



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England

An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation

July 2020

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Foreword

Having somewhere safe to live that one can call home is a basic human need. Without this it is difficult for probation to manage individuals safely or do effective rehabilitative work. Many individuals go into prison homeless and even more leave with nowhere to live; and the enhancement of Through the Gate services has yet to make any difference to the numbers in settled accommodation. The result is that those who are released homeless are significantly more likely to go on to reoffend and to return to prison. In the sample of cases we looked at, the proportion of service users recalled or resentenced to custody within 12 months of release was almost double for those without settled accommodation. There is currently no cross-government approach to housing offenders, which is needed to set accommodation in the context of a broader strategy to reduce reoffending. It is encouraging that Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has recently established a directorate to develop strategic work on accommodation, and we look forward to seeing improvements in service delivery.

There are many barriers for individuals supervised by probation services to obtaining suitable, settled accommodation. These include a shortage of housing stock, delays in obtaining benefits, high up-front costs of renting, low priority on housing registers, insufficient support services, and providers who are averse to accommodating people with substantial criminal records. We were particularly disturbed by the high numbers of higher-risk prisoners being released into homelessness or unsettled accommodation. At least 22 per cent of NPS cases, by definition the highest risk individuals in the probation caseload, were released from prison without stable accommodation in 2018-2019 – equivalent to 6,515 individuals.¹ And only 75 per cent of individuals supervised by the NPS were in settled accommodation 12 months after release.²

Since the ending of the Supporting People programme, the availability of specialist supported accommodation and floating support services for offenders has greatly reduced. The scale of the challenge of assisting individuals to obtain and retain settled and suitable accommodation is huge, given the shortage of accommodation and the many barriers service users face, and requires considerable attention and resources in order to make progress. It also requires stronger partnerships at national and local levels to address the needs of homeless offenders. The separate structures of the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) have weakened partnership work at local level; there is now an opportunity with the forthcoming unified model of offender management to ensure that this is resourced appropriately.

Many prisoners are released from prisons that are not local to where they have lived. Design of resettlement services should form a bridge between the accommodation services available in the community and the accommodation tasks that can be delivered in custody. Many of those released homeless are serving very short prison sentences and were homeless prior to sentence. They require accommodation with support either as an alternative to prison or immediately on release, commissioned nationally or in partnership with local authorities. Housing authorities are improving the advice and assistance given to the homeless; future probation commissioning should focus on expanding access to housing and support to enable individuals to settle in accommodation.

We found a few examples of where CRCs had established innovative relationships with accommodation providers, expanding access to good-quality accommodation. There were also promising examples of the NPS co-commissioning accommodation and achieving successful outcomes. A strategic approach to identifying and building on effective practice in this area is needed.

¹ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly Release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

² Ministry of Justice. (2020). *Community Performance Update to September 2019 National Probation Service Tables*.

Many service users felt that probation services were unable to help them with their accommodation problems. Probation practitioners lack specific training in housing legislation and guidance, and pathways for enabling individuals to progress into settled accommodation are unclear. Many service users commented on the poor quality of the accommodation or felt unsafe where they were placed. Guidance for practitioners is needed on acceptable standards for accommodation placements. Finding and keeping somewhere safe to live is emotionally draining. Knowledgeable practitioners, in association with homelessness services, can guide and support individuals as they make these difficult journeys, providing motivation and encouragement to enable individuals to succeed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Justin Russell
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Contextual facts

4,742	Number of individuals beginning community supervision homeless in 2018-2019 ³
11,435	Number of occasions individuals released from prison homeless in 2018-2019 ⁴
15.7%	Percentage of men released from prison homeless in 2018-2019 ⁵
18.6%	Percentage of women released from prison homeless in 2018-2019 ⁶
35.4%	Percentage of individuals without settled accommodation on release from prison, April to September 2019 ⁷
24.8%	Percentage of NPS cases without settled accommodation at the end of their sentence, April to September 2019 ⁸
726	Number of deaths of homeless people in England and Wales in 2018 ⁹
45 years	Average age of homeless men who died in England and Wales in 2018 ¹⁰
53%	Percentage of cases in first round of CRC inspections where accommodation interventions were judged sufficient
71%	Percentage of cases in first round of NPS inspections where accommodation interventions were judged sufficient

³ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

⁴ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

⁵ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

⁶ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

⁷ Ministry of Justice. (2020). *Community Performance Update to September 2019 Community Rehabilitation Company Tables*. This data excludes information from London CRC.

