



# A REVIEW OF PROBATION APPROVED PREMISES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

MARCH 2023

## WHAT ARE APPROVED PREMISES?

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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.

Although the term 'Approved Premises' had been in common usage for many years and implied some type of formal approval or accreditation, this was not the case in Northern Ireland. CJI previously defined approved premises as hostels which received Supporting People funding for criminal justice referrals and where PBNI standards were applied.

## WHERE ARE THEY?

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There are seven approved premises with 91 places for high-risk offenders across Northern Ireland. The premises are managed by community and voluntary sector organisations that work closely with PBNI and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

## WHAT DID YOU LOOK AT?

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We looked at how the approved premises operated from when prisoners are considered for placement to the arrangements for people leaving the hostel. We also reviewed oversight and governance arrangements.

We visited each approved premise, spoke to residents and staff and examined records. We also interviewed staff and managers working in criminal justice organisations including Probation Officers, Police Officers and Prison Governors.

## WHY DO CJI REVIEW APPROVED PREMISES AND WHO WAS INVOLVED?

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Approved premises were reviewed because they make an important contribution to supporting criminal justice organisations resettle and rehabilitate some of the most serious offenders leaving prison, to manage risks of reoffending and to make sure the public are protected from harm.

We were asked to carry out this Review by the previous Minister of Justice because approved premises are not yet in our statutory remit. We have asked the Department of Justice to amend legislation, when they can, to correct this.

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## WHAT DID YOU FIND?

- ▶ Approved premises provided an invaluable service to the criminal justice system.
- ▶ Day-to-day operational practice was good and the staff we met were inspiring, caring people who were highly committed to the work they did.
- ▶ Working relationships between approved premises and those directly involved in their work was good.
- ▶ When we visited, demand for places was high and decisions about placements were being taken close to release dates.
- ▶ Some people were staying too long in approved premises with little prospect of moving on and some people were not high-risk offenders but had other reasons why they needed to be there.
- ▶ People continued to be released from prison without being registered with a doctor, and without photographic identification and bank accounts which increased their risks and did not help with successful resettlement.
- ▶ Effective arrangements were in place to supervise and monitor residents.
- ▶ The lack of sustainable longer-term accommodation hampered efforts to successfully support residents move on from approved premises.

## WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE?

Inspectors made one strategic recommendation and three operational recommendations for improvement including:

### At strategic level (leadership level):

- ▶ a framework was needed to clarify the vision, strategy, oversight arrangements of approved premises and set out each organisations' roles and expectations;
- ▶ systems should be in place to monitor the demand and supply of places and the preferred staffing model needs to be decided;
- ▶ there were opportunities for joint training and to raise awareness about the role of approved premises; and
- ▶ a mechanism was needed to measure and monitor the quality of service delivery.

### At an operational level (on-the-ground level):

- ▶ improvements to practical arrangements like opening a bank account, having photo identification and an email address to help resettlement;
- ▶ a greater involvement of approved premises staff in case planning and an improvement in move-on planning; and
- ▶ better involvement of approved premises key workers in public protection arrangements.

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO SEE HAPPENING NOW?

The Department of Justice, criminal justice organisations and approved premises providers working together to implement the Review recommendations.

Criminal Justice Inspection  
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