



# A REVIEW OF PROBATION APPROVED PREMISES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

---

A FOLLOW-UP REVIEW  
OF RECOMMENDATION  
IMPLEMENTATION

**JUNE 2026**

# CONTENTS

List of abbreviations	2
Chief Inspector's Foreword	3
<b>Follow-Up Review</b>	
<b>Chapter 1</b> Introduction	5
<b>Chapter 2</b> Progress on recommendations	14
<b>Chapter 3</b> Conclusion	33
<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b> Key Details of Approved Premises in Northern Ireland	35
<b>Appendix 2</b> CJI Follow-Up Review Judgements and Definitions	36

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACE</b>	Assessment, Case Management and Evaluation
<b>CJI</b>	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
<b>DfC</b>	Department for Communities
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>DoJ</b>	Department of Justice
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>HMI Probation</b>	His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (in England and Wales)
<b>LAPPP</b>	Local Area Public Protection Panel
<b>NIAO</b>	Northern Ireland Audit Office
<b>NIHE</b>	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
<b>NIPS</b>	Northern Ireland Prison Service
<b>NISRA</b>	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
<b>PBNI</b>	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
<b>PDU</b>	Prisoner Development Unit (within NIPS)
<b>PPANI</b>	Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland
<b>PSNI</b>	Police Service of Northern Ireland
<b>SEHSCT</b>	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
<b>SROSH</b>	Significant Risk of Serious Harm

## Note

Electronic links to documents and information sources referenced within this report are correct at the time of publication but may be subject to change where the information is outside CJI’s control.

# CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

Approved premises and their staff provide vital services to support people released from prison who require enhanced supervision and monitoring in the community.

The 2023 Review Report recommendations aimed to help the inspected organisations, service providers and vital stakeholders like the Department for Communities Supporting People Programme and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive respond to the entirely predictable circumstance that more people would need a place in an approved premise on release.

The increase in Category 2 sexual and violent offenders requiring approved premise accommodation on release is stark and yet strategic direction, service oversight and quality provision has not kept pace. It is unacceptable that any person assessed as Category 2 or 3 under the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland should be released back to the community as homeless.

While no data was available, inspected organisations and stakeholders agreed with Inspectors that the focus on Ending Violence against Women and Girls and implementation of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 had probably led to more demand for services.

While there had been some progress, particularly on the Operational Recommendations, it is particularly disappointing that work to implement the Strategic Recommendation had not been satisfactorily progressed to ensure the improvements needed and the anticipated benefits were realised.

The lack of and barriers to accessing housing in Northern Ireland remains a concern for many and for people moving from an approved premise to another home, when they can find one, it will always carry complexities and risks of reoffending.

This work now needs to be gripped and in the spirit of authentic collaboration, all organisations must recognise and agree what needs to be done together to develop quality approved premise services that meet current and future needs and create safer communities rather than where its responsibilities start and stop.

My thanks to the Department of Justice officials, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Prison Service, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and approved premise service provider officials, Officers and staff who supported this Follow-Up Review.

I am grateful to those residents in approved premises who took time to speak to us about their experiences.

This Follow-Up Review was led by Inspector Maureen Erne and supported by Inspector Rachel Lindsay; I am grateful for their work.



---

**Jacqui Durkin**

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice  
in Northern Ireland

**June 2026**

Criminal Justice Inspection  
Northern Ireland  
*a better justice system for all*



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND TO THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

In March 2023, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) published its report of a *Review of Probation Approved Premises in Northern Ireland*.<sup>1</sup> The Review Report made one Strategic and three Operational Recommendations for improvement. Strategic Recommendation 1 was jointly addressed to the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and the organisations managing approved premises. This recommendation entailed the development of a strategic framework for the operation of approved premises to clarify the vision, strategy and oversight arrangements; reviewing the current delivery model and clarifying the preferred staffing model; developing a strategic training plan and a mechanism to measure and monitor how approved premises contributed to resettlement, rehabilitation and public protection outcomes.

The three Operational Recommendations were made to the NIPS, the PBNI and the Joint Chairs of the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) Policy and Practice Subgroup. These recommendations concerned improvements to practical resettlement supports to ease the transition from custody to community; case and move-on planning; and the involvement of approved premises' key workers in public protection risk assessment and management arrangements.

All four Review Report recommendations were accepted and the DoJ provided a joint action plan in response.

The purpose of this Follow-Up Review is to report on progress made in implementing the 2023 Review Report's recommendations.

1 CJI, *A Review of Probation Approved Premises in Northern Ireland, A Review of how Effectively Probation Approved Premises Contribute to Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Public Protection Outcomes in Northern Ireland, March 2023* available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-review-of-probation-approved-premises-in-northern-ireland/>.

## CHANGES SINCE THE 2023 REVIEW

Fieldwork for the 2023 Review was largely conducted from June to September 2022. Since then there have been no changes to the number of approved premises services, their management organisations, location or the number of PBNi approved premises beds, which remained at 91. Four of the approved premises continued to accept PBNi only referrals with the remaining three accommodating a mix of direct access and PBNi service users. Inspectors were advised that some had also accommodated individuals undergoing pre-release testing from custody in the final stages of their sentence on an ad-hoc basis, although not in recent months. A table setting out the key details of approved premises services is at Appendix 1.

### Operating environment

The operating environment for approved premises had become significantly more challenging. System-wide pressures that existed at the time of the previous Review had not only persisted but had intensified. These included: the rising prison population, increased numbers of individuals being managed under PPANI, unprecedented levels of homelessness, increased demand for temporary accommodation and continuing financial constraints.

### Prison population and accommodation post-release

Official statistics for 2024-25<sup>2</sup> showed the highest average daily immediate custody population since 2015-16 and the highest remand population in a decade. This increase was reflected in demand for approved premises places with a greater number of people requiring approved premises beds at short notice. The length of time that people were spending on remand was impacting on opportunities to effectively support rehabilitation and prepare them for release prior to discharge. More individuals were now leaving custody with no accommodation arranged in advance including individuals where a referral for an approved premise place had been made but no space was available at the point of release, including those subject to PPANI. The rising population meant there was also demand for spaces in approved premises for pre-release testing of individuals in the final stages of their sentence. The NIPS planned to fund one new approved premises place in 2026-27, subject to budget availability, to make provision for this.

The continued growth<sup>3</sup> in the number of individuals managed under PPANI, particularly Category 2 violent offenders, had further contributed to demand for approved premises placements.

NIHE commissioned research<sup>4</sup> published in April 2023 identified structural challenges in securing permanent housing for approved premises service users who were subject to PPANI.

2 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), *The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2024-25, October 2025*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/Northern-Ireland-Prison-Population-2024-25.pdf>.

3 Snapshot PPANI data for the end of each financial year 2023, 2024 and 2025 showed no increase in the proportion of offenders categorised as PPANI Category 3, a 6% increase in the PPANI Category 2 Registered Sex Offenders and a 39% increase in Category 2 Violent Offenders. Data provided by PPANI.

4 NIHE, *Challenges of Move-on Accommodation for Housing Applicants subject to PPANI*, April 2023, available at <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/a93b6e01-6810-4f75-8d72-0fc7123eef37/Review-of-move-on-accommodation-PPANI.pdf>.

These challenges included limited housing options, risk management concerns, inter-agency co-ordination issues and delays to moving on due to stigma and community resistance. Work to take forward the research report's recommendations was being progressed and some improvements had been noted but were severely limited due to the lack of, and access to, move-on accommodation.

*A Protocol for the Management of the Accommodation and Related Support Needs of People in Custody in Northern Ireland*<sup>5</sup>, that was being reviewed during 2022 fieldwork, had been finalised in October 2023. This Protocol provided a framework for co-operation between the signatory organisations<sup>6</sup> setting out how their accommodation needs were to be met in custody. It did not specifically cover the needs of prisoners assessed as PPANI Categories 2 and 3 risk as allocated Personal Development Plan Co-ordinators took the lead in approving their accommodation and support. There was brief reference to the referral pathway for approved premises but not a recognition of the interfaces between them and other housing services.

### Levels of homelessness

As of 30 September 2025, the latest official figures reported almost 50,000 households on the social housing waiting list, with 77% in housing stress<sup>7</sup>, and single males - the primary demographic for approved premises - remaining the largest group presenting as homeless. Wider homelessness reports published in 2025 also highlighted the sustained reliance on temporary and non-standard accommodation and the financial pressure this placed on the NIHE.

