is known and planning for the provision of suitable accommodation could start months in advance. This would provide NIHE Housing Officers and other organisations (such as Housing Rights) more time to work with the prisoner, to support them in completing housing applications and to identify other potential sources of support upon release.

One interviewee noted that often the length of time that they have to engage with offenders to discuss their housing options can be very limited. For example, if someone has spent a long time on remand then their actual sentence can be quite short (or, be released immediately). Therefore, in some cases

the time that is available for key agencies (such as PBNi) to engage with the offender and undertake key tasks such as risk assessments can be very limited.

As highlighted by one participant another factor to consider in the Moving On process is that not all offenders will receive a custodial sentence, they may receive a community order. Therefore, the risk managers responsible for these individuals will be PBNi and the individual not come into contact with any of the other support services that can be accessed in prison (such as Housing Rights).

A small number of participants highlighted that the availability of suitable housing does not link in with release dates from prison. Offenders must be released on their release date, irrespective of the availability of suitable accommodation, meaning that it is technically possible that an offender may be released with no accommodation to go to on their release date. In such circumstances, depending on the individual and the conditions of their licence, an offender may return to a previous tenancy, stay with family or apply for temporary accommodation with the NIHE. High-risk offenders should only be placed in PBNi Approved Premises.

Conversely, one participant commented that recently some offenders have remained in prison beyond their release date and offered an example of a couple of individuals who have refused to be placed in hostels, preferring to wait for a permanent address. Ultimately, the decision on whether or not an offender will be placed in Approved Premises is directly influenced by their level of risk and their licence. For those who are reluctant to be placed in hostel accommodation, a desire to live with friends or family or the costs associated with hostel accommodation (for those who have the means to pay) may influence their willingness to be placed in Approved Premises.

Several participants noted challenges around finding suitable temporary accommodation for those individuals who are released from prison and who pose a higher risk to the community. In a situation where an offender cannot be offered a place in Approved Premises, and where no other suitable accommodation is available, they may be presented to NIHE as homeless.

"If we can't get [category 3 offenders] a hostel, and we can't find any sort of Approved Accommodation, then we have to present them to the Housing Executive as homeless. And there's no guarantee that [NIHE] will be able to provide emergency accommodation at short notice."

This was considered by some to be of particular concern, as some offenders would be in breach of their bail conditions if they became homeless. A number of participants, they felt that the lack of suitable available temporary accommodation was something that offenders had no control over and therefore were at risk of breaking bail or license conditions through no fault of their own. Timing was also considered to influence whether or not places in emergency accommodation could be offered, when an offender is released towards the end of the day, there may not be someone available within NIHE to support in finding accommodation.

"Many of these people would be in breach of their bail conditions if they became homeless and that is sometimes happening through no fault of their own. We need to provide secure accommodation, prior to it becoming a homeless issue"

As PPANI offenders are staying in Approved Premises longer than they should be, it has created a high demand for hostel places. In some cases, where no Approved Hostel accommodation can be identified at short notice, offenders have been placed in temporary accommodation (such as a more traditional B&B), for very short periods of time.

“Ideally, probation approved accommodation is preferable – but if there’s nothing available, we’ll have to look outside of that.”

Whilst it is acknowledged that this situation is not ideal, a small number of participants have explained that in some circumstances where an individual would otherwise be homeless, this is considered to be the best approach to risk management (in the very short-term), as DRMs know where the individual is staying and they can be properly monitored.

Identification of suitable Move On accommodation

Applications for permanent accommodation may be started before an individual goes into prison or an application can be started while they are in prison – a process which is supported by Housing Rights. Individuals will be allocated homeless points as part of this assessment and a representative from NIHE reported that the organisation deal with a significant number of applications from offenders who are presenting as homeless.

While offenders are staying in Approved Premises, hostel staff will support them to find suitable accommodation. If an individual is not living in Approved Premises, Probation staff will support an individual, in conjunction with NIHE, to find a suitable permanent accommodation. Each time a new address is considered for a high-risk offender, PBNi must carry out checks on the address, before the PSNI will carry out due diligence checks.

Participants who were directly involved in the risk management and rehabilitation of offenders, emphasised the importance of having a secure accommodation, for rehabilitation and reintegration into the community to be successful.

“When someone doesn’t have a roof over their head, money in their pocket or feel safe, it’s really hard to do the significant pieces of work we need to do with them to reduce offending, get them to understand why they’re in the first place, when they’re worrying about where their head is going to be that night.”

Barriers to securing Move On accommodation

Participants were asked what they believed to be the main challenges in providing Move On accommodation and a number of common themes arose. All of the participants noted that the situation was complex and there were challenges at every stage of the process. There were however several common themes in the challenges noted by participants.

Housing stock

Almost all participants highlighted that the general shortage of social housing across Northern Ireland created a number of challenges for them. For example, for offenders who have restrictions regarding the area where they live, this makes the pool of housing available to them even smaller. Another issue to consider relating to the general pressures on social housing is that many of those who are subject to PPANI restrictions will not be offered accommodation in any of their preferred areas.

Participants noted that in some parts of Belfast and in rural areas waiting lists for social housing were particularly long. Therefore, there is a need for the Housing Officers to work with individuals during the early stages of their housing applications to manage their expectations about where they might be able to find accommodation.

“People think there is this never-ending abundance of accommodation available and there isn’t”

Some participants referred to ‘unrealistic expectations’ with regards to housing requests, with certain areas of Belfast reported to be in high-demand among PPANI offenders, for example, South Belfast (particularly around the Lisburn and Ormeau Road areas).

A small number of participants discussed challenges surrounding housing offers in particular areas of Belfast City. Given that those in Approved Hostel accommodation, were usually single men, and generally required one bedroom accommodation, it was also noted that most of the one bedroom properties⁶¹ in cities are in areas that are known to have greater levels of paramilitary activity. Due to individual offenders’ community backgrounds, or the higher risk of community resistance in these areas, this can create further complications and reduce further the pool of suitable accommodation. It was clear from those who participated in the interviews that the not only was the risk to the public taken into consideration but, also the risk to the offender.

It was also noted during the interviews, that the NIHE manage a homelessness points system whereby families with children would receive more points than single people without dependants. Therefore, those subject to PPANI restrictions are likely to receive fewer priority points than applicants with dependents even if they are in temporary accommodation⁶². One participant explained that while offenders are in probation hostels, this time does not contribute towards homeless points. The same participant also reported that while this was information she had been given, other colleagues have been given different information, which was perceived to indicate a lack of consistency around the allocation of housing points.

“The housing needs in Northern Ireland have shot up, particularly in the last two years.”

Participants who have experience working within the hostels noted that pressure on social housing has also created additional demands within the Approved Hostels as other (non PPANI) service users are also, finding it difficult to secure social housing this has created additional demands on places within hostels.