⁸ Ministry of Justice. (2020). *Community Performance Update to September 2019 National Probation Service Tables*.

⁹ Office for National Statistics. (2019). *Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2018*.

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics. (2019). *Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2018*.

Executive summary

The inspection in context

Responsibility for housing and homelessness sits with local authorities. However, under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 probation services have a duty to refer to them people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. While local authorities have a duty to prevent and relieve homelessness, they do not have a duty to house such individuals unless they are particularly vulnerable, which excludes many single individuals on probation supervision. Since 2014 probation services have been split between the NPS, which manages the higher risk offenders, and 21 CRCs, which manage low and medium risk offenders. There is no statutory duty on probation services to house those they supervise. HMPPS manages approved premises, which are short-term facilities for managing high risk individuals on release from prison. They also commission the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS), which provides a short-term facility for low and medium risk individuals, many of whom are on home detention curfews.

Under the Supporting People programme, the funding of which was ring-fenced until 2009, local Probation Trusts were co-commissioners with local authorities and health services of supported accommodation and floating support services. In 2005-2006, 6,410 units of housing-related support for offenders were commissioned in England, costing £49,264,000.¹¹ Supporting People continues in Wales; however, in England this funding has been merged with the local authority area-based grant. Probation is no longer a commissioner of such services, many of which have been lost or merged with generic housing support.

Inspection methodology

This inspection report draws together information from our 'call for evidence' and visits to probation services in Northamptonshire, Cleveland, London and Essex. We examined the work of the National Probation Service (NPS), Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), partner organisations and service providers in assisting those under supervision to obtain and retain settled accommodation. In doing so, we analysed a representative sample of 116 cases of individuals released from prisons in February 2019 into six local delivery units and tracked their subsequent accommodation status over the next 12 months. The sample included CRC and NPS cases, short and long sentences and all offence types. We also conducted a more detailed qualitative examination of the case files for 40 separate individuals on community sentences and prison licences who had experienced accommodation problems. For these cases we interviewed the responsible officers who had worked with them and examined the quality of assessment, planning and subsequent accommodation interventions.

The organisation Empowering People: Inspiring Change interviewed 75 service users on our behalf. We also reviewed data and examples from recent HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections. More detail about our methodology can be found in Annexe 2.

The scale and nature of the issue

Aggregate findings of Through the Gate samples from adult probation inspections in 2018-2019 found that 24 per cent of prisoners were released to no fixed abode and 27 per cent went to temporary accommodation. Many individuals go into prison homeless and even more leave with nowhere to live. At least 12 per cent of those starting community sentences in 2018-2019 were homeless or in temporary accommodation.¹² In our first round of core inspections in 2018-2019, we

¹¹ National Offender Management Service. (2008). *Reducing Re-offending Housing and Housing Support Framework*. These figures do not include Wales, which has retained a separate Supporting People programme.

¹² Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

found that interventions to address accommodation need were insufficient in too many CRC cases, though NPS interventions were frequently better.

In this thematic inspection sample of 116 prison releases, we found that 12 months later, 17 per cent were still homeless, and a further 15 per cent remained in unsettled accommodation. For those released to settled accommodation, the percentage recalled or resented to custody was almost half that of those without such accommodation on release.

	Accommodation status on release ¹³	Recalled or resented to custody	Charged with further offences
Without settled accommodation	47%	63%	65%
With settled accommodation	41%	35%	44%

Obtaining and retaining settled accommodation is a key factor in successful rehabilitation. The Ministry of Justice 2012 Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) report showed that 79 per cent of prisoners who reported being homeless prior to entering custody were reconvicted within a year of release, compared to 47 per cent for those with accommodation.¹⁴

There are many substantial barriers to obtaining settled accommodation for service users. Access to supported housing is reduced, costs are too high for those in employment, and some do not wish their accommodation to be contingent on agreeing to a support plan. Most service users do not have priority on the housing register, and some are excluded because of previous behaviour, rent arrears, being classed as 'intentionally homeless', or having no local connection. Some social housing providers exclude some service users because of their risk. Private rents are higher, especially in London, where the availability of shared housing is limited. This excludes many under-35s, who can only get the shared housing rate of benefit. Many landlords require sizeable up-front fees, which are not possible for those on benefit if local rent deposit schemes are insufficient. Many private landlords require considerable reassurance before taking on those supervised by probation services. These obstacles are not necessarily insurmountable, but they do require a considerable amount of effort, time and dedicated resource at management and practitioner level to overcome.