A 2025 Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report<sup>8</sup> noted that the homelessness sector had faced unprecedented challenges including:

- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to significant increase in demand for temporary accommodation which had persisted;
- the cost of living crisis with increased rental and household costs and a reducing capacity of private rental as some landlords exited the sector;
- increasing costs to the NIHE of meeting statutory responsibilities leading to a smaller proportion of its budget being spent of prevention work; and
- a relatively small but growing number of households with leave to remain in Northern Ireland presenting to the NIHE requiring homelessness services.

5 *NIHE, A Protocol for the Management of the Accommodation and Related Support Needs of People in Custody in Northern Ireland, October 2023*, available at <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/759e732e-bd84-49b0-b98e-5a32b79b1c95/Prisoner-protocol.pdf>.

6 Signatory organisations to the Protocol were the NIHE, the DoJ, the PBNI, the NIPS, Housing Rights and NIACRO. Homeless Connect and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations were involved in developing the original Protocol but had no direct role in implementation.

7 In Northern Ireland, social houses are allocated according to the Housing Selection Scheme which is a points-based system. A household is considered in housing stress if it has more than 30 points.

8 NIAO, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, *Homelessness in Northern Ireland*, 25 March 2025 available at [https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/documents/2025-03/NI%20Audit%20Office%20Report%20-%20Homelessness%20in%20NI\\_1.pdf](https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/documents/2025-03/NI%20Audit%20Office%20Report%20-%20Homelessness%20in%20NI_1.pdf).

Key findings included that dealing with homelessness, particularly temporary accommodation, was creating an unsustainable financial pressure for the NIHE and that a lack of social housing was a key issue hampering attempts to tackling homelessness. The NIAO report also acknowledged the Beyond the Gate<sup>9</sup> service as a good but scarce example of effective cross-Departmental working.

The current demands for housing significantly impacted the availability of accommodation generally for people leaving prison and move on planning specifically for those who were living in approved premises.

Reoffending data for all adults released from custody in Northern Ireland<sup>10</sup> continued to show that nearly half of first reoffences occurred within three months post release, underscoring the importance of stable accommodation during this period.

### Profile of service users

The experience of approved premises staff and supervising Probation Officers was that the profile of service users accommodated in approved premises had shifted notably since 2022 Review fieldwork. A significant rise in domestic abuse related cases, people with needs related to neurodiversity, mental health and addictions and a higher prevalence of chaotic and violent behaviour among younger males was reported. Services also reported an increase in the number of older residents some with significant health care and mental health needs which could not adequately be met in approved premises, despite the care provided by staff. Unlike in England and Wales, there continued to be no specialist provision to support the management of service users with suspected mental health or personality disorders.

People were more likely to present with multi-diagnosed mental health, behavioural and substance misuse needs.

### Community engagement

The community context surrounding approved premises had also changed and impacted service user allocation. Providers reported higher levels of public concern, political engagement and media scrutiny, contributing to a more challenging environment for accommodating categories of service users, particularly those convicted of sexual offences. Providers had been supported by criminal justice organisations and the DoJ to respond to community concerns when they arose.

9 Beyond the Gate is a service provided by the Housing Rights Service in Northern Ireland. Beyond the Gate works with repeat offenders across Northern Ireland by co-ordinating wrap-around support for prisoners upon release. Its advisers work to reduce homelessness on leaving custody, and associated reoffending, by ensuring that their clients are supported with the initial transition back into independent living.

10 NISRA, *Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland 2022-23 Cohort, October 2025*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/system/files/2025-10/Adult%20and%20Youth%20Reoffending%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20%28202223%20Cohort%29.pdf>. Of those adults who reoffended 20.9% (703 of 3,370) did so within one month and 46.1% (1,554 of 3,370) reoffended within three months following release from custody.

## Staffing and funding

Staffing and workforce stability had improved in some approved premises services but remained fragile overall. A number of the services were carrying vacancies during Review fieldwork with these being covered by experienced agency staff. There had also been changes to many of the management teams.

The Department for Communities (DfC) Supporting People Programme confirmed that funding of its services including approved premises had been uplifted by 6.7% over the last two years but providers reported ongoing financial constraint. One approved premise/service continued to operate at a substantial loss which raised questions about its sustainability.

While the PBNI had a full staff complement, persistent high sickness levels were impacting on delivery of its work. Some Teams that normally would have been staffed by more experienced Probation Officers included relatively more inexperienced staff members.

Since the last Review an experienced Area Manager had been appointed to the Public Protection Team whose responsibilities included chairing the weekly Approved Premises Panel which made decisions on approved premises placements. The post-holder was highly regarded and effectively oversaw the operation of the Panel and supported less experienced colleagues.

## Legislative, strategic and legal developments

There had been no changes to the legislative and policy framework of the operation of approved premises since 2023. Neither had CJl's statutory remit been updated to include the inspection of approved premises.

A significant development since the last Review was the *Court of Appeal's decision in Department of Justice and the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland v McAllister* (9 December 2025).<sup>11</sup> This appeal raised an important question of law, namely whether Parole Commissioners could lawfully direct the release of a prisoner under Article 28 of the *Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008* ('the 2008 Order') on a conditional or contingent basis. The judgment clarified that the Parole Commissioners could not lawfully direct the release of a prisoner on a conditional or contingent basis under the 2008 Order. Release must be 'immediate' in the statutory sense, meaning that all necessary licence conditions - including the availability of suitable accommodation - must be capable of being put in place without dependency on unknown future contingencies. This ruling had implications for approved premises, criminal justice organisations and accommodation providers as it reinforced the need for confirmed, viable addresses at the point of Parole Commissioner decision-making. At the time of Report drafting, the agencies were considering the implications of this judgment.

11 *In His Majesty's Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland on Appeal from the High Court of Justice Northern Ireland King's Bench Division (Judicial Review) in the matter of an Application by the Department of Justice for Judicial Review between: The Department of Justice (Applicant/Appellant) and the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (Respondent/Respondent) and Martin McAllister (First Notice Party) and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (Second Notice Party), [2025] NICA 63*, available at <https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2025-nica-63>.

## USE OF APPROVED PREMISES

During Follow-Up Review fieldwork snapshot data was gathered at each of the approved premises, it found that 95% of the approved premises placements were occupied, mostly by males. The majority were serving Determinate Custodial Sentences (77%) for a range of offences. The proportion of service users subject to PPANI was higher than the 2023 Review snapshot data (59% compared with 50%) with a greater proportion assessed as PPANI Category 2 or 3 (40% compared with 28%). This profile reflected wider changes in the PBNI's workload<sup>12</sup> and PPANI<sup>13</sup> statistics. A higher proportion of service users compared with last time (74% compared to 50%) were assessed as high likelihood of reoffending using the PBNI Assessment, Case Management and Evaluation (ACE) risk assessment tool with a smaller proportion being assessed by the PBNI as posing a Significant Risk of Serious Harm (SROSH) (8%). Service users' risk profile was consistent with what would be expected for approved premises accommodation. During fieldwork visits the average duration of placements was approximately 24 weeks with the majority (55%) having resided at approved premises for six months or less. Almost 10% (eight of 86) had been resident at approved premises for more than six months.

The snapshot data gathered by Inspectors during Follow-Up Review fieldwork was reflected in the data provided by the PBNI for this Follow-Up Review. Table 1 provides a profile of approved premises referrals for the last full financial year (2024-25).

The 2023 Review data is included although the PBNI were not able to replicate this data as the methodology<sup>14</sup> had changed. Care needed to be taken when making a direct comparison between the two financial years.

12 NISRA, *PBNI Annual Caseload Statistics Report 2024-25*, 28 May 2025 available at <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/pbni/pbni-annual-caseload-statistics-2024-25.html>.

13 PPANI statistics available at <https://www.publicprotectionni.com/statistics/>.

14 The PBNI drew the 2024-25 data above from a standalone database. New referrals were defined as anyone who had an arrival date within the financial year. If a service user arrived in April, resided at the approved premises for two months and left, then later came back to the approved premise again in September – that individual was counted twice. Any cases without an arrival date were removed from the analysis (14 cases in total). The number of approved premises service users who were recalled to custody was defined as those where the departure reason was recorded as 'recalled'. The high ACE, PPANI and SROSH figures were based on the corresponding fields within the approved premises database. There were a small number of cases where an ACE band was not recorded. In those cases, it was assumed these were not high ACE cases. For the average weeks stay the duration of stay was calculated by differencing the arrival and departure dates rather than using the length of stay variable within the database. Any cases where the departure date was missing was excluded.