As mentioned previously, most participants interviewed agreed that inter-agency working with NIHE was effective and ‘straightforward’. Engaging with housing associations was regarded as less straightforward. One participant suggested that as there are different types of housing stock all over the country, it could be more straightforward if NIHE had oversight for all social housing. Another participant commented that while housing association could offer places to offenders, that they may ‘frown upon’ housing certain categories of offenders.

Another issue related to high level of demand for Social Housing was the perception that Housing Associations are reluctant to accept PPANI offenders as tenants. Many of those who participated in the interviews believed that as there were long waiting lists for Housing Association properties the Housing Associations could “pick and choose” which applicants they choose to accept as tenants which meant that PPANI offenders were often turned down from Housing Association properties regardless of their place on the waiting list. Feedback from Housing Association staff indicated that they do have any particular pre-conceptions of PPANI offenders but, have to consider the well-being of existing tenants,

⁶¹ Most offenders within the approved accommodation are on Housing Benefit, under the “bedroom tax”, NIHE or, Housing Association tenants face a reduction in their Housing Benefit if their property has more bedrooms than they need.

⁶² NIHE awards 70 points to ‘Full Duty Applicants’, individuals who satisfy the four homelessness tests (homelessness, eligibility, priority need & intentionality). Single men are unlikely to satisfy criteria to pass all tests. 50 points can be awarded upon release from prison if demonstrable that no suitable accommodation is available, or they could not reasonably be expected to seek alternative accommodation.

potential neighbours when accepting any new tenants. For example, if a property becomes available in an area with many young families or, other vulnerable neighbours Housing Association staff noted that based on the limited information that receive about applicants they may have to refuse an offer of housing for that area. However, Housing Association staff did note that they would welcome more engagement with NIHE to understand the specific needs of individual applicants if that is appropriate and within the limitations of GDPR.

Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation

In addition to the limitations associated with a lack of social housing stock across Northern Ireland, a number of participants also noted that the cost of accommodation from the Private Rented Sector (PRS) was also a significant barrier. One participant noted that most of the PRS accommodation in reasonable areas is too expensive for people who are in receipt of social security benefits and that often PRS accommodation that is affordable is in areas where there are high levels of anti-social behaviour or, paramilitary activity. These areas are likely to be regarded as unsuitable for offenders who are subject to PPANI restrictions and therefore accommodation in the area will not be approved by the Designated Risk Manager.

Demand for properties in the PRS over the past couple of years was noted to be higher than the available supply, which has been an additional barrier to accessing this type of accommodation. One participant commented that they felt that for this reason, PRS landlords could “cherry pick” tenants, and despite support given by certain agencies (and a contact whereby the landlord can highlight any issues), landlords avoid tenants with offences, vulnerabilities, or complex needs.

“Some landlords have a blanket ban on offenders.”

Several participants highlighted issues that offenders may have in providing a deposit for private rental accommodation. While offenders will be in receipt of certain benefits, due to the cost they must pay for Approved Premises, many are unable to save for a rental deposit. A small number of participants also explained that those who are living in Approved Premises may struggle to secure employment, due to their address. It was also suggested that for those who could secure employment, this would often need to be used to pay for the Approved Premises, leaving individuals no better off financially. Such financial barriers often result in individuals being excluded from the PRS from the outset.

“The deposit that is required for the private rented sector is a huge barrier for most people.”

A large proportion of participants noted the difficulties associated with securing tenancies in the PRS, and most commented that it would be typical for a landlord to perform internet searches on potential tenants. It was suggested that should landlords find information about an individual’s offence on the internet their application for a tenancy would be declined.

“Everyone googles everyone now, so it’s easy for private landlords to say no.”

While challenges associated with securing private rentals were widely discussed, one participant reported experiencing greater success with the PRS in comparison to social housing. Some participants working more closely with the Approved Hostels, noted that they had not experienced individuals moving on for quite some time, if they were only looking for social housing.

“In 18 months, I have not had one service user who has moved on through the housing executive”.

Offenders with complex needs

Several participants highlighted that a growing number of individuals who are subject to PPANI restrictions have additional health and social care needs. For example, those who are elderly with specific health needs, those with mental health needs, learning needs or individuals with addictions. Finding approved accommodation for individuals with additional needs is particularly challenging, especially for those who may require supported or sheltered accommodation.

NIHE do not provide this type of accommodation and older offenders in Approved Hostels may be turned down from sheltered or supported accommodation due to the risks posed to other residents and visitors if they come into contact with an offender. This is particularly challenging as some elderly offenders may have mobility issues may require accessible accommodation. Some offenders may not be able to live independently due to their individual needs.

For older participants with complex needs, some participants commented that the support and routine provided by Approved Premises could discourage offenders from moving-on.

“For the older ones as well it’s like a form of sheltered accommodation – they become institutionalised”

One participant suggested that the health and social care trusts should provide support needed from this offender group.

“Older prisoners need support from the trust, [they] often need supported accommodation. And the trusts need to accept the duty of care.”

Complex mental health needs were also reported by a small number of participants to be a barrier to obtaining move-on accommodation, and later maintaining tenancies. One participant explained that some individuals could ‘fall through the cracks’ in terms of health and social care or supported living. Unless an individual has a qualifying need, it can be difficult to engage a social worker to work with that individual.

One example provided was in the case that an offender had a personality disorder – this was suggested as a condition that might not meet the criteria needed for social support, but it could affect the individual’s ability to engage with services, to look after themselves, to maintain a tenancy, and to hold down relationships with others, both personal and professional.

Additionally, it was noted that when offenders do qualify for social care assistance (including health appointments or suitable housing), those working with them are not always able to get individuals to avail of this assistance.

“We can’t drag them kicking and screaming”

Several participants commented on the housing points system. With specific regard to those with complex needs, some reported that it can be difficult for those individuals to get housing points which reflect their individual complex needs, including those who have a history of homelessness.

“Getting complex needs points can be very difficult, and should be easier.....people who have a long history of homelessness often have complex needs, and the points system should take account of this.”

There is a challenge associated with those individuals with complex needs who are not engaging with the relevant professional services or who are unwilling to engage with such services (for example, not attending health-related appointments). In such instances, individuals are not allotted points based on complex need, as needs assessments must be carried out to determine when an offender has a complex need.

“Some clients will not engage with services.”

Some participants suggested that offenders with complex needs are not engaging with professionals for different reasons, including shame held around the reason for their conviction or mental health issues (which may be the reason that an individual needs a particular level of support, but could also be a factor which determines their ability to engage with support services).

Community resistance

Community resistance was highlighted when participants discussed challenges around finding suitable move-on accommodation for offenders. Some participants suggested that this could be an issue before an individual is placed in a property, due to community perceptions around Approved Premises. It was reported that some offenders who appear in the media may draw particular attention and that sometimes the hostels are mentioned in media reports, which strengthens the perception among those in the community that hostels are synonymous with sex offenders. This can leave the hostels vulnerable to community conflict as well as any individuals who may have been named in the media.