Strategy, policy, partnership and organisation

At present there is no national approach across government to addressing the housing needs of offenders. The NPS produced an initial accommodation strategy in 2017; this work has been overtaken by the formation of the HMPPS Community Interventions Residential and Support Services Division in 2019, which is in the process of producing a more comprehensive framework for the delivery of accommodation services. Following the cessation of the national cross-government reducing reoffending board, there is an intention to set this framework within a broader reducing reoffending strategy. In some areas, the different CRCs have undertaken their own accommodation initiatives; however, not all have been joined up with the work of the NPS. With the prospect of a unified probation model in 2021, there is an opportunity to strengthen the strategic approach to delivering accommodation services across England and Wales.

In 2018, MoJ produced guidance for probation services on the new Duty to Refer individuals who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to local authorities for assistance and support with finding

¹³ Data taken from an inspection sample of 116 cases released in February 2019 and tracked for 12 months to see whether they reoffended, were recalled, or resented to custody during that period. This excludes those who on release were housed initially in approved premises, BASS accommodation, or immigration detention.

¹⁴ Williams K, Poyser J, Hopkins K. (2012). *Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Survey*. MoJ Research Summary 3/12.

accommodation. There has been no formal evaluation of how well this has been implemented, though the guidance was revised and updated earlier this year. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) publishes the number of referrals that have been made by the NPS and CRCs. However, there is concern that this data may not be completely accurate, and there is currently no method for tracking referrals through from probation services to local authorities to identify how effective the process is in achieving accommodation outcomes. There is currently no consistent method for recording these referrals, and in our qualitative study we could only find evidence of these referrals being made in about one-third of relevant cases.

Most probation practitioners were unaware of the expectation that they should ideally follow up these referrals, and only one responsible officer confirmed that they had seen the personal housing plan produced by the local housing authority that resulted. Many saw this as simply another bureaucratic process, with the perception that prisoners would still be required to attend the local homelessness service on the day of release. They did not appreciate how referrals might result in individuals receiving appropriate assistance, especially in cases where the local authority did not have a main duty to house them.

There were positive examples of local prison release protocols that set out the responsibilities of probation providers, prisons and local authorities in implementing the Duty to Refer. There were initiatives by some local authorities where housing officers visited prisons, or conducted assessments by telephone or video link, which enabled the local authority to organise housing more swiftly on release. These initiatives were by no means universal and required staff in prisons to facilitate them. In some areas, prison navigators assisted those with histories of homelessness, funded by the local authority under MHCLG's Rapid Rehousing Pathway. However, probation practitioners were not consistently aware of these developments.

The split between NPS and CRCs has weakened local partnership working, which is under-resourced and less effective. There is a need for something similar to the Homelessness Reduction Boards, about which MHCLG has consulted, where probation managers can plan with others to address the housing needs of offenders. Where partnerships have been built up and strengthened over years, services are more effective and new initiatives have resulted. There were examples of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) protocols addressing housing issues for the riskiest individuals with no local connection, and Integrated Offender Management (IOM) developments providing additional support for more challenging people.

CRCs have focused much of their accommodation work on Through the Gate delivery. Against a background of financial challenges, some CRCs have not prioritised resources towards addressing accommodation issues in the community where there are gaps. Some accommodation workers are too thinly stretched. The NPS has developed the case management support role in some local delivery units, in line with the 2017 strategy, to fill some of these gaps in service delivery for their service users.

Many probation practitioners' knowledge of housing legislation and guidance is limited, much of it gathered by informal methods. This means they are less able to guide and support individuals with housing need. Where there are housing specialist roles, those working with the larger housing charities are more likely to have had formal training than staff who are directly employed.