**Table 1: Comparison of approved premises key facts 2021-22 and 2024-25**

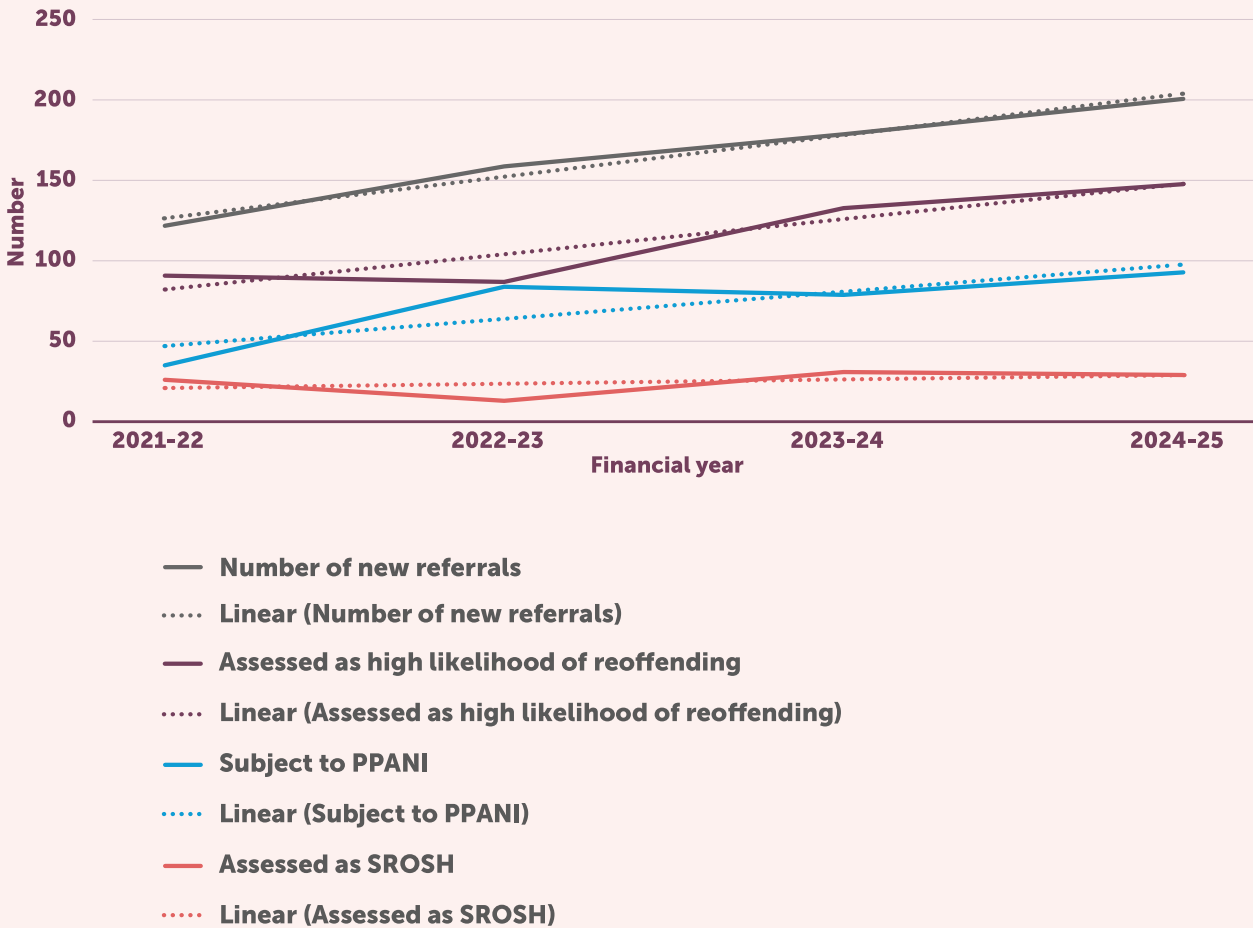
	2021-22	2024-25
Number of approved premises	7	7
Number of approved premises beds	91	91
Number of approved premises that accommodate women	2	2
Number of approved premises that accommodate PBNI referrals only	4	4
Average occupancy rate (PBNI only referrals)	90%	Not available <sup>15</sup>
Proportion of all immediate custody releases required to reside at an approved premise	6% (86 of 1,337)	16% (192 of 1,181)
Funding provided by Supporting People, NIHE (total figure and includes those premises which accept other homeless clients)	£2.88 million	£3.24 million
Number of new referrals to an approved premise	122	201
Proportion of approved premises' service users who were recalled to custody	6% (10 of 176)	6% (12 of 201)
Proportion of service users who were assessed as high likelihood of reoffending when referred to an approved premise	75% (91 of 122)	74% (148 of 201)
Proportion of referrals who were subject to PPANI	29% (34 of 122)	46% (93 of 201)
Average weeks stay at an approved premise	11 (range 4-26 weeks)	15 (range 5-22 weeks)

At a time when the overall number of recalls is increasing, the proportion of approved premises service users recalled to prison remained at 6% and that there were no serious further offending notifications during 2023-24 and 2024-25 is noteworthy.

Data provided by the PBNI for each of the financial years starting from 2021-22 to 2024-25 showed an increasing number of referrals as well as a rising number of new referrals assessed as high likelihood of reoffending and subject to PPANI (see Figure 1).

<sup>15</sup> Supporting People were unable to provide full occupancy figures for 2024-25 due to a system change. Figures provided for the financial year 2025-26 from April to December indicated the average occupancy for this period for the four PBNI only referral services was over 90% which was similar to the snapshot data Inspectors gathered during Follow-Up Review fieldwork.

**Figure 1: PBNI trend data for number of new referrals to approved premises and risk profile from 2021-22 to 2024-25**



## THE FOLLOW-UP REVIEW

A progress update against the recommendations was co-ordinated and provided by the DoJ Reducing Offending Directorate and the PBNI in October 2025 with supporting documentation and data provided during November and December 2025. CJI met with key stakeholders including the Chief Parole Commissioner, NIACRO and Housing Rights Service. Discussions were also conducted with representatives of the NIHE and DfC *Make the Call* Team.

Inspectors conducted fieldwork from November 2025 to January 2026. The fieldwork plan was specifically tailored to assess progress made against the 2023 recommendations and test the evidence provided by the inspected organisations.

This included visits to each of the seven approved premises where Inspectors spoke with managers, staff and service users and had an opportunity to sample a small number of case records. The senior managers within the managing organisations were interviewed separately. Fieldwork was also conducted with representatives of the DoJ Reducing Offending Directorate, the NIPS Licencing Unit and Prisoner Development Unit (PDU) Governors. Within the PBNI, Inspectors met senior managers with responsibility for approved premises and met with Prison and Community managers and/or staff. Inspectors also met the PPANI Co-ordinator. The information gathered during the Follow-Up Review was assessed and judgements were made of progress made against the recommendations.

In Chapter 2, the inspected organisations' response to each recommendation including their assessment of progress is set out followed by Inspectors' assessment of the developments and judgements. CJI makes one of three judgements when assessing progress, that is, a recommendation is achieved, partially achieved or not achieved. In some circumstances a recommendation may no longer be relevant. A definition of each judgement is at Appendix 2.

This Follow-Up Review was assisted by the use of Microsoft Copilot, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered tool, guided and reviewed by CJI Inspectors, in line with UK Government AI policy and CJI's interim AI policy.

## CHAPTER 2: PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within nine months of the publication of this report, the Department of Justice, in conjunction with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and organisations managing approved premises, should:

- develop a strategic framework which clarifies the vision, strategy, oversight arrangements and respective organisations' roles and expectations for approved premises;
- review the current delivery model to ensure that systems are in place to periodically monitor and respond to demand and supply of approved premises places;
- clarify the preferred staffing model to inform future funding requirements;
- develop and implement a strategic plan for joint training and produce and deliver a plan to enhance understanding of the role of approved premises among practitioners and stakeholders; and
- identify a strategic mechanism to measure and monitor the quality of service delivery of resettlement, rehabilitation and public protection outcomes.