As mentioned previously, certain areas were thought to pose a higher risk for offenders moving on, especially those where paramilitaries are active.

“In this country we have criminal elements who monitor who is in the community or not and they can instigate community conflict”

A small number of participants referred to certain areas, for example, in South Belfast, where there was a level of upset among residents who felt that a disproportionate number of sex offenders were being placed in their local neighbourhood. Community resistance was not only reported in Belfast, however, with other incidents mentioned by participants. For example, a house in Coleraine was targeted when an offender re-located from Belfast, as this individual appeared in the media.

Residents in local communities with young families and schools were noted to be particularly concerned when offenders are placed in properties nearby. This resistance was thought to be difficult to overcome, as the reassurance provided to local residents must be balanced with the safeguarding and privacy of offenders.

“We can’t turn around and say that this offender has no interest in children, we need to dance around it and reassure them without compromising his safety and personal information”.

Reluctance to Move On

There was a perception among some participants working with offenders, that some individuals can become ‘comfortable’ in Approved Premises. This was thought to be particularly true for those who had been in prison for a longer period of time or, had served time in prison more than once.

Some offenders become accustomed to the level of routine and support they experience on a daily basis while living in Approved Premises. Some interviewees referred to a perceived sense of security provided by Approved Premises, which may deter some offenders from moving on, especially if they lack the confidence or skills to secure accommodation or live alone (which may be the first time an individual has had to do this).

“Those that have been in hostels for so long are scared because they’ve been in this safe environment for so long – they don’t want to move, they do drag their heels. They haven’t been given that opportunity to integrate into community on release from custody.”

Those who have had adverse childhood experiences, those who are older or those who have had a higher level of interaction with the justice system have been described as individuals who may be particularly difficult to move on. This can, and has, led to the ‘silting up’ of Approved Premises and contributes to the lack of places available for some high-risk offenders on release from prison.

Some participants noted that to overcome challenges in moving on offenders to permanent accommodation, more support should be provided to individuals to ensure that they develop the skills they need to manage tenancies themselves. A small number of participants felt that offenders were being ‘set-up to fail’ when offered accommodation, as further support is required to help them to maintain their tenancies.

“You almost set them up to fail by offering them something”

One participant noted that certain offenders like the routine and restrictions associated with being in Approved Premises, as this can help them to manage their own risk. This was believed to be more likely among sexual offenders than violent offenders, who have been described as difficult to engage and more reluctant to be placed in hostels in the first instance.

Some offenders have been living in hostel accommodation much longer than intended and some of those interviewed reported that in these situations certain residents can be seen as having a certain ‘status’ in the hostel, which can cause unrest when new residents are placed.

“He sees himself as top dog as he has been there so long”.

Accommodation issues were also reported to arise more frequently when dealing with offenders who are unable to engage (due to complex needs) or don’t want to engage with professionals for support to obtain suitable accommodation.

“It’s very difficult to help somebody that doesn’t want to be helped.”

Some participants commented that there is support on offer from key workers of hostel staff, but that it is up to the individual as to whether or not they engage with the support on offer. Conversely, it was noted

that for other types of support – such as floating support services provided by Extern – not all offenders have been able to avail of this.

One participant who was familiar with the process of housing high-risk offenders in Scotland, discussed the perceived benefits of this system, in comparison to move-on provision in Northern Ireland. They reported that offenders in Scotland move directly into permanent accommodation, which has been found to enhance rehabilitation into the community and gives offenders the opportunity to develop ‘positive relationships’ with people who have not committed similar crimes. This was considered to enable probation officers to focus the core issues (such as prevention of re-offending), rather than spending significant amounts of time trying to secure accommodation. It was also thought that as offenders were not living in hostels and associating with other offenders, it provided them with anonymity, which in turn allowed them to feel safe. In contrast, the move-on process in Northern Ireland was considered to be a lengthy process, which acts as a barrier to rehabilitation.

“Quite bluntly, it’s not effective. It’s not time effective. It takes such a long time. It can create barriers for guys integrating into the community.”

Clustering

Another challenge highlighted by participants with a responsibility for risk management was that they had to be careful not to place too many offenders in one area, as this could create a cluster. Clustering was noted as a particular issue in the risk management of sex offenders. Therefore, whilst an area might be suitable, in relation to the offender’s preferences and their PPANI restrictions if there are too many people in one area with similar convictions the accommodation may not be approved by the Designated Risk Managers.

“We take offenders out of prison and into a hostel with other ex-offenders. Tell them not to be associating with each other, but then we also take them away from their whole support network.”

Many of the participants interviewed discussed the issue of clustering, but also highlighted that the processes in which offenders were placed in Approved Premises. They raised concerns about placing those with similar histories and offences relying together in the Approved Accommodation and that they now rely on each other for social support.

“Who else do they have to socialise with? We have just put them right back in with likeminded people”.

While clustering was a concern, many participants also commented that the offenders they worked with would often not reconnect with their families or wider social contacts, which would often leave them isolated and other offenders often make up their social networks, due to their living arrangements.

“In real life people [the PPANI Offenders] do not reconnect with their families and communities, therefore the users are very isolated.”

“Our clients are very isolated. The majority do not return to their social contacts.”

A number of those interviewed indicated that most of the Approved Premises available are in Belfast and in turn, the city has the largest proportion of violent and sexual offenders in hostel accommodation. Those who work closely with offenders have found that they are more likely to make links with each other and get used to the support from those in similar circumstances.

While ‘clustering’ has been identified as a potential issue, one that has on occasion drawn media attention, a small number of participants we interviewed noted that it was beneficial to some degree that certain offenders are living together as the police and other relevant authorities will know where they are, which facilitates ongoing risk-management.

“People who are not from Belfast, want to live in Belfast because it helps them stay anonymous. But then clustering becomes an issue.”

Changes in demand over time

Almost all of those interviewed noted that Covid-19 has impacted upon Move On in two main ways. Firstly, participants noted that over the lockdowns associated with Covid-19, all of the hostels not only became busier but, they were also under increased pressure due to the need for social distance.

Another challenge created by Covid-19 was the lack of movement in the social housing sector over the lockdown periods, which created additional pressures on vacancies. Participants noted that people were not moving from social housing, so the pressure of vacancies was even greater. Some highlighted that Covid-19 presented additional challenges in securing move-on accommodation as when certain properties were available, face-to-face property viewings were not operating as normal.

“COVID slowed everything down”.

Another impact of COVID 19 that was highlighted was the inability of staff from various agencies to meet with offenders face to face to discuss their housing needs and what options were available to them. It created a disconnect between housing providers (i.e. NIHE) and staff within the hostels. This made it more difficult for hostel staff to identify the right person to talk to if they had queries regarding accommodation. Several participants suggested that ‘housing clinics’ were very helpful for offenders in that they would receive advice from housing officers regarding their housing options and it would enable offenders to understand what was or was not feasible in terms of housing (e.g., likelihood of being housed in a preferred area).