Accommodation provision and support

Probation services have a wealth of data on accommodation need, which can be used for commissioning services. This demonstrates that many of those with histories of unsettled accommodation have associated needs such as mental health and substance misuse. The greater proportion of those without settled accommodation are the 'hidden homeless', those in temporary accommodation, or who are 'sofa surfing'. The number of service users who are released from prison that are 'street homeless' is more than twice the number of homeless on community sentences. Performance of many providers who are assisting those on supervision with accommodation issues is frequently judged by the numbers of individuals seen or interventions completed, rather than the specific accommodation outcomes achieved. The large majority of

responsible officers interviewed said that insufficient accommodation for offenders is available, though the specific challenges vary by locality.

Funding of supported housing for people with associated needs, both accommodation-based and floating support, fell by 59 per cent in real terms between 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 (National Audit Office, 2017, p.28). Many offender-specific schemes have closed or been merged with generic homelessness services, where higher-risk individuals, such as those with convictions for sexual offences or arson, are less likely to be accepted. At the same time, there has been a growth in properties funded under intensive housing management,¹⁵ which provide less support but a degree of oversight. However, these schemes do not come under the same quality and outcome frameworks as the supported schemes commissioned by local authorities, and there have been problems with unregulated expansion in some areas.

The provision of accommodation services is a central element of Through the Gate activity, which has seen increased funding from the Ministry of Justice of £22 million a year in resettlement prisons in 2019 and has now been expanded into the majority of non-resettlement prisons. The extent to which this has improved accommodation outcomes is unclear, as performance against the relevant indicator has not yet improved. There are very large unexplained variations in performance between different CRCs. Through the Gate teams find accommodation for some individuals, as do responsible officers. Those without accommodation are more likely to go on to reoffend and return to prison. It is easier for Through the Gate services to link prisoners to accommodation services where they are released locally, and more difficult otherwise, where knowledge of available services is more limited. In some areas, the NPS is making alternative arrangements to find accommodation for released prisoners, especially where the prisoner is high risk or difficult to place. Very few of the service users interviewed, with one or two exceptions, were able to tell us about good experiences of Through the Gate services.

We came across a couple of innovative examples of where CRCs have worked with accommodation providers to obtain direct access for individuals to accommodation that acts as a stepping stone towards having their own tenancies. We are concerned that these innovations and relationships are not lost with the ending of the CRC contracts. There are also some good examples of where NPS divisions have used their co-commissioning funding, or staff resources, to work with local authorities and housing providers to expand housing options for service users. This model of procuring accommodation is promising.

The nationally commissioned BASS properties are now oversubscribed, with the increase in numbers of individuals on home detention curfews without alternative accommodation. These properties could be used more for homeless prisoners released on licence, but this would require considerable expansion over what is planned. The three prison pilot schemes funded by Ministry of Justice and MHCLG in Bristol, Leeds and Pentonville prisons for accommodating homeless individuals leaving custody are in their early stages. They are beginning to show that, for many who are serving short sentences, the move into privately rented accommodation is not easy, and many need somewhere to stay before they can progress to more long-term accommodation. For those released to approved premises, planning for them to move on after their usual 12-week stay needs to begin before they arrive to achieve a successful transition.

Probation service delivery

In many of the 40 cases we examined, no pre-sentence report was prepared. In many cases, the individuals had a number of associated needs in addition to their accommodation need, and in some of these the analysis was insufficient. Planning to address accommodation issues was generally good, though in some cases where there was housing need, this was not addressed. In others,

¹⁵ Intensive Housing Management is a term used to describe the services provided by a supported housing landlord, differentiating it from a general needs landlord. The services are provided to ensure the ongoing viability of the tenancy with respect to the needs of the tenant. Such services are eligible for a higher level of housing benefit.

there were gaps in detailed planning to address accommodation need in conjunction with housing authorities.

Overwhelmingly, we heard from service users that homelessness is tough. It is mentally and physically draining, often coexisting with similarly draining issues such as substance misuse and mental ill-health. We heard how some find it easier to be in prison than navigate housing services following release.