**Status: Not achieved.**

#### Organisational response

*While Reducing Offending Directorate in DoJ accepted the lead role in this recommendation, it was acknowledged that it would require significant contribution from other parties, both within the criminal justice family and across wider government.*

*Reducing Offending Directorate established a working group comprising PBNI, DfC, NIHE, Department of Health (DoH), NIPS and PSNI (PPANI) to develop the Framework. Three meetings of this group have taken place to date, the most recent on 2 April 2025. The Terms of Reference for this Group is provided at Annex A [for the purpose of Review by Inspectors] and minutes of the meetings are available on request.*

*While the meetings have been well attended, members highlighted challenges in prioritising work on the Strategic Framework in the intervening periods due to competing pressures within their own work areas compounded by constrained resources. This has delayed progress in the development of the Framework within the timescale suggested in the CJI recommendation.*

*At the latest meeting in April 2025, a first draft of the Strategic Framework for the Management of Approved Premises was shared with members for consideration.*

*Discussion highlighted that three key areas needed to be added to the Framework, and Task & Finish sub-groups were established to take these forward, namely:*

- i) Task and Finish Group for Data - the review indicated there was no analysis of demand for number of beds required to identify trends and provide evidence-based projections.*

*This group, led by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and PBNI statisticians, is working towards collating data on the number of prisoners in custody who meet the criteria for approved premises accommodation and the number of impending release dates within specific time frames. This includes the number of prisoners referred to the panel for assessment before release: (not all PPANI categorisations require approved premises accommodation), the number who required approved premises but were unable to be offered a place; (and reason for same) and the length of time individuals stay in approved premises. The analysis will provide baseline data on future demand which will be monitored on a regular basis.*

- ii) Task and Finish Group for Staffing Models - Disparity in staffing requirements and models in place across different hostel providers, need to consider if there should be a minimum requirement and what that should be.*

*This group, led by PBNI in conjunction with hostel managers, is working on outlining an appropriate staffing model to ensure the risk management of individuals placed within approved premises. The current staffing model varies between providers in respect of ratio of staff to residents; social work qualified staff/project workers; and need for 'waking staff' during the night.*

*The model staffing within Thompson House has been identified as a best practice approach, and is being considered as the appropriate model to be replicated across all Approved Premises.*

*Note: At draft report stage the PBNI advised Inspectors that they believed they were a participant in this group rather than responsible for leading it.*

- iii) Task and Finish Group for Training - Hostels deliver various training courses on an individual basis.*

*This group, led by PBNI, undertook a training needs analysis to identify the key training requirements for staff working across the approved premises network. The training components below have been agreed and consideration will now be given to how these programmes can be delivered, in partnership with Hostel Managers:*

- role of PBNI;
- role of PPANI;
- risk assessment and management;
- licensing/prisoner recall;
- trauma informed practice;
- safeguarding - adult safeguarding and child protection;
- grooming, manipulation & professional curiosity;
- information sharing and General Data Protection Legislation Regulation (GDPR); and
- self-Care (dealing with vicarious trauma).

Note: At draft report stage the PBNI advised Inspectors that they believed they were a participant in this group rather than responsible for leading it.

*[The] PBNI are also working on the development of service standards for approved premises provision for inclusion in the Strategic Framework. They are reviewing a handbook developed by His Majesty's Inspectorate [sic: of] Probation (HMI Probation), which outlines service standards in England and Wales to inform how this can be adapted for use in Approved Premises accommodation in Northern Ireland, while also aligning with PBNI's practice standards.*

*The outworkings of each of the Task and Finish Groups are being finalised, with a view to having an updated version of the Framework signed off by the Working Group by March 2026.*

The DoJ assessed this recommendation as **partially achieved**.

At draft report stage the DoJ provided a further update that, while not usual practice, the Chief Inspector considered should be included in this report:

- the draft Strategic Framework was discussed at a meeting on 30 March 2026 and that some minor amendments were recommended by the group. DoJ therefore expected that the Framework would be agreed at the next working group meeting with an action plan to be developed to progress supplementary actions identified by the Strategic Group through its consideration of the Framework.
- the work of the Task and Finish Group for Data had now been brought back within the auspices of the main Strategic Group. A data dashboard was being developed which would be reviewed by the Strategic Group on a regular basis and would inform future planning and demand management;
- a more detailed training needs survey was being developed by the Task and Finish Group for Data, with the support of DoJ staff. The responses from the survey would inform the PBNI's Training Programmes which would be delivered, in partnership with Hostel Managers.
- the Task and Finish Groups had concluded, and the work was being taken forward under the auspices of the main Strategic Group. The Framework was being finalised. However, the Strategic Framework would not be agreed until the next working group meeting in June 2026.

## Inspectors' assessment

The 2023 Review identified gaps in the strategy and governance of aspects of approved premises service delivery which Strategic Recommendation 1 aimed to address. The principal gaps were around:

- the governance structure and accountability;
- the current delivery and funding model;
- the staffing model and training;
- the lack of systems to monitor future demand for places and needs of service users; and
- how effectively service delivery was measured and monitored to provide assurance of the contribution of approved premises to resettlement, rehabilitation and public protection outcomes.

The recommendation was accepted and DoJ Reducing Offending Directorate took the lead role in co-ordinating the work to address the recommendation. This followed a strategic discussion at the DfC's Supporting People Programme Joint Policy Forum<sup>16</sup> where it was agreed that a justice-chaired working group would be the best way to proceed with reporting as required to the Joint Policy Forum.

A robust delivery plan setting out how the recommendation was to be addressed, respective roles and responsibilities and the timelines around this was not developed at that time and progress had been slow due to resource pressures and competing work priorities. It was apparent during the Follow-Up Review that lead responsibility for different aspects of the work sitting under Strategic Recommendation 1 was not settled principally between the DoJ and PBNI. It was apparent at draft report stage that this was an ongoing issue which reinforces the need for clarity and agreement between the organisations.

An integrated, collaborative approach was required given how the approved premises service in Northern Ireland was configured. As set out in the 2023 Review Report there was no formal definition of approved premises in Northern Ireland and the term 'approved' was a misnomer as, unlike England and Wales which had similar legislative provision, the premises were not approved by a Minister of Justice, their Department or any other party.<sup>17</sup> This position has not changed. There was also no overarching vision or strategy for approved premises related to their role in supporting risk management and there was a lack of clarity about who was responsible for setting direction and strategy and on lines of accountability. It was important that questions of ownership were quickly resolved.

A Strategic Working Group comprising representatives of the PBNI, DfC, the DoH, the NIHE, the NIPS and the PSNI (PPANI) first met in September 2023 and at the time of Follow-Up Review fieldwork two further meetings had taken place.

16 The Joint Policy Forum was established by the DfC to facilitate and support new and existing co-operation and engagement between the DfC, DoH, DoJ and the NIHE regarding the Supporting People Programme.

17 The Probation Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 provided for the Board, with the approval of the DoJ, to provide and maintain probation hostels for use in connection with the supervision and assistance of offenders; or to provide and maintain bail hostels. The PBNI adopted the model of externally managed establishments. The funding of the current approved premises was provided by the NIHE under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. Approved premises in England and Wales were approved by the Secretary of State under Section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007 and services provided in line with the Offender Management Act 2007 (Approved Premises) Regulations 2014.

The minutes indicated some useful engagement reflecting the structural/governance challenges around the existing operation of approved premises including funding models and regulation development of an approved premises service specification including practice standards drafted by the PBNi. Member organisations proposed a range of options for addressing these drawing on their respective experiences, but these did not seem to have been progressed from one meeting to the next.

A draft strategic framework had been developed for discussion with strategic partners with input from the represented statutory partner organisations. As indicated in the DoJ's progress update, it was hoped that the Strategic Working Group would be in a position to agree and sign-off on this framework before the end of the 2025-26 financial year. Inspectors considered the strategic framework should encompass the components outlined under Strategic Recommendation 1 as a whole rather than each element being developed in isolation of the others such as their co-dependence. At draft report stage, the DoJ indicated that the draft framework had been discussed at meetings of the Strategic Working Group and would be agreed and signed at its next meeting in June 2026.

A number of Task and Finish Groups had met during 2025 to take forward elements of the recommendation relating to staffing, training and data. While this was positive and a preferred course of direction had been developed in each area, Inspectors considered this work was at an early stage of development. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) statisticians had developed a tool to extract data from the NIPS prison record management system and this now needed to be used alongside a range of other metrics to inform whether 91 approved premises placements met current and anticipated demand. This should include a reflection of the successful completion of placements and level of unmet need. At the time of the previous Review the PBNi had maintained that the 91 spaces currently available was sufficient to meet demand. Its position had changed given the current system wide pressures. Most other stakeholders had indicated at the time of the 2023 Review that the number of places was insufficient at that time. Inspectors were particularly concerned if those being managed under PPANI who required a space could not get one.

Inspectors could not yet see that this work was leading to discussions about the size of the service going forward, whether a mixed or PBNi referral only model worked best and how the needs of specific groups of service users could best be met.

While a social work led model of service delivery had been identified as a preferred staffing model, this now needed to be appraised and fully costed against existing models of delivery and detailed plans for its development and implementation brought forward. This could include benchmarking with other services and approaches for sourcing sustainable accommodation for people leaving prison elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Training Task and Finish Group had identified a list of training topics but there was no delivery plan to support this. At draft report stage, the DoJ indicated that a more detailed training needs survey was being developed by PBNi, with the support of DoJ staff.

The survey would be launched in April 2026, and responses would inform PBNI's Training Programmes.