Another change in the demand for Move On accommodation that was noted by most participants was the demographics of service users. Participants noted that they have an increasingly aging population within the approved hostels, many of whom have additional health and social care needs. This was reported to be largely due to historical convictions (mainly in relation to sexual offences). One participant provided an example of an elderly individual living in Approved Premises, who they felt could live in independent accommodation in the community. As there was no available provision for this individual, the participant felt he was taking a place that could be offered to someone who is high-risk.

“For months now, he has taken up a bed that could and should go to a higher risk client.”

Some participants discussed a recent increase in the use of B&B type accommodation – as a temporary housing solution while Approved Premises were secured. While the placement of offenders in B&B accommodation was recognised to be a last resort, a small number of participants commented that they felt this had happened more frequently in the recent months (at the time of their interviews). The use of B&B accommodation was necessary in those situations where no places were available (often on short notice) in Approved Premises. As mentioned previously, some participants felt that this was in part due to individuals staying too long in Approved Premises, which preventing places from becoming available. Some participants reported that they felt some individuals who were staying in hostels longer than necessary, did not pose the same kind of risk as high-risk offenders who should receive a hostel place as a priority.

Positive examples throughout the Move On process

While NIHE may receive a lot of applications from offenders who are presenting as homeless, or seeking accommodation, the organisation has extensive experience of housing individuals in temporary or other accommodation when it is required, often at short notice. While some participants did not have many examples of clients who had been able to secure NIHE accommodation as move-on accommodation, others explained that even in the most complex circumstances, where issues can arise frequently with individual cases, NIHE will always try to find a solution. One participant noted that while it could be a bit of a ‘waiting game’ for accommodation, that this is the case with most people who are looking for houses, and that there are success stories of individuals who have moved from Approved Premises back into the community.

Hostel staff

Some participants highlighted how supportive hostel staff were, in working with other organisations and in keeping offenders ‘away from external influences’. While hostel staff were generally found to be helpful, a small number of participants indicated that a hostel in South Area was found to be positively impacting offenders. One participant felt that this may be explained by its location, in that it kept offenders away from places and acquaintances that may influence them to commit further crime.

Floating support

There was a consensus among participants (from various organisations) that floating support services were extremely beneficial in supporting offenders in their transition to permanent accommodation. Most participants felt that services provided by organisations such as Extern were under great pressure.

“[Extern] are excellent, they are so good, I can only imagine how overwhelmed they are”

While floating support was recognised to be of great benefit to offenders, some participants highlighted the provision of floating support varied from region to region. Depending on whether or not offenders could access support services, hostel staff may be more or less involved in providing support to help hostel residents to support them to move on. Once an offender has moved-on, floating support services such as Extern, were considered to be their ‘best chance of succeeding’ in terms of managing their tenancy and living in the community successfully without re-offending.

“Floating support services are good, they help, it gives people a good chance to succeed.”

Other examples

While the barriers to move-on have been discussed in detail throughout this chapter, there are few examples which highlight where individuals have successfully moved on, or where this has happened without any challenges. The main positive practices discussed through the interviews, include the tenacity and cooperation of NIHE, the support provided by hostel staff and floating support services.

One participant referred to the ‘Vicar’s Relief Fund’ which comes from an organisation based in central London, which can help individuals moving on with rental deposits. The initiative is intended to help to stabilise those with housing challenges. This participant reported that one of their client’s had applied to this fund and was awarded a month’s rent – the money was transferred very quickly, and the client was able to secure a private rental.

Looking to the future of Move On accommodation

We asked participants to look ahead to the future of move-on accommodation, and to discuss how they felt the system for the provision of move-on accommodation could develop in order to meet the objectives of the PPANI Strategic Management Board. A number of themes were identified.

Increased support for offenders

Many participants highlighted that offenders often came from complex backgrounds or have individualised needs. There was a consensus that offenders do not always possess the skills necessary to successfully transition from life in prison or Approved Premises to independent living in the community. Many participants suggested that for this reason, offenders often struggled to arrange finance, employment and accommodation. They may also find it difficult to establish positive relationships. Some commented that by throwing offenders in ‘at the deep end’, by asking them to find and maintain a property, may result in certain individuals become a ‘risk’ again and could lead to reoffending.

“Service users have often had chaotic lifestyles and have experiences additions and/or trauma. They can’t manage a normal life.”

Participants interviewed felt that additional support for offenders, to advise them on the above matters, would be beneficial to the move-on process. Several participants also noted that offenders can feel isolated when they spend long periods of time in Approved Premises.

“It would be good if there was more support, not so much mental health, like a social support”

It was also noted that allowing offenders to contact their own support networks, such as family, could be beneficial to their rehabilitation.

Some felt that the process to start identifying accommodation for those who are subject to PPANI restrictions should start earlier. This would give the relevant agencies more time to identify suitable accommodation, to manage the expectations of the individual and to engage with other agencies to source additional support services if required.

Transitional accommodation

Several participants discussed the potential benefits of having transitional or sheltered accommodation, where offenders could go after leaving Approved Premises, and before securing a permanent tenancy. It

was recognised, however, that this could pose additional challenges, for example, offenders could become reliant on this type of accommodation.

Non-government organisations such as Extern and the Simon Community were perceived to be 'plugging a gap' and are addressing housing needs. From a risk management perspective, one participant commented that premises such as Thompson House were important, as securing stable places there for offenders would prevent issues around 'sofa surfing' and homelessness for those who are struggling to find accommodation and therefore manage risk better.

"If we had 10 Thompson Houses, we'd be in a great position"

Most participants highlighted that hostels should not be used as a long-term solution, but should be used for a time of 'crisis'. At the same time, many acknowledged the challenges facing NIHE and other housing providers.

"But no-one should be in a hostel for 18 months."

Increased communication

Some participants felt that increased communication across agencies (beyond those involved in the PPANI committee) could allow for issues with accommodation to be addressed as early as possible. One participant highlighted that due to the fact that their organisation does not sit on the housing panel, they are sometimes unaware of potential housing issues or threats. Knowing this in advance would be beneficial, as there have been times where the participant has struggled to get hostels or other housing providers to accommodate offenders.

Being able to pre-empt housing issues would be positive, as often sometimes participants are trying to arrange accommodation for offenders on the day they are released. Those working with offenders may anticipate that a housing issue will arise but are often unable to overcome this.

"[You] see the crash coming, but know you are helpless to do anything about it."

More advanced warning of potential issues with offenders in hostels would be of benefit to some of the participants interviewed, as they would have some time to try to secure alternative accommodation if they are evicted from a hostel.