We found that recording of service users' accommodation status was often incorrect, and quality assurance of this was limited. Performance measures and targets need reviewing and realigning to provide more incentive and challenge. More work is required to promote learning and to evidence effective practice in achieving accommodation outcomes. Standards and processes for quality-assuring accommodation placements are lacking. These are needed to protect service users and other residents, to avoid exploitation of individuals and ensure that all feel safe.

Future commissioning should be informed by the needs and perspectives of service users. The priority should be to increase access to units of accommodation in the social and private rented sectors, and floating support services to enable those with associated needs to settle and retain their tenancies.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, should:

1. work to develop a national cross-government strategy that addresses the housing needs of offenders
2. set out clear expectations as to how appropriate services for offenders who are homeless should be commissioned in each locality. Implement systems for tracking and monitoring Duty to Refer cases from probation providers to local authorities, and the outcomes of these referrals, and publish this data on a regular basis.

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

3. ensure there are designated accommodation leads, at strategic and operational level, in each probation delivery unit, for effective engagement with local authorities and housing providers, to deliver appropriate services for individuals under supervision, to obtain and retain settled accommodation
4. develop a comprehensive performance and data strategy for offender accommodation, which includes accurate recording of accommodation status, challenging and aligned performance measures and targets, and appropriately segmented data on accommodation need for use in commissioning services
5. substantially expand the provision of BASS, or similar transitional accommodation schemes in partnership with local authorities, to reduce the numbers of individuals beginning prison licences or community sentences who lack a stable address and require support before obtaining their own accommodation
6. ensure, as a priority, that stable accommodation is available for every higher-risk offender leaving prison and that individuals moving on from approved premises have settled accommodation to go to
7. equip probation practitioners and accommodation specialists with the knowledge and skills to work effectively on housing and accommodation issues with individuals under supervision, and to engage appropriately with local housing authorities
8. use the dynamic framework to commission access to private and social rented sectors, and floating support services that provide access to units of accommodation and support for individuals in them
9. agree minimum quality standards for the provision of accommodation when making referrals
10. in redesigning Through the Gate accommodation services, ensure that:
 - actions to prevent loss of tenancies are completed swiftly
 - Duty to Refer responsibilities for prisoners at risk of homelessness are undertaken as soon as possible, involving the responsible officer
 - local authorities are enabled to access prisoners in custody to make Duty to Refer assessments in person, on the phone or by video link
 - prisoners have identity documents and bank accounts prior to release
 - there is provision for prisoners who need it to be met at the gate and taken to any accommodation appointments on the day of release

- accommodation services in the area to which prisoners are to be discharged are involved in making referrals and brokering accommodation provision in conjunction with responsible officers.

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, together with Community Rehabilitation Companies, should:

11. ensure there are effective arrangements for the transfer of accommodation projects, and knowledge of local services and arrangements, when CRC contracts are terminated.

1 Introduction

1.1 Why this thematic?

HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection and research findings indicate that offenders face barriers to accessing and retaining stable and suitable accommodation, which can be a key component of successful rehabilitation. The Ministry of Justice 2012 Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) report showed that 79 per cent of prisoners who reported being homeless prior to entering custody were reconvicted within a year of release and 84 per cent were reconvicted within two years of release, compared to 47 per cent and 60 per cent respectively for those with accommodation.¹⁶ Our Through the Gate phase two inspection (HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation, 2017) found little effective work by CRCs to improve access to accommodation. Aggregate findings of Through the Gate samples from adult probation inspections in 2018-2019 found that 24 per cent of prisoners were released to no fixed abode and 27 per cent went to new temporary accommodation.

In our more recent inspection of post-release supervision for short-term prisoners,¹⁷ we found that almost one in three were released to no fixed abode. We found significant difficulties in accessing accommodation, substance misuse and mental health services for this group. CRCs' capacity to influence other key agencies was weak, with leaders not routinely included in local commissioning arrangements.

At a national level, at least 12 per cent of those starting community sentences in 2018-2019 were homeless or in temporary accommodation; however, the accommodation status of 27 per cent was not recorded.¹⁸

A report on offender housing for community and post-release cases is timely to report the effects of the operation of the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017* for probation service users. It should inform the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's work on reducing homelessness. HMPPS is currently producing an offender accommodation strategy, and this inspection should test the likely impact of this strategy and inform the new commissioning arrangements for probation accommodation services.