The PBNI had drafted an approved premises service specification including practice standards to assist with defining what the approved premise service was and monitoring service delivery. It would be useful for the PBNI to benchmark these with new inspection standards<sup>18</sup> developed and published by HMI Probation during 2025.

While there had been some limited engagement with approved premises managers in the Staffing and Training Task and Finish Groups, all services had not had the opportunity to be represented due to the timing of the meetings. Inspectors anticipated that Strategic Recommendation 1 would be taken forward in conjunction with the approved premises providers, but this had not been the case bar some ad-hoc discussions at the weekly allocation panel meeting. An early meeting of the Strategic Working Group had identified that an effective mechanism was needed to engage with approved premises providers, but this had not been implemented. Inspectors considered that the expertise and knowledge that the management organisations could bring to the strategic discussions was missed.

A Senior Hostel Managers Forum, chaired by the PBNI, had not met for some considerable time and might have provided an appropriate structure and opportunities to engage and consult with the management organisations. The absence of this also meant that opportunities identified in the 2023 Review Report for exchange of best practice and learning to drive continuous improvement had also not been realised.

Inspectors considered the absence of the senior hostel managers from the Strategic Working Group and an effective mechanism to engage them was a gap. It was suggested during fieldwork that the Strategic Working Group could evolve over time to become an oversight group for the operation of approved premises and this made sense. Inspectors considered there were a range of issues which arose in the course of the Follow-Up Review as well as the matters raised in the 2023 Review Report that warranted escalation for resolution to a strategic oversight group.

As work was still ongoing to address Strategic Recommendation 1, there had been no changes to the configuration of approved premises since the last Review Report. The delivery and staffing models remained the same and while some formative and constructive work had been undertaken to move this forward it had not, at this time, resulted in improved outcomes or strengthened governance and oversight arrangements. Some elements set out in Strategic Recommendation 1 had not been addressed such as a plan to raise awareness and enhance understanding of the role of approved premises and to develop indicators to measure and monitor success. As described in the introduction, many of the systemic challenges impacting on the environment in which the approved premises operated had deepened since 2023 and required effective cross-Departmental working and engagement with service providers to sustain and prepare the service for this.

18 HMI Probation, *Approved Premises Inspection: Rules and Guidance*, 8 July 2025, available at <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/document/approved-premises-inspection-rules-and-guidance/>.

The building blocks were there for doing this. This Follow-Up Review presented an opportunity to reset how the different elements of Strategic Recommendation 1 were taken forward on a collaborative basis recognising the way the service was configured in Northern Ireland. The DoJ should co-ordinate this work but it needed to be progressed with other partners who were responsible for elements of operational delivery.

Inspectors assessed this strategic recommendation was **not achieved**.

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within three months of the publication of this report the Northern Ireland Prison Service should engage with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to remove barriers to resettlement such as provision of photographic identification, and the creation of email accounts and bank accounts prior to discharge from custody to improve outcomes for those transitioning from custody to approved premises.

**Status: Partially achieved.**

#### Organisational response

*In line with NIPS release planning and Exit Passport arrangements, processes are now in place in all prison establishments for the provision of photographic identification and creation of bank accounts. NIPS have partnered with Lloyds who provide bank accounts for prisoners on request. Following a meeting between the NIPS Director of Rehabilitation and Hostel Managers, it was agreed that hostel staff can assist those residing in PBNi approved premises to set up email addresses for clients permitted access to the internet.*

*The monitoring of Exit Passport information is included in PDU management checks on an ongoing basis, to ensure this support is maintained. No concerns have been raised by PBNi or Hostel Managers on this issue since the new arrangements were put in place.*

The DoJ assessed this recommendation as **achieved**.

#### Inspectors' assessment

The 2023 Review Report set out the barriers and challenges encountered by service users when they arrived at approved premises without photographic identification and a range of other resettlement supports, including being registered with a General Practitioner (GP). Operational Recommendation 1 intended that the NIPS engage with the PBNi to remove these barriers specifically for those moving from custody to approved premises. A focus on this group of service users was important given a need had been established for them to be supported in an approved premises for risk management purposes on release. A smooth transition from custody was therefore important in not only supporting resettlement and rehabilitation but also protecting the public from harm.

Research indicates that access to stable accommodation is key to preventing reoffending and reoffending data for Northern Ireland continued to show that the highest proportion of adults reoffend within one month of release from custody, with 46.1% reoffending within three months of their release. While this data does not specifically relate to those residing in approved premises it serves to underline the importance of a smooth transition from custody so that they are aware of benefit entitlements, have access to a bank account and are registered with a GP to ensure continuity of care including medication. Underpinning access to reconnecting with most community supports and services was access to photographic identification.

The recommendation was accepted by the NIPS with the element relating to the creation of email accounts for those living at Burren House (the Prisoner Assessment Unit) being extended more widely being accepted in principle.

On committal to custody PDU staff completed a resettlement needs profile for all consenting prisoners from which referrals to different services were made.

A wide range of resettlement services were available in prisons and delivered either directly by NIPS staff, through partnerships with other statutory agencies such as the DfC and with community and voluntary sector organisations including Housing Rights, NIACRO and Extern.

Those services had been extended since the 2023 Review to include the implementation of a formal partnership with Lloyds Banking Group (March 2023) and a Custodial Housing Advisor pilot project, introduced from April 2024, that involved NIHE staff providing housing and homeless advice at Maghaberry Prison two days each week. This service, which complimented services provided by Housing Rights, had been positively received by a range of stakeholders and the NIHE was, at the time of Follow-Up Review fieldwork, scoping the extension of this project to all prisons in Northern Ireland.

The NIPS also completed an exit passport, conducted at 30 days and seven days before release, to check what support prisoners had in place shortly before their release. The progress update provided for this Follow-Up Review indicated that the monitoring of exit passport information was included in PDU management checks on an ongoing basis, to ensure that this support was maintained. It was however established that these management checks looked at the proportion of exit passports completed rather than monitoring gaps in uptake of the different resettlement services available and exploring the possible reasons for this.

PDU Governors provided snapshot data extracted from exit passports for a short period between October and November 2025. While there were some limitations with the data and it did not relate specifically to those released/being released from prison to approved premises, it indicated that the majority of prisoners (where an exit passport had been created) had access to photographic identification (85% of the sample at Maghaberry, just under 75% at Magilligan, 83% of females leaving custody and all young men at Hydebank Wood).

In the Maghaberry and Hydebank Wood samples most other entries had been left blank, including on the question of accommodation being in place whereas at Magilligan the majority of completed passports showed that prisoners leaving the prison were registered with a GP and had been in receipt of benefits. The PBNi advised that there had been a concerted effort at Hydebank Wood to focus on addressing exit passport requirements through a short-term funded post.

Other data provided by the NIPS indicated some uptake of applications for photographic identification and the level of applications for support to open a bank account. Maghaberry and Magilligan Prisons had dedicated Prison Officers to progress banking applications and housing peer mentors.

During fieldwork with approved premises and with other stakeholders, Inspectors consistently heard that there had been no improvement in outcomes arising from this recommendation. Approved premises staff and managers, Probation Officers and community and voluntary sector organisations cited numerous examples of cases where they had encountered significant problems with re-engaging service users with community services particularly when people did not have photographic identification or were not registered with a GP.

From interviews with service users Inspectors established that, although more than half reported already having some form of photographic identification, in some instances it wasn't accessible or was out of date. Of the eight service users who did not have any form of photographic identification when released from custody, three reported receiving support to acquire this while in custody although that had not resulted in photographic identification being available in all cases. There was a similar picture in terms of access to bank accounts and only 10 of the 22 service users we spoke with were registered with a GP or had an appointment with addiction services on release/on arrival at the approved premises. In one instance we were shown an identity verification card issued by a Governor shortly before release which had enabled the service user to access a prescription.

Approved premises staff described having to *'piece things together like a jigsaw'* post release and the impact of delays while waiting for photographic identification to come through. But for the intervention of Homeless Nurses and support provided by NIACRO and Housing Rights the situation would be a lot worse. Service users were very positive about the support they had been provided with to navigate these issues from their supervising Probation Officers, approved premises key workers and staff working within community and voluntary sector organisations.

Where service users had previously resided at an approved premise or had been interviewed by approved premises staff as part of the allocation process, better information about their circumstances could be established although the number of these pre-release interviews had reduced in recent years. For those who moved to approved premises through Burren House good resettlement supports were in place including access to email accounts while the individuals remained in prison custody. The scheme had not been extended to other prisoners leaving custody as initially envisaged.