As mentioned previously, some participants felt that there was a discrepancy in the levels of knowledge of the PPANI system across different employees within NIHE, and that housing advisors were less knowledgeable on some of the PPANI processes, compared to more senior staff involved in PPANI. One participant who was familiar with the move-on processes in Scotland, suggested that the system used there – where specific housing advisors would manage the equivalent MAPPA offenders – could be beneficial in Northern Ireland, as this would allow a handful of front-line staff to become knowledgeable about PPANI processes and license conditions.

Housing stock

While participants were open in their suggestions for the future of move-on accommodation in Northern Ireland, it was recognised that without sufficient housing stock, finding permanent accommodation would always be a challenge.

Summary

The multi-agency approach to Move On is necessary and the agencies involved reported positive working relationships and good levels of communication. It was the view of many participants that everyone working with individuals subject to PPANI, understood what their roles were and any common challenges which may arise. While participants spoke positively about NIHE, a small number highlighted issues around getting in touch with local housing officers, and there was a perception among a small number of participants, that some front line staff within NIHE were not as knowledgeable on PPANI processes as others, which was considered to be a potential barrier to move-on accommodation. Lack of engagement from some Health and Social Care Trusts was highlighted as a key issue, especially with regard to service users who have additional health and social care needs. When an individual would move from one trust area to another, this was also found to be challenging, in terms of arranging a new care package.

Move On is operating within extremely challenging circumstances, including a general lack of social housing, increasing demand within the PRS and additional occupancy pressures within Approved Premises. The impact of this is compounded by the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is making it even more challenging to find suitable accommodation and move offenders on from the Approved Hostels. Participants highlighted an increased housing need over the past couple of years. Offenders may also struggle to secure properties in certain areas, not only due to high demand, but based on the conditions of their license. If an offender is not allowed to live close to a school or other type of property, their available housing options become further limited. Securing accommodation in the PRS poses its own challenges. Landlords are reluctant to take offenders and there are financial considerations, as many offenders will be unable to provide a rental deposit for properties in this sector.

Participants discussed the challenges linked to individuals who are subject to PPANI restrictions and who also have additional needs. Finding accommodation for those with additional needs, such as elderly individuals and those with complex mental health needs can be difficult. Some older offenders may require sheltered accommodation, which may not be suitable based on their license restrictions. Those who require health and social care support, may struggle to obtain assessments which will help them to obtain housing points as they will not or cannot engage with certain health professionals.

Community resistance was discussed as another potential barrier to securing move-on accommodation, as local residents can respond negatively to offenders being placed in their neighbourhood. Perceptions of Approved Premises among the general public was thought to fuel community resistance, especially when specific individuals or hostels are named in the media.

A reluctance to move-on among offenders themselves was also identified as a potential barrier. Participants felt that some individuals became dependent on the routine and support they received while in Approved Premises, especially if they lack the support or skills needed to successfully move into the community. Some commented that they felt that some offenders felt better able to manage their own risk while supervised in hostels, while others had lived there so long, they had become comfortable with their living arrangements.

Many participants highlighted the issue of 'clustering' whereby a number of offenders are housed in relatively close proximity. It was noted that those with a responsibility for risk management needed to take care not to place too many offenders in one area, thus creating a cluster. This was noted to be particularly problematic among sex offenders. While clustering was identified as a challenge, it was acknowledged that while in Approved Premises, this was somewhat unavoidable and offenders with

make links with each other and rely on other in similar situations for support (particularly as social ties with family or friends were often cut). Should clustering occur once individuals have moved-on, one advantage to this from a risk management perspective is that when it is the case that offenders are living together, the police and relevant authorities will know where they are.

There were a couple of key factors which highlighted how demand has changed over time. Firstly, nearly all the participants interviewed indicated that Covid-19 had impacted the move-on process, as hostels were busier, there was an increased need for social distancing, and there was a lack of movement in the housing sector. Housing clinics had also stopped within Approved Premises during the lockdowns, which was considered to be another barrier to move-on. Secondly, participants noted an aging population within hostels, which as mentioned previously, is linked to challenges with finding suitable accommodation, often for individuals with complex needs.

While there were few specific positive examples throughout the move on process, participants highlighted that NIHE are experienced in providing accommodation in complex cases and will always do their best to find a solution. Hostel staff and floating support services were also considered to be beneficial in supporting offenders to successfully move on to permanent accommodation, and to maintain their tenancies.

Looking to the future of move on accommodation, many participants felt that offenders needed additional support to move on successfully, particularly to gain necessary skills to be able to live independently and additional social support. Transitional accommodation was frequently suggested as a potential positive 'step-down' offer between Approved Premises and permanent accommodation, but how this could be implemented was unknown. Increased communication between all relevant authorities involved in the risk management and housing provision for those subject to PPANI was suggested, mainly to ensure that any potential issues (such as housing threats) could be addressed as soon as possible. Ultimately, there was a consensus that move-on is currently a complex and lengthy process, and that the success of move-on in the future would be dependent on a larger housing stock, which is not available at this time.

06

**Service User
interviews**

6 Case Studies

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide an anonymised overview of the key themes and findings from in-depth interviews with four offenders who were subject to PPANI restrictions and had experience of living in PBNi Approved Hostel accommodation. Due to COVID -19 restrictions all four interviews were conducted remotely (via telephone and Microsoft Teams). All service users who participated in the interviews provided informed consent in advance.

Case Study 1: D

D has lived in his own, privately rented accommodation in County Down for around six years. After being released from prison he resided in a PBNi hostel for around six months. D highlighted how challenging his time in the hostel was and how difficult his life was at that time. He described how he had become very institutionalised in prison and he noted that that he understood how some men became very used to the routine and security within the hostel which makes leaving the hostel very difficult for them.

He had engaged with Housing Rights whilst in prison and was able to complete his own housing application. However, D noted that he believed that prisoners should be provided with more support before release as, when he was released he felt “*abandoned*”. He described how he was provided with a train fare and directions to the hostel and how stressful that was experience was as he was very concerned about getting lost and then inadvertently break conditions that were placed on him.

D noted that he was provided with support from Extern and that this was extremely helpful. This included a support worker who provided him with very practical help. For example, the support worker helped him to draft a letter and use the right address to open a bank account as well as accompanying him to the bank. He also took D to view properties when he was looking for his own accommodation. He described this help as invaluable and really helped to speed the process up for him.

Very early into his stay at the hostel D realised that he was going to find it very difficult to access accommodation through NIHE, as he was a single man and did not qualify for many Housing Points and there was a very long waiting list. He also felt that there was insufficient communication from NIHE regarding his housing application, meaning that it was difficult for him to know if his application had been processed and what the likely timescales were.