1.2 Background

Lack of housing or insecure tenure was identified as a pathway to offending and reoffending by the 2002 Social Exclusion Unit (Cabinet Office) report on reducing reoffending (SEU, 2002). The SEU claimed that stable housing could reduce the risk of reoffending by prisoners on release by a fifth (citing unpublished 2001 OASys data). The current consensus is that "the provision of suitable accommodation [is a] necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the reduction of reoffending" (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Many of the problems with offender accommodation identified by the SEU in 2002 – losing tenure following imprisonment, barriers to social and private rented accommodation, housing benefit delays, referral restrictions and homelessness – remain current.

¹⁶ Williams K., Poyser J., Hopkins K. (2012). *Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Survey*. MoJ Research Summary 3/12.

¹⁷ HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2019). *Post-release supervision for short-term prisoners: the work undertaken by Community Rehabilitation Companies*.

¹⁸ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

The Offender Assessment System (OASys) has five questions on accommodation (the last four of which combine as a criminogenic need scale):

3.2: Accommodation status

3.3: Currently of no fixed abode or in transient accommodation

3.4: Suitability of accommodation

3.5: Permanence of accommodation

3.6: Suitability of location of accommodation

Ministry of Justice researchers (Moore, 2015) analysed completed OASys datasets (England and Wales) for probation service users. They found that accommodation status was a highly dynamic factor, with many service users experiencing changes in status after the initial assessment, and that changes in accommodation were predictive of non-violent and violent reoffending. Stable accommodation was found to be negatively correlated with reoffending (when controlling for other risk and positive factors) and was often linked to supportive family members.

Morton and Smith-Yau (in Debidin, 2009) found that domestic violence was a 'recurring theme' in OASys accommodation assessments, with abusers often living with previous victims or new partners and children who were at risk sharing a home with them. This was a factor that we considered in this inspection in our more detailed assessments of 40 cases across four areas, to identify the links between being a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse and accommodation status, and how this was responded to.

Some researchers (cited in Sapouna, 2015) have found that hostel type accommodation can foster networks of criminal associates and thus undermine resettlement and rehabilitation. As such, they recommend a 'housing first' approach to move offenders into mainstream housing with security of tenure rather than segregate them in hostel accommodation. The 'housing first' approach was indicated as promising in tackling homelessness by a Campbell Systematic Review (Menzies Munthe-Kaas et al, 2018). We were keen to explore different types of accommodation provision, with particular attention to the views of service users who had recent experience of using them, to find out from their perspective what worked best.

1.3 Aims and objectives

This inspection sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does leadership support and promote the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive accommodation service for all service users?
2. Are staff empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive accommodation service for all service users?
3. Is there a comprehensive range of high-quality accommodation services in place, supporting a tailored and responsive service for all service users?
4. Are high-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated accommodation services delivered, engaging the service user?
5. Are Through the Gate services personalised and coordinated, addressing service users' accommodation needs?
6. Is timely and relevant information available to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach to the provision of accommodation services for all service users?

Scope of the inspection

The scope included the work of both CRCs and the NPS in preventing homelessness and securing stable and suitable accommodation for service users on community sentences and on release from prison. It considered service users' views on the quality of the services and the accommodation found and the extent to which it met their needs. It was restricted to adult offenders and did not specifically look at work with children leaving the secure youth estate, which would require a more detailed focus. It did not consider the work of approved premises, which we had inspected recently, except in relation to the extent to which they prepared service users for, and secured, a successful move to more permanent accommodation. We intended to include a visit to Wales, which has different statutory arrangements for the delivery of accommodation services under the Welsh Government. However, we were unable to inspect there, or in Kent and Manchester as we had intended, after the programme was cut short because of the coronavirus epidemic. Therefore, this report and recommendations just relate to services provided in England.