Approved premises providers continued to report that service users were frequently released without an adequate supply of medication or information about their medication regime and health care leading to immediate crises in the first days post release. These issues were particularly difficult when individuals were released on a Friday or Saturday with a short supply of medication and where they were not already registered with a GP. Delays in registering service users with local GPs were reported because they had no photographic identification. Out-of-hours services often refused treatment without verification of identity or access to prison health care records. Inspectors noted from referral forms and in speaking to Probation Officers that there were difficulties in accessing relevant health care information.

The 2021 Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) *Review of Services for Vulnerable Persons Detained in Northern Ireland Prisons*<sup>19</sup> stated that robust transitional arrangements were essential to prepare for prison discharge and to facilitate information sharing with relevant agencies. A May 2025 Improving Health within Criminal Justice Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report referred to a Transition to Community Task and Finish Group, co-chaired by the PBNI and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT), that had delivered a paper setting out potential solutions to improve interfaces. This included proposed actions around GP registration. Separately the development of a transitions service that included linkages with GPs and community-based addiction services has been identified in a joint DoH and Public Health Agency Substance Strategic Commissioning and Implementation Plan 2024-2028<sup>20</sup> and this was now the vehicle through which continuity of health care services was to be progressed. Due to funding constraints for health care initiatives, a definitive timescale for the introduction of this important service which was much needed was not available.

A significant development since the 2023 Review was that prison health care records had been successfully migrated to *encompass*.<sup>21</sup> From November 2025 GPs could now access all prison health care records for patients through the *EpicCare Link*<sup>22</sup> portal. This significantly extended the information GPs could now access and should help address some of the challenges identified earlier in this Report and was in addition to the existing two stage discharge process operated by prison health care. The SEHSCT also reported that it had now completed an Information Sharing Agreement with the NIPS and the next stage was to develop a similar framework with the PBNI. A Discharge Liaison Pilot had operated for a period but unfortunately it could not be sustained due to the significant demands on health care because of the increased prison population.

19 RQIA, *Review of Services for Vulnerable Services Detained in Northern Ireland Prison, September 2021*, available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356069849\\_Review\\_of\\_services\\_for\\_vulnerable\\_persons\\_detained\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_prisons](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356069849_Review_of_services_for_vulnerable_persons_detained_in_Northern_Ireland_prisons).

20 DoH, *Substance Use Strategic Commissioning and Implementation Plan 2024-2028, November 2024*, available at <https://drugsandalcoholni.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Substance-Use-Commissioning-and-Implementation-Plan-2024-2028.pdf>

21 Encompass is a Health and Social Care programme that created a single digital integrated health care record for every citizen in Northern Ireland. The roll-out began in November 2023.

22 EpicCare Link is a web-based portal that provides read-only access to encompass. EpicCare Links allows GPs (and other health professionals) to access information about their patients.

The other significant feature which had arisen in the previous Review but seemed to have worsened was that, due to the demand for approved premises places, a growing number of people did not have confirmation about where they would be living on release. Two service users Inspectors met, including one who was subject to PPANI, could not immediately access an approved premises place at the point of release and both had slept rough before a place became available. The majority of service users told us they were informed where they were going on the day of their release (not necessarily at the prison but later when they had reported to probation services) or the day before their release. This was far from ideal and not conducive to supporting a smooth transition from custody for those who had been assessed as needing additional supervision and monitoring on release from custody.

The flow of information about a prisoners' engagement with resettlement services while in custody was not routinely evident in approved premises referral forms and this was something that could be quickly rectified. Specific information about the outcomes of referrals to services in custody captured on referral forms could provide an earlier alert to approved premises providers and potentially avoid unnecessary duplication. This is something that the PBNI could take forward in conjunction with the NIPS and approved premises providers.

Although the NIPS had a range of services available and had continued to develop those services, there was a significant disconnect with these and the experiences of service users and approved premises staff. The NIPS progress update had indicated that no issues had been raised by the PBNI or approved premises providers. There were opportunities for the NIPS to improve its monitoring of the uptake of key resettlement supports to promote engagement. There was also an onus on all parties to engage proactively to better understand whether their collective efforts and the investment by the NIPS and other partner agencies in providing important resettlement services was resulting in better outcomes. This was a further example of where an effective oversight group could provide a forum to raise and resolve recurring operational issues around transition from custody.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation was **partially achieved**.

## OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of the publication of this report, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, in conjunction with approved premises providers, should clarify its expectations in relation to:

- case planning to ensure that approved premises' key workers are closely involved in risk and need assessment and management processes; and
- move-on planning to ensure there is a clear focus on the timescale, actions and progress required to move on from an approved premises placement.

Both should be reflected in the Probation Board for Northern Ireland case plans and approved premises support plans.

**Status: Partially achieved.**

### Organisational response

#### Measurable Actions

PBNI to work with NIHE and approved premises providers to clarify expectations in respect of move-on planning:

- A 'move on' plan to be included in all initial case plans;
- 'Move on' Plan to include specific, time bounded actions, attributed to named individuals;
- Exit from the hostel to be discussed at each tripartite meeting;
- NIHE Housing Advisors to attend tripartite meetings and contribute to 'move on' plans; and
- 'Move on' plans for PPANI eligible residents to be discussed at the PPANI Accommodation Subgroup.

#### Progress Made to Date

- Guidance Note re approved premises has been updated. The Guidance reinforces the need for a 'move on' plan to be agreed in the initial case plan and it should be discussed at each tri partite meeting. It further states the Supervising Probation Officer should maintain regular contact with the Housing Advisor and ensure all necessary steps are being taken to expedite the service user's 'move on'. All cases where a service user has been in an approved premises for six months should be discussed by the supervising Probation Officer with their Area Manager;
- Probation Officers/Area Managers have been advised to contact Assistant Principal Officers, Homelessness Policy and Strategy Branch, NIHE in respect of unresolved issues with NIHE;
- The previous Area Manager with responsibility for Chairing the Hostel Panel attended Area Manager team meetings and reinforced the information contained in the Guidance. The current Area Manager with this responsibility is in the process of re-visiting Area Manager team meetings;
- The Area Manager with responsibility for Chairing the Hostel Panel (alongside a manager of an Approved Premises) has facilitated inputs to the Onboarding Programme for all new operational staff;

- Case planning training for Probation Officers has reinforced the importance of liaising with partner organisations (including hostel staff) when agreeing a case plan with a service user;
- Probation Officers based in the Practice, Performance and Research Unit are to be embedded in teams over the coming months and can focus on ensuring 'move on' plans are incorporated into case plans;
- The case plan proforma is currently being reviewed. Consideration to be given to including a specific section for service users resident in Approved Premises referencing the agreed 'move on' plan;
- PPANI Accommodation Subgroup (chaired by NIHE Homelessness Policy Manager) continues to focus on service users who have been in Approved Premises for six months plus;
- Area Manager monitoring - all Area managers are required to monitor eight cases a month to provide assurance of the quality of work and adherence to Practice Standards. Area Managers are required to provide feedback to POs [Probation Officers] in respect of practice issues and to advise of remedial actions to be taken;
- Assistant Director (Public Protection) and Area Manager with responsibility for Chairing the Hostel Panel, regularly review the cases of service users who have been resident in approved premises for 12 months + and, if the service user is not required to be resident in an approved premise to manage their risk, a 'notice to quit' letter is sent giving the service user 28 days' notice that their placement is to be withdrawn;
- Enhanced communication with NIHE (and a senior level) to ensure better coordination and support for service users;
- Enhanced partnerships with various sectors to support the housing needs of service users (collaboration with housing providers, community organisations and other stakeholders); and
- Development of an Escalation process with the NIHE, whereby in specified circumstances, the Homelessness Policy Manager convenes a meeting of relevant parties to attempt to resolve situations where a PBNI service user is homeless and temporary accommodation has not been able to be sourced for him/her.

### **Actions still outstanding**

- PBNI is working with the NIHE to develop a proposal to second a Housing Officer to PBNI. It is hoped this will enable direct collaboration, enhance access to housing and improve support for service users to maintain their accommodation. The seconded role will focus on addressing the accommodation needs of PBNI service users, as well as access to potential probation specific 'crash' beds.

### **Barriers to Progress**

- Pressures within the housing sector - lack of available accommodation, the specific lack of appropriate housing for those managed under PPANI and the over reliance of too small a number of 'crash' beds/temporary accommodation.

The PBNI assessed this recommendation as **partially achieved**.