He also recognised that there are very few private sector landlords who are willing to accept offenders who are subject to PPANI conditions and therefore he needed to start looking for a home in a much wider range of areas. He noted that the deposits required for PRS accommodation were often high and he started saving very hard as soon as he entered the hostel. D. recognised that in addition to the limited number of landlords who would accept offenders as tenants, the deposit was a huge barrier to many people in his position he suggested that there be some of guarantor or, loan scheme that offenders could access to help them move out of PBNi Approved Hostels.

D noted that his accommodation is in a relatively quiet, semi-rural area and whilst he appreciated the anonymity, he would like to be a more productive member of society.

Case Study 2: L

L has been in a PBNi approved hostel in Belfast for over a year. He has a number of mental health issues which have created additional challenges for him in finding suitable accommodation as he needs to stay close to mental health service providers and to a pharmacy to collect a daily prescription. L. noted that the staff in the hostel, including his Social Worker, have been very supportive and provide him with advice and practical help on many aspects of everyday life.

"The hostel staff are fantastic, very helpful. The support that [the hostel] gives is immense".

He highlighted that whilst he wants to move out of the hostel he would find it very difficult living on his own and he would require additional support as well as practical help (such as furniture) to get established on his own.

He noted that he received some housing advice whilst in prison from a trained peer but, that he had to go through all the paperwork again when he got into the hostel. Noted that his housing application has been processed and that he know how many points he has been awarded but he doesn't know what is happening now with his application, he felt that his Housing Officer was very hard to get hold of and that there was very little communication from NIHE

"I am supposed to have a designated Housing Officer, but I haven't heard from him, he is no help."

L noted that he was finding the lack of communication very unsettling and that he didn't know what was happening.

"If I knew where I was on the list, I could start to plan, set goals, make arrangements. I need people to help me and I could plan with all the people I need help with".

L described the efforts that he undertaken to find suitable accommodation and that he had applied for 14 different places but each of them were rejected by his PBNi officer as they were either unsuitable because of his PPANi restrictions or, they would be unsafe for him *"due to community issues"*.

L regarded costs as one of the greatest challenges to accessing accommodation via the PRS. He had looked at PRS one bedroom apartments but there were significantly more than his Housing Benefits and they also required a month's rent in advance, both of which meant that it was unaffordable for him.

L believed that the staying in the hostel longer that was necessary has had a negative impact on his mental health and how noted that the uncertainty was challenging.

"It's difficult coming out of prison and harder staying in a hostel. I'm still sitting here after 14 months with no offer and no change of private rented sector. It's very difficult."

Case Study 3: P

P had been in PBNi Approved Hostel for eight months. He is now in PRS accommodation, in a shared house where he has his own room but shares a bathroom and a kitchen. He did not receive any housing advice whilst in prison and completed a housing application within a week or two of being in the hostel with support from hostel staff but, he found the process *"chaotic"*.

P noted that he has a named Housing Officer who helped him out with his point's allocation but that he finds it difficult to get hold of him.

"I have had no updates from the Housing Executive, I would like to know, even its bad news".

Whilst initially he didn't mind being in the hostel, as it was a relief having somewhere to go after being released and that the staff in the hostel are very helpful.

P noted that the biggest challenge for him is the lack of affordable accommodation is. He noted that this also places additional pressures on the PRS and drives rents and deposits up and that PRS accommodation is often £160 a month more than his Universal Credit.

"The PPANI restrictions are not unsurmountable, but the lack of property is... I have been looking really hard for three months but the prices are scandalous"

P believes that offenders need to be more realistic about the areas where they can live and that they have to broaden their searches. He noted that whilst his current accommodation is in a nice area it is not the area in Belfast where he would like to live.

P believed that the housing application process is too slow for offenders and that something should be done to allow them start the process sooner.

"I think I should have been able to start my housing application when I was still in custody. As part of your pre-release plan your housing application should be done."

Case Study 4: J

J has been living in a PBNi Approved Hostel in Belfast since his release from custody over four years ago. He described how after his release he contacted NIHE, registered himself homeless, completed a housing application and was appointed a housing officer. However, his application was not processed properly, the housing officer did not identify any suitable housing. J noted how he had changed his area of choice multiple times in order to be as flexible as possible and to maximise his chances of getting accommodation but nothing was happening with his file.

"Every time we go back [to the application] I change my areas. Last year, I was told that if I put my name down for the greater Derry area it would open up a whole new scope. But I am still waiting, it made no difference."

"If I find somewhere nice and suitable I would take it – I don't care where it is".

J noted that he has complex mental health and degenerative physical health issues, including anxiety disorders and mobility difficulties and that he had submitted medical evidence from his Doctor to support his application. When staff from the hostel and the V&C organisation who advocate for J asked for an update on the progress of his application J was informed that he needed to re-submit his medical evidence.

He has only had one offer of accommodation which was turned down by PBNi as it did not meet J's needs. However, the Housing Officer deemed that it was a reasonable offer and he then had to go through an appeals process.

"They have made offers that are just not suitable, they are not in a good area. My floating support said it".

“Single lets are very scarce – no one is moving. But they are now talking about putting me into a two bedroom as they now recognise that I need additional support, but this was all related through my floating support officer. I am the last person to know what is going on”.

Described how living in the hostel for so long is “devastating” and that it is making his mental health issues worse. He noted that at one point he was suicidal when a property gets identified he gets his hopes up but then when they are not suitable.

J recognises that because of his convictions in addition to his health issues it makes it even harder to get accommodation. He has worked closely with PBNi and his floating support to examine all options that are open to him, NIHE, Housing Associations and the PRS. He noted that he has been to a solicitor and Housing Rights, to examine the delay with his housing application and that he now has a new Housing Officer who links in with his Floating Support Officer, PBNi and his doctor. He was told that the Housing Officer is supposed to link in with you on a weekly basis, but he haven’t heard from her in months.

J described how he has a lot of support around him. He noted that the staff in the hostel, the PBNi, his floating support and his doctor have all been very helpful.

“It’s frustrating for me and the people who are working on my behalf, we keep having to go over old ground.

His case is now being considered by a multi-agency panel for complex cases, but he feels like he keeps having to submit the same evidence over and over again. His GP and his Mental Health doctor and counsellor have submitted evidence three times.

“I mean how many times? They are now fully aware of my issues, my physical health, my mental health, my convictions, the time I have been in here”.

J. noted how having to keep going on the details is difficult for him and that it is “re-traumatising”. He also finds the lack of communication makes him anxious. He said that he would appreciate a brief call, even if it’s just to say that nothing suitable has become available. But he was dubious that being referred to a specialist, multi-agency panel would make any difference to his situation.

J recognises that the publicity around his offences makes it almost impossible for him to access the PRS. He said that any landlord could search his name on the internet and see what he was accused of and turn him down instantly.

Overall, J feels that he has been neglected by the system. He has been in the hostel for four years longer than he should have been. He feels that he has done everything that has been asked of him and he still hasn’t been able to find accommodation. He is quite despondent and no longer feels suitable accommodation will ever be found for him and says that he now feels like a burden on society and that a place of his own would give him a “second life”. He is very frustrated with the whole process.