1.4 Report outline

Chapter	Content
1. Strategy, policy, partnership and organisation	Accommodation strategies Accommodation policy and the Duty to Refer Partnership working Delivery structures in the NPS and CRCs Staff experience and training
2. Accommodation provision and support	Commissioning of accommodation services Supported housing CRC accommodation services in the community Through the Gate services NPS co-commissioned services Nationally commissioned services
3. Probation service delivery	Assessment of accommodation needs Planning to address accommodation needs Delivery of interventions Service users' views on the difficulty of finding settled and suitable accommodation
4. Overcoming barriers, improving performance and quality	Addressing barriers Performance measures and targets Quality assurance of accommodation Future commissioning

2. Strategy, policy, partnership and organisation

This chapter will consider what work has been done to develop accommodation strategies at both national and local levels, before reviewing how far policies have been developed and implemented in relation to the probation service's responsibilities under the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*. It will then examine to what extent probation services have been involved in effective partnership work with local authorities and other key local stakeholders, before outlining some of the delivery models that are in operation.

2.1 Legislative context

Statutory responsibility for housing and homelessness sits with local authorities, within national policy set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*, building on earlier legislation, gives local authorities duties to take 'reasonable steps' to prevent and relieve the homelessness of any individuals who are threatened with homelessness. It also requires them to take 'reasonable steps' to help all eligible homeless applicants to secure accommodation for at least six months, unless the applicant is referred to another local authority due to having no local connection to the authority they have applied to.

Probation providers and prisons, along with other designated authorities, have a duty to refer individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to local authorities. However, the Act does not give local authorities a duty to house such individuals unless they are in priority need, have a local connection and are not 'intentionally homeless'. Single people without children, and childless couples, are not categorised as in priority need, and are owed the prevention duty and the relief duty only, unless they are particularly vulnerable.

Under the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms in 2014, probation services were split between the NPS, which manages all high-risk offenders and those who come under MAPPA, and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies, which manage most low and medium risk of harm offenders. The CRCs were expected to provide interventions for all offenders to address their offending-related needs, including accommodation interventions. There is no statutory duty on probation services to house the individuals they supervise. The contracts for the CRCs are due to end in June 2021 and their offender management functions will transfer to the NPS.

Before 2003, local Probation Boards, as they were then, managed the £10.4 million Probation Accommodation Grants Scheme.¹⁹ These funds were used to assist with financing supported housing and floating support schemes for offenders. In 2003, these funds were merged with funds from health and housing into the Supporting People programme, which commissioned a wide range of housing-related support. In England in 2005-2006, 6,410 units of housing-related support for offenders were commissioned, costing £49,264,000, along with 6,900 units of support for those with substance misuse problems, costing £43,590,000.²⁰ Probation providers were fully involved as commissioners of these services. During this time, supported housing schemes for offenders expanded. These arrangements came to an end in 2009, when the ring-fenced funding was merged with a local authority area-based grant, and probation was no longer formally involved as a commissioner of these services.

¹⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2001). Briefing paper.

²⁰ National Offender Management Service. (2008). *Reducing Re-offending Housing and Housing Support Framework*. These figures do not include Wales, which has retained a separate Supporting People programme.

Approved premises and bail support

HMPPS currently manages 100 approved premises, with 2,235 places. They are used primarily to manage risk rather than as an accommodation resource. HM Inspectorate of Probation undertook a thematic inspection of approved premises in 2017. We found that 96 per cent of places in approved premises were used for individuals on prison licences, most of whom posed a high or very high risk of harm. These individuals usually stayed for 12 weeks before moving on to other accommodation. HMPPS also commissions 550 places in small units of accommodation under the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS), which is operated by NACRO. These are for individuals who pose a low or medium risk of harm and are a short-term resource for those who would otherwise be in prison. Most places are used for prisoners who have been released on home detention curfew and who have no other suitable accommodation, but places are also available for people on bail, as an alternative to recall to prison, as a residential requirement for people on intensive community orders in Manchester or Wales or, if space is available, for others released on a prison licence homeless.