## Inspectors' assessment

In 2023 Inspectors reported that PBNI case plans were not shared with approved premises key workers and it was not evident how the case plans developed by the PBNI and risk assessment and support plans used by approved premises staff related to each other. At that time records of tripartite meetings lacked detail, specifically around evidencing discussion of risk assessment and management. There were opportunities for approved premises staff to be better involved in PBNI management meetings and case planning. In 2023 Inspectors did not see sufficient evidence of move-on planning beyond a list of areas of choice for housing and the number of housing points. Service users spoken with then were not clear how long they expected to live at an approved premise and what was required of them to be able to move-on.

Operational Recommendation 2 aimed to ensure that case planning was better aligned and within move-on plans there was a clear focus on the timescale, actions and progress required to move on from an approved premise. The recommendation was accepted by the PBNI.

As indicated in the PBNI progress update, a plan of work and measurable actions was developed. A Guidance Note reinforced the need for a 'move-on' plan to be agreed at the initial case plan and this was being reinforced through training opportunities for existing and new staff and by the Area Manager with responsibility for chairing Approved Premises Panel (Panel) meetings through their engagement with area PBNI teams. The PBNI case plan proforma was being reviewed and consideration was being given to referencing agreed move-on plans within it. The actions set out steps to strengthen collaboration with the NIHE at strategic and operational level, including the development of an escalation process to resolve situations where a PBNI service user was homeless, and for closer oversight of cases where a service user had been at an approved premises for six and 12 months.

There was a mixed picture on improved integration of assessment and planning work. Stronger relationships and engagement were noted between supervising Probation Officers and approved premises staff with Probation Officers being more visible at approved premises and more regular tripartite meetings taking place. Tripartite meetings were particularly effective when first appointments took place at approved premises. The capacity to do this more routinely was constrained for a number of reasons not least that often it was not clear where a service user would be living until after their release. This was also impacting on pre-release tripartite meetings between prison and community supervising Probation Officers. PBNI resource and caseload pressures and the proximity of the approved premises to the relevant probation team were also factors limiting the extent to which first appointments with probation could take place at approved premises.

Service users felt that their supervising Probation Officers and approved premises key workers worked closely in partnership to support them, which was positive.

PBNI managers had a clear expectation that case plans and the outcome of risk assessment reviews would be shared with approved premises. The findings from the cases Inspectors sampled found this was not done consistently although copies of Panel referral forms and licences were generally available. It was reported that the level of information sharing was often dependent on the nature of personal relationships between supervising Probation Officers and key workers/managers which was not satisfactory. It was rare to find evidence of updated risk assessments recorded in approved premises case management systems or in the records maintained of tripartite discussions. As before, the ACE assessments documented tended to be those that had been included in Panel referral forms rather than the current assessment of likelihood of reoffending, risk of serious harm and PPANI Category of Risk (see commentary under Operational Recommendation 3). There were examples where the understanding around supervision and move-on between approved premises and the PBNI was not aligned.

One service had initiated a monthly meeting with the Area Managers of its local PBNI office and Intensive Supervision Unit. This was a good initiative and enabled a discussion at managerial level of risk management concerns and to address any practice issues as they arose.

As indicated in the PBNI's progress update, Area Managers routinely monitored service delivery against PBNI standards. This monitoring was across all case types and did not specifically relate to service users in approved premises. The small sample of PBNI cases examined showed limited evidence of move-on plans and gaps in risk and case plan reviews, however, it was not clear how representative this was. This was something that PBNI should monitor more closely.

There were some notable exceptions. In one case an approved premises key worker, who was aware that a service user had completed an offending behaviour programme, had contacted the supervising Probation Officer to report the service user's response to an incident in the approved premise which they had responded to well and demonstrated a positive change in attitude and behaviour. Generally, however, approved premises key workers reported that they did not know what offending behaviour programmes service users were to be enrolled in or when.

There was evidence that the PBNI was more proactively monitoring the length of stays in approved premises, which was something that Inspectors were supportive of. Where a resident no longer needed to reside at an approved premise for risk management purposes they were being issued with a Notice to Quit notification letter around 12 months from their initial placement or as they approached the end of the supervision period. This was now happening more routinely but there were some exceptions where both approved premises staff and supervising Probation Officers made representations on their behalf. The unintended consequence of Notices to Quit was service users had no sustainable accommodation to move-on to and were, after a period of stability, then having to access crash beds, other forms of temporary accommodation or becoming homeless.

Although no longer requiring an approved premise place for risk management purposes, these individuals tended to have high support needs and these not being maintained could escalate the risk to them and others and make them more liable to recall. Service users Inspectors met during Follow-Up Review fieldwork were particularly concerned about this as were the staff working to support their rehabilitation. There was no data to quantify this or its impact but it was important that it was closely monitored by the PBNI and approved premises providers.

Despite efforts by PBNI managers, supervising Probation Officers, approved premises staff, the PPANI Accommodation Subgroup, the NIHE and community and voluntary sector organisations, access to suitable move-on accommodation was severely limiting people successfully moving to sustainable accommodation from approved premises. A change in Supporting People reporting systems meant data was no longer available to indicate the forms of accommodation people leaving approved premises moved to. Inspectors were therefore unable to make comparisons with the breakdown of move-on accommodation data published in the 2023 Review Report.

There were no single point of contact Housing Officers linked to approved premises and some challenges were reported to Inspectors around engagement with Belfast Housing Solutions Teams in particular. Resourcing pressures within that Team and a lack of awareness of the specific role of approved premises were understood to have contributed to this. Some services benefitted from regular housing clinics being held in the approved premises but this was not replicated across all services. Two NIHE Homelessness Team Policy Officers were dedicated single points of contacts for Housing Officers working with service users subject to PPANI. Although an increasing proportion of service users are now subject to PPANI, the individuals not subject to PPANI did not have the benefit of this service. Inspectors welcomed the proposal to second a Housing Officer to the PBNI. Although there were no formal structures to facilitate direct engagement between the NIHE Homelessness Team and approved premises providers, there had been engagement on an ad-hoc basis as and when required. Supporting People teams were engaged for contract management purposes and were live to a number of pressing issues from their quality monitoring visits but the absence of a suitable forum to escalate these meant this important source of information was not being escalated for discussion and resolution.

While the PPANI Accommodation Subgroup considered the issues around those subject to the PPANI this did not extend to all approved premises service users, as the Subgroup's remit did not extend beyond those individuals within the arrangements. Again, the absence of a strategic oversight forum at which systemic issues could be raised and responded to was a gap.

Approved premises key workers should be fully aware of what is detailed in an individual case plan and what their role as key worker is in delivering it. The work of approved premises and the PBNI will be different but should be aligned. All, including service users, should be aware of the purpose of the case plan/support plan, the likely length of stay, the intended move-on plan and the role approved premises staff play in delivering the objectives of supervision. This was a work in progress.

The actions taken by the PBNI to address the recommendation needed to be fully delivered and underpinned by a monitoring regime which provided assurance that improving outcomes in this area were sustained.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation was **partially achieved**.

### OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

The Joint Chairs of the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland Policy and Practice Subgroup should immediately ensure that approved premises key workers are fully involved in public protection risk assessment and management arrangements.

**Status: Partially achieved.**

## Organisational response

### Measurable Actions

PBNI to ensure that approved premises key workers are actively involved in the risk management of service users. To include:

- inviting key workers to attend and contribute to Local Area Public Protection Panels (LAPPP);
- inviting key workers to attend and contribute to PBNI Risk Management; Meetings/risk strategy discussions;
- ensuring key workers are fully aware of the risk management plan for each resident and how they contribute to the implementation of the plan; and
- ensuring key workers are adequately trained in respect of working with offenders and risk assessment/management.

### Progress Made to Date

- A Practice Note was issued by the joint Chairs of PPANI's Policy & Practice Subgroup on 1st June 2023. The Practice Note asked Probation Officers, with Designated Risk Manager<sup>23</sup> responsibility for individuals managed under PPANI and resident in approved [p]remises, to forward hostel key worker contact details to the PPANI Links Team, who in turn will forward the WebEx joining details to the hostel key workers.
- Probation Officers continue to invite hostel key workers to PBNI Risk Management Meetings and risk strategy discussions.
- Case plans and risk management plans are reviewed at the bi-monthly tripartite meetings.
- There is regular liaison between supervising Probation Officers and the key worker/manager of the approved premises.
- Approved premises managers/staff are invited to PPANI training/special interest seminars.

23 Under PPANI a Designated Risk Manager is responsible for implementing risk management plans.

### **Actions still outstanding**

- *An initial meeting of the Training and Staffing Task & Finish Group meeting was held on 29th July 2025 (convened by the DoJ Reducing Offending Directorate and attended by PBNI managers and approved premises managers). The training records previously submitted by the approved premises managers were reviewed and panel members identified the key training that all staff working in approved premises should complete. The training is to be developed and delivered.*

The Joint Chairs of the PPANI Policy and Practice Subgroup assessed this recommendation as **partially achieved**.

