



KEY FACTS

A REVIEW OF PROBATION APPROVED PREMISES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

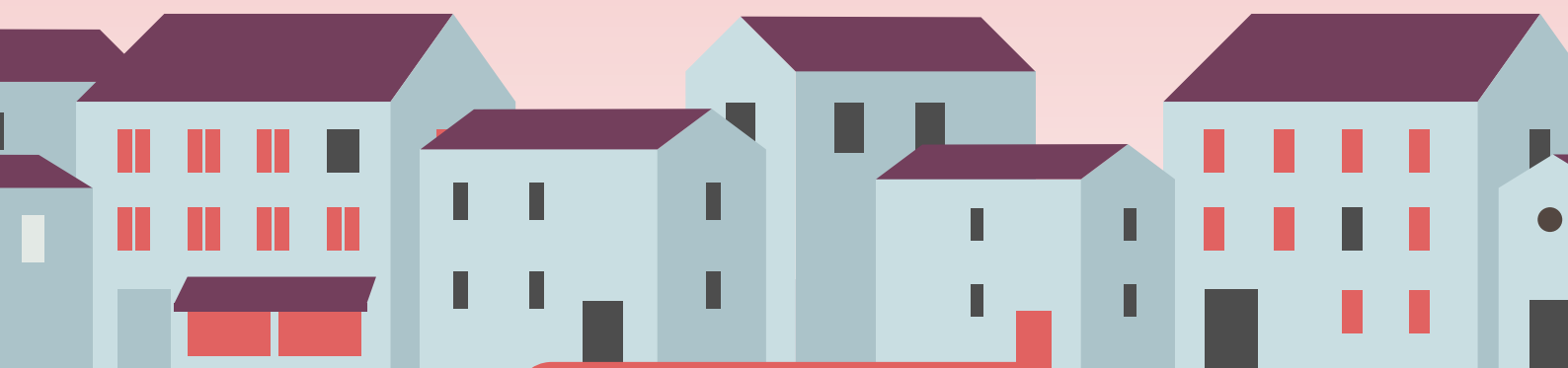
A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW OF
RECOMMENDATION IMPLEMENTATION

JUNE 2026

WHAT ARE APPROVED PREMISES?

Approved premises or hostels are places for high-risk offenders to stay when they leave prison before they are settled in the community. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), in conjunction with approved premises' managers, decide who should live in an approved premise under their supervision when they leave prison.

There are seven approved premises run by four different voluntary and community sector organisations in Northern Ireland. They provide 91 probation approved places for men and women needing enhanced supervision. These places are funded by the Department for Communities Supporting People programme.



OUR 2023 REVIEW

- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) published a Review Report of probation approved premises in March 2023
- The Report made one Strategic and three Operational Recommendations for improvement that were accepted by the Department of Justice (DoJ), PBNI, Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and approved premises.
- The Strategic recommendation aimed to improve the vision, strategy, delivery, staffing and oversight arrangements in place to monitor how approved premises contributed to resettlement, rehabilitation and public protection outcomes.
- The Operational recommendations included greater involvement of approved premises staff in public protection arrangements; actions to support men and women smoothly transition from custody to approved premises, including having photographic identification and ensure ongoing access to medication and setting up a bank account; and delivering improvements in case planning and support for men and women to move on from approved premises to sustainable long-term accommodation.

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WHAT WAS THIS FOLLOW-UP REVIEW ABOUT?

- Inspectors carried out this Follow-Up Review to check what progress had been made to achieve the recommendations.
- Inspectors asked each of the inspected organisations to tell us what work had been done to achieve the recommendations and provide evidence to support this.
- Inspectors visited each of the approved premises and spoke to managers, staff and residents. We also looked at documentation and sampled some case records.
- We spoke to DoJ officials and staff and managers working in criminal justice organisations including Probation Officers, Police Officers and Prison Governors and the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) Co-ordinator.
- We also heard from other statutory, community and voluntary organisations who supported the operation of approved premises.



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WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND?

- Inspectors were disappointed by the slow pace of work and the level of progress in the three years since the recommendations were made. The Strategic Recommendation was not achieved, and the three Operational Recommendations were partially achieved.
- There was a lack of clarity about who was leading the implementation of the Strategic Recommendation even though the 2023 Action Plan had named a senior DoJ official and the PBNI's role needed to be clear to everyone involved in taking this work forward.
- While demands on the approved premises service had increased and the profile of service users had changed since the 2023 Review Report, there had been no changes to the number and type of approved premises. Delivery and staffing models had stayed the same.
- Some formative work was underway to develop a strategic framework, looking at demand modelling, staffing and training.
- The NIPS had continued to develop the resettlement services it provided, but service users and approved premises staff found barriers impacting a smooth transition from custody to approved premises.
- Efforts to better align and involve approved premises staff in risk assessment, case planning and public protection was a work in progress. It was good that approved premises staff were now routinely invited to attend and contribute to Local Area Public Protection Planning meetings.
- Worryingly, in the sample of case files reviewed, Inspectors found one service user under PPANI supervision was released from prison as homeless and there was no space in an approved premise for them, until they had been in the community for several weeks. Inspectors were told this was not an isolated case.
- Housing shortages were impacting the availability of long-term accommodation for people leaving prison and moving on from approved premises.
- Approved premises continued to provide an essential service to the criminal justice system.



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WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- Outstanding work needed to deliver all the inspection recommendations needs to be gripped by all of the organisations involved and the work progressed at pace.
- They need to work together to recognise and agree what needs to be done to develop and support quality approved premises services that meet the current and future needs of men and women requiring enhanced supervision on leaving prison to create safer communities.
- Given the contribution of approved premises to resettlement, rehabilitation and public protection, CJI will continue to monitor progress as part of its inspection programme.

If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

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