2.2 Overview

Accommodation strategy

At present there is no national government approach in England to addressing the housing needs of offenders, nor is there an agreed position on the priority that offenders should be given in relation to access to accommodation. The Justice Select Committee (2019) recommended that the government publish an accommodation strategy and action plan for prisoners on release, in view of the serious problems it had identified. However, the government responded that it was “actively feeding in to the MHCLG-owned Rough Sleeping Strategy and Delivery plan” (paragraph 34).²¹

The NPS developed a National Accommodation Needs Strategy in 2017 (NPS, 2017), which related to those it was responsible for supervising. It required NPS probation divisions to, among other things, develop their own accommodation action plans, implement specialist case support worker roles for accommodation needs, agree how resources would be targeted to address accommodation needs, coordinate partnership working, and work constructively with CRCs to achieve shared accommodation objectives for offenders. It was to be accompanied by an implementation plan, but this appears not to have been published or followed through to completion. In one of the three divisions we visited, we were provided with an accommodation work plan that began in September 2019. This focused on compliance with probation’s responsibilities under the *Homelessness Reduction Act*, improving recording of accommodation outcomes and strengthening links with local partners, providers and government initiatives.

Of the four CRCs we visited, London CRC had published a summary of its accommodation strategy, dated 2019, which set out some of the barriers service users faced, and the CRC’s current and future proposed service offer. While the other CRCs did not have any formal strategy, they had undertaken various accommodation initiatives. In each area, the work of the CRC and NPS divisions on accommodation appeared to have diverged. They were pursuing different initiatives and different partnerships, with minimal joint activity.

In mid-2019, HMPPS established the national-level Community Interventions Residential and Support Services Directorate, which now leads on accommodation support and operations. It is in the process of producing a detailed accommodation framework and toolkit, which is due for publication shortly. This will cover the next two years until the new probation arrangements are sufficiently established. It should provide a clearer direction for work on offender accommodation. This work needs to sit within a broader reducing reoffending framework, which will require more joined-up cross-government working following the cessation of the national reducing reoffending board in 2019.

²¹ https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/2526/252605.htm#_idTextAnchor01

The government's Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice, 2018a) identifies the need for separate accommodation geared specifically to women with complex needs who might otherwise go to prison, many of whom will have experienced abuse. In Southwark, we learned of a specific initiative with SOLACE Women's Aid, probation services and the local authority to house women who were rough sleepers and who had experienced abuse. While there are still significant gaps in provision in some areas, most of those interviewed recognised that this was a need that must be addressed.

Accommodation policy and the Duty to Refer

The Ministry of Justice (2018b) published guidance for HMPPS staff in October 2018 about implementing the Duty to Refer those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless; this guidance was updated in March 2020. There has not yet been a thorough evaluation of how far this guidance has been followed, or of its impact in terms of enabling individuals supervised by probation services to access settled accommodation through arrangements with local authority homelessness units. The most recent experimental homelessness statistics published by MHCLG for the period July to September 2019 show that the NPS made 730 referrals for assessment during this period, while CRCs made 100.²² Given their responsibility for Through the Gate resettlement services, this very low level of referrals by CRCs is surprising, though 390 referrals were made by prison establishments during the same period, and the origin of some referrals were unknown.

In our more detailed examination of 40 cases without settled accommodation, we found just over one-third had evidence on file of a referral being made to local authorities, though there was no consistent method of recording these referrals. The large majority of probation practitioners interviewed had heard about and received briefings on referring cases to local authorities, but many were unclear about what they should do once a referral had been made. The responsibility for making referrals falls to NPS court staff when an individual is released from court homeless; to resettlement staff when an individual is likely to be homeless on release from prison, and to probation practitioners in the community when someone under supervision is homeless or at risk of homelessness. While many were clear about the obligation on resettlement staff to make these referrals, some community staff were not aware of their responsibilities, and court staff expressed reservations about having the time to do this in the court setting. Few staff understood that they were expected to follow up these referrals with local authorities, and only one had seen the personal housing plan that was subsequently drawn up.

There was a common perception among many staff interviewed that the Duty to Refer was simply another bureaucratic process, because the only result would be that released prisoners would be instructed to attend local authority homeless services on the day of release. It is difficult to judge how far this was the case. It is certainly difficult for local authorities to engage with prisons, particularly where they are more distant. We heard of some local authorities who would undertake assessments with prisoners in person or via phone or video link, where the prison and resettlement team could facilitate this. In Stockton we saw evidence of how the local authority prison resettlement