Summary

The interviews with the service users emphasised the issues associated with Move-On accommodation for PPANI offenders. They brought to life the challenges these offenders experience in accessing permanent accommodation and the impact of staying in hostel accommodation longer than was necessary. A number of common themes emerged from the case studies, including:

- Lack of communication: All of those who were interviewed noted that they felt should have had more communication from the NIHE regarding the status of their application. They noted that this was great source of frustration and had a negative impact on their mental health.
- The majority of those interviewed noted that the costs associated with the PRS are a major barrier to moving on. They noted that not only were the monthly rents often more expensive but, also the deposits that were required were a major barrier.
- Publicity around their offences, was also noted as a barrier to accessing accommodation. Two of the service users interviewed that private landlords would search the internet and once they found out about your offences they would not offer you the property. This also meant that some areas would be unsafe for the service users to live in, as communities would not accept the offenders as neighbours.
- All of those interviewed noted that whilst they found it challenging living in the hostel, it provided a routine and a sense of security, which can make some offender 'institutionalised', which can make it more difficult for them to move on.
- The interviewees believed that there should be more support available for offenders leaving prison. There was some discussion around the practical issues they faced such as getting identification and a bank account before they could access benefits or, look for accommodation in the PRS. Three of those interviewed highlighted the importance of the practical support they received from V&C sector organisations.
- The service user case studies also highlighted the very different experience that PPANI offenders have had depending the additional needs they have. The two service users without any specific health and social care needs, whilst they noted challenges associated with a shortage of social housing were able to move one within a year. The two service users who had more complex needs remained in the Approved Hostels for significantly longer. This further emphasises the additional difficulties experienced by individuals with complex needs when attempting to secure permanent accommodation.

07

**Conclusions and
Recommendations**

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

In June 2021 there were around 46 offenders who are subject to PPANI restrictions living within PBNI Approved Hostel accommodation. Since January 2016 a total of 74,754 nights were spent in PBNI Approved Hostel accommodation, at an average length of stay of 227 days, ranging from 1 day to 1,925 days (5.3 years). Approved Hostel accommodation is intended as a temporary housing solution to ensure that PPANI offenders adhere to licence conditions until suitable permanent accommodation can be found that also adhere to any PPANI restrictions.

An analysis of the data relating to stays in PBNI Approved Accommodation shows that PPANI sexual offenders stayed more than three times longer than violent offenders. Suggesting that these offenders face additional challenges when accessing permanent accommodation. Furthermore, those with physical or mental health problems also experienced more delays in getting accommodation. Therefore, sex offenders with one or more health conditions are more likely to experience longer stays in approved accommodation.

The cost of Approved Premises per offender varies significantly based on the specific hostel and length of stay, however, this equates to around £13,000 per stay. As Sex Offenders tended to have longer stays in approved accommodation than other offenders the average cost per stay for sex offenders was significantly more than for violent offenders, at £18,000 per stay compared to £4,700 per stay. On average, around 72% of the costs are met by Supporting People funding with the remaining 28% provided by service users, via Housing Benefit.

Common themes emerged from the feedback provided by key stakeholders, service users and a review of the literature.

Offenders with complex needs

Stakeholders from the criminal justice sector noted that the UK's prison population is aging, meaning that more and more offenders are coming out of custody with additional or, complex health and mobility problems, which is creating additional challenges finding accessible accommodation. There are a number of papers and research studies that demonstrate not only that the prison population is aging but also that there is a high prevalence of illnesses and disabilities amongst older prisoners.⁶³ In addition to the growing number of offenders with complex health and social care needs, stakeholders also noted the challenges that services users experienced when trying to access social care in the community, which further restricted their housing options. Stakeholders noted that closer engagement with the appropriate staff in HSCTs would be welcomed.

Inter-agency working

Whilst key stakeholders noted that the communication and inter-agency working between those directly involved in the PPANI committees was working well, communication across other agencies appeared to be less consistent. For example, feedback from service users, Hostel staff and representatives from V&C sector organisations noted that at times it was difficult to speak to a NIHE Housing Officer. Services users highlighted that the lack of communication from Housing Officers was frustrating and that the uncertainty around their housing application made them anxious. A review of the literature relating to

⁶³ For example, see: Aging Prison Population. House of Commons Justice Committee. Fifth Report of Session 2019 -21.

Move On accommodation for high-risk offenders also highlighted the importance of effective engagement across a wide range of agencies to facilitate timely move on.

Given the demand for social housing effective engagement with Housing Associations is key to supporting the process. There was a perception amongst some stakeholders that Housing Associations were reluctant to accept PPANI offenders as tenants. However, staff from Housing Associations noted that they take each application on a case by case basis and have to consider the welfare of their current tenants when assessing the suitability of an applicant for the unit that is available. They also noted that they would welcome closer engagement with relevant NIHE staff when making decisions. A review of the literature also highlighted that engaging with Housing Associations in relation to high risk offenders can be challenging, one project in the South of England found that the development of formal communication processes, through a protocol helped this process.

Community resistance to offenders

Most key stakeholders and two service users highlighted that the potential for a public challenge from the local community is also an issue that they need to be cognisant of when considering permanent accommodation. Whilst both the PSNI and PBNi will only approve accommodation that is within the conditions of an offender's restrictions and licence conditions any potential reactions from the local community also needs to be considered when approving accommodation. This further limits the range of properties that are suitable Move On accommodation. Feedback from those interviewed highlighted that sex offenders are most likely to be met with high levels of community resistance, which is consistent with a number of studies that found sex offenders to be the most 'feared and loathed' offenders in society⁶⁴. An analysis of the data relating to the length of stay in Approved Accommodation also highlighted that on average sex offenders stayed significantly longer than violent offenders.

Demand for social housing

The most frequently discussed challenge impacting PPANI offenders who are seeking move on accommodation was the lack of social housing. All of those interviewed highlighted the shortages in social housing stock particularly accommodation with one or two bedrooms. This view is further supported by data published by the Department for Communities⁶⁵ which shows that the number of people on waiting lists for social housing in 2020-2021 was over 43,000 (the highest in 10 years). This data also shows particularly high levels of demand for social housing in Belfast, Derry and Strabane and Craigavon Armagh and Banbridge district council areas. Furthermore, single males accounted for around one quarter (26%) of those who presented as homeless and the district council areas with the largest number of households presenting as homeless (per 1,000 population) were Belfast City, Derry City and Strabane and Mid and East Antrim⁶⁶. Therefore, the statistical data from the NIHE and the Department for Communities corroborates the views of key stakeholders and service users who noted the high levels of demand for properties that are suitable for single males, especially within the Belfast and Derry City areas which created additional challenges for them in accessing social housing.