### **Inspectors' assessment**

In the previous Review good relationships were reported between approved premises staff, Probation Officers and PSNI teams involved in managing public protection and we saw good evidence of how approved premises were supporting public protection arrangements. However, approved premises key workers were not routinely involved in LAPPP meetings and the case records examined by Inspectors did not adequately reflect details of specific risk factors and concerns or specific actions required of approved premises staff to help mitigate these risks. Operational Recommendation 3 was intended to ensure that approved premises key workers were fully involved in public protection risk assessment and management arrangements.

At the time of the Review Report's publication, this recommendation was accepted and welcomed by the Joint Chairs of the PPANI Policy and Practice Subgroup.

The contribution of approved premise services to public protection continued to be highly regarded by criminal justice organisations and the recall rate and the absence of serious further offending confirmed this.

Timely action was taken to progress this recommendation. A practice note was issued in June 2023 by the Joint Chairs which asked Probation Officers with Designated Risk Manager responsibility to ensure that invitations to meetings were extended to approved premises key workers. The PBNI also developed a series of actions to ensure greater involvement of approved premises staff in PBNI risk management meetings and strategy discussions, that they were fully aware of the risk management plan for each resident and that key workers were adequately trained to work with service users and risk assessment and management.

In most, but not all, approved premises services we heard that key workers and/or managers or senior practitioners were now routinely invited to attend LAPPP meetings. Mostly staff and managers reflected that it was very helpful to '*be in the room*' to hear and contribute to risk assessment and management discussions. Staff changes and resource pressures from both a PBNI and approved premises perspective had impacted this but generally this was better embedded than before. The rich information approved premises staff bring to these discussions was well regarded, particularly by PBNI staff and managers.

Pending the training plan being developed under Strategic Recommendation 1, ad-hoc training had been delivered by the PPANI Co-ordinator to most services and was highly valued. This extended across a greater number of services than before which was positive, but staff reported that they would welcome additional training so they had a better awareness of risk assessment tools in particular. One service reported that there had not yet been an opportunity for staff to attend training or attend LAPPPs. Some services had more regular PPANI training than others. Opportunities to attend PPANI Special Interest Seminars had also been taken up and the feedback was that these had been very informative and helpful where attended.

The case sampling completed for the Follow-Up Review evidenced ongoing monitoring and reporting to supervising Probation Officers and to the PSNI as required. It was evident when Inspectors met with approved premises staff and managers that they knew service users well, including monitoring requirements, but this was not always well evidenced in risk assessment and support planning records or there was a lack of clarity around drug and alcohol testing and device inspection regimes. Current risk assessment information including changes in PPANI category was not routinely documented and in instances where the category of risk had been updated or maintained there was not an explanation of the reasons why this was the case and of any adjustments, where needed, to risk assessment and support plans.

This also included evidence of contributions to Designated Risk Manager reports, PBNI risk management meetings and flow of information to approved premises staff around the outcomes of reports they had submitted to Probation Officers. In one instance the outcome of a joint Public Protection Team visit and drug test had not been proactively communicated to the approved premises. An update was only provided when approved premises staff informed the Probation Officer of the service user returning under the influence of substances.

Copies of LAPPP minutes were not routinely shared with approved premises key workers/managers and there were some limitations to what data could be recorded on approved premises case management systems due to data protection concerns. It was important that proportionate and compliant information sharing arrangements were operating effectively and this was an area that required further development.

Overall, there had been an improvement and Inspectors were more confident that approved premises were better integrated into public protection risk assessment and management arrangements. There remained work to do to fully realise this and to regularise training including opportunities for joint training, continue to improve information flow and ensure that up-to date information and specific actions for key workers were reflected in assessment and support plans.

Inspectors assessed this operational recommendation was **partially achieved**.

## CHAPTER 3: **CONCLUSION**

Some progress had been made to implement the 2023 Review Report recommendations. The three Operational Recommendations had been partially achieved and while recognising efforts to address the Strategic Recommendation, progress had been hindered due to resource constraints and other competing priorities faced by the organisations taking forward this work. This recommendation had not been achieved.

The previous Review Report highlighted the unique situation of how approved premises operated in Northern Ireland. Although a similar (but different) legislative framework existed between Northern Ireland and England and Wales, there was not a similar 'approval' mechanism as existed in England and Wales. The PBNi did not manage or operate the premises but managed referrals and supervised service users. Approved premises places were funded under the DfC's Supporting People Programme that, while recognising their role in delivering housing support services, did not address the question of their role in supporting public protection, reducing offending and supporting rehabilitation, and finally, the services were operated by four independent providers.

These structural challenges appeared to have been recognised by the Strategic Working Group to take forward implementation of Strategic Recommendation 1 but it appeared there was an acceptance that these structures could not be changed. Inspectors could still not see an evidence base for the required number of approved premises beds across Northern Ireland and how they might be configured to meet the current and emerging needs of service users and public protection arrangements. Work to examine and develop a preferred staffing and delivery model including funding arrangements was in its early stages. It was disappointing that an effective communication mechanism was still not in place to engage with approved premises providers on addressing Strategic Recommendation 1. It was important now to reset. A clear plan of work should be developed with relevant delivery partners, in conjunction with approved premises providers, with continuity of leadership and co-ordination by the DoJ Reducing Offending Directorate. This plan should assign ownership of work strands and timescales for delivery which bring together what work remains outstanding under Strategic Recommendation 1. It should also establish an oversight mechanism for approved premises and how improved outcomes for service users are monitored.

The NIPS, PBNI and Joint Chairs of the PPANI Policy and Practice Subgroup had taken steps to address the Operational Recommendations. Some work remained outstanding on these with aspects of it linked to the elements within Strategic Recommendation 1. For Operational Recommendations 1 and 2 in particular, it was important that the NIPS and the PBNI respectively took steps to consider, in light of the work done, that outcomes for approved premises service users had improved. This required closer monitoring of service delivery and improved engagement between their organisations and with approved premises providers.

Taken together, the evidence indicated that the operating context for approved premises has become more pressurised since the 2023 Review, characterised by higher demand, greater complexity, rising homelessness, continued gaps in move-on provision and heightened community scrutiny. It was important in these circumstances to address the structural challenges to sustain services.

# APPENDIX 1

## KEY DETAILS OF APPROVED PREMISES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

2025	Bonds Hill	Centenary House	Dismas House	Edward Street	Innis Centre	MUST	Thompson House
<b>Management organisation</b>	Simon Community Northern Ireland	The Salvation Army	Extern	Simon Community Northern Ireland	Extern	Extern	Council of Social Witness, Presbyterian Church in Ireland
<b>Location</b>	Derry/Londonderry	Belfast	Belfast	Portadown	Belfast	Cookstown	Belfast
<b>Premises Owner</b>	Choice Housing	The Salvation Army	Extern	Choice Housing	Radius Housing	Choice Housing	Radius Housing
<b>PBNI places</b>	4	13	14	15	20	6	19
<b>Accommodate females</b>	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
<b>Access</b>	Mixed	Mixed	PBNI only	PBNI only	PBNI only	Mixed	PBNI only

## APPENDIX 2

# CJI FOLLOW-UP REVIEW: JUDGEMENTS AND DEFINITIONS (VERSION 1.0)

Judgement	Definitions
<b>Achieved</b>	A realistic improvement plan has been formulated and implemented addressing all aspects of the recommendation; there is sufficient evidence of a sustained improvement for the intended beneficiaries; the plan is resourced and is sustainable, with clear governance and lines of accountability (including when partner organisations are involved).
<b>Partially achieved</b>	There is a formulated improvement plan with evidence of actions being taken to achieve the recommendation, for example, improved systems and procedures; the evidence shows that the actions are sustainable; and are beginning to have a beneficial impact. Some actions forming part of the improvement plan require further progress, for example, more is required to address all issues highlighted by the recommendation, better lines of accountability are needed, or greater partnership working is required.
<b>Not achieved</b>	There is an absence of a realistic improvement plan; or a formulated improvement plan exists but has not been commenced, is progressing too slowly or resourced insufficiently; lines of accountability are not clear; there is no evidence of progress to address the recommendation and improve outcomes for beneficiaries.
<b>No longer relevant</b>	This may arise where strategic or other developments have resulted in a different direction that means there would be no benefit in implementing the recommendation or it would not be practicable.



First published in Northern Ireland in June 2026 by

**Criminal Justice Inspection  
Northern Ireland**

Block 1, Knockview Buildings

Belfast BT4 3SJ

[www.cjini.org](http://www.cjini.org)



**Scan here to visit  
the CJI Website**