Access to the PRS

All of those consulted with noted two main limitations associated with PPANI offenders accessing accommodation via, the PRS. Firstly, due the generally high level of demand across the PRS, the

⁶⁴ For example see: Petrunik, M.G. (2001), 'The Hare and the Tortoise: American and Canadian Approaches to Sex Offender Policy', International Academy of Law and Mental Health Conference, Montreal [www.ialmh.org/Montreal2001]

⁶⁵ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-housing-stats-20-21-full-copy.pdf>

⁶⁶ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-homelessness-bulletin-jul-dec-2021.pdf>

average rent and deposits required for the PRS tends to be higher than that of social housing. As most of the offenders who are subject to PPANI restrictions are entitled to claim Housing Benefit their financial circumstances often limits their access to the PRS. A review of NIHE data on affordability within the PRS in 2018 highlighted⁶⁷ that based on the average household income for the local council area and PRS average costs, there were particular affordability issues in:

- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon;
- Belfast;
- Causeway Coast and Glens; and
- Derry and Strabane.

It should also be noted that the latest analysis on affordability was published in 2018 other research commissioned by the NIHE⁶⁸ has highlighted that rent across the PRS has continued to rise over the past number of years. For example, the average monthly rent across Northern Ireland had increased by 9.2% from 2020 to 2021. This is likely to exacerbate any affordability issues and make access to the PRS even more challenging for those subject to PPANI restrictions.

A further challenge in accessing the PRS sector is landlord's reluctance to accept violent or, sexual offenders as tenants. Key stakeholders and service users who were interviewed noted that landlord's often 'Google' potential tenants and once they see details of their convictions they do not accept them as tenants. Given the high levels of demand for PRS accommodation landlords can choose who they want as tenants.

Planning for release

Feedback from key stakeholders and service users suggests that housing issues have not consistently been considered within prisoner's resettlement plans. Whilst some stakeholders highlighted that at times offenders are released with little or no notice, meaning that the use of temporary Approved Accommodation is necessary in order to manage risk and adhere to licence conditions

Whilst it is recognised that planning can be difficult for prisoners with very short sentences or, for those without a custodial element to their sentence; housing should be a core element of an offender's release/resettlement plan and should be considered from the start of their imprisonment. A small number of those who were consulted with suggested that it would be beneficial if offenders who knew they would have no accommodation on release to submit their housing application in advance. Therefore, they would be submitting a housing application whilst still in custody, once they knew their release date and therefore helping to reduce the amount of time spent in Approved Accommodation.

Recommendations

It is clear that there are a number of challenging and complex issues that can prevent offenders who are subject to PPANI conditions to move out of temporary, Approved accommodation in a timely manner. The delay in finding suitable, settled accommodation has negative impact on service users, the system and the public purse. Given the individual nature of the circumstances associated with each offender and the range of agencies required to support effective Move On it is unlikely that one or, two individual

⁶⁷ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/3a31604f-043f-4b09-9308-eaea079046e3/Affordability-in-the-private-rented-sector-in-Northern-Ireland-in-2018.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf> 113528

⁶⁸ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Private-Rental-Market-CURRENT/performance-private-rental-market-NI-Jan-July-2021.aspx?ext=.>

actions will make a significant impact on the length of stay in approved accommodation. There are however a number of factors that should be considered to minimise the length of stay in Approved Accommodation, these include:

Specialist Housing Officer: PPANI and NIHE should consider creating a Specialist Housing Officer role who would be appointed to liaise with all the PBNi approved hostels. This would allow them to develop specialist skills and knowledge and potentially manage few cases which would allow them to devote more time to each case and will have the specific aim of reducing the length of stay within the hostels. It could also simplify the process for Hostel staff, as there would be one point of contact for them. The Housing Officer would also work closely with the NIHE representative on the PPANI panel.

Timing: whilst it is recognised that planning can be difficult for prisoners with very short sentences or, for those without a custodial element to their sentence, housing should consistently be a core element of an offenders resettlement/ release plan and should be considered from the start of their imprisonment. PPANI should consider how best higher risk offenders (Category 2 and 3) can access housing advice and support before their release. For example, through an extension to the existing service provided by Housing Rights.

Closer engagement with Health and Social Care Trusts. Whilst it was noted that HSCTs are required to attend LAPPPs, feedback from key stakeholders indicates that greater levels of engagement and support from relevant HSCT staff would be helpful. The review of data relating to Move On accommodation stays and interviews with key stakeholders highlighted not only the aging profile of PPANI Offenders but also the increasing levels of complex health and social care needs within this population. Qualitative feedback suggests that there is a disconnect between health care provision in prison and on release. Service users, Hostel staff and PBNi staff noted challenges in accessing assessments and community-based packages of care. Where it is recognised within the resettlement planning process that an offender has health and social care needs that require additional support or specific accommodation needs outside of prison staff within the relevant Health and Social Care Trust should be contacted immediately to ensure there is a timely access to assessments and services. In order to facilitate this each Health and Social Care Trust should provide a nominated contact person who can liaise with the PPANI committee and ensure that referrals can be made to the appropriate teams in each Trust area.

Closer engagement with Housing Associations: Feedback from Housing Association staff indicated that they would welcome closer engagement with NIHE or PPANI representatives when making decisions around Housing offers for PPANI Offenders. Whilst it is recognised that due to GDPR it may not be possible to share additional information on housing applicants, NIHE / PPANI representatives should consider engaging with Housing Association staff to provide more details on the PPANI process, risks assessments, the role of DRMs and also the support and supervision services that PPANI offenders access. This may help to alleviate any concerns regarding offering tenancies to PPANI offenders.

Maximising access to PRS: Given the high level of demand for social housing, alternative funding models should be considered to make the PRS more accessible for PPANI Offenders. For example, this may include Deposit Support Schemes (Deposit Support Schemes operate in many Local Authority areas of England⁶⁹) and /or greater use of the existing Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) or the modification of other NI PRS access schemes such as Smartmove.

⁶⁹ For example see The Department for Communities and Local Government Private Rented Sector, Access Development Scheme

Consideration for other housing models. PPANI should consider the extent to which other housing models, such as Housing First, are suitable for PPANI offenders. Under a Housing First model, offenders without suitable accommodation on release from prison would immediately access approved housing with appropriate levels of support to allow them to maintain their tenancy and to live within the conditions of the PPANI arrangements. Whilst it is noted that this may not be suitable for all offenders (for example, those who are released with little or no notice), the provision of this type of accommodation may help to relieve some of the pressure on Approved Hostels and potentially provide better value for money.

Any consideration of the above recommendations should include a detailed cost benefit analysis. Whilst it is recognised that there are resource and cost implications associated with the above recommendations their potential impact should also be considered in light of the costs associated with the provision of approved hostel accommodation.

This report can be found on the Housing Executive website: www.nihe.gov.uk

For any information on the report
Challenges of Move-On Accommodation for Housing Applicants Subject to PPANI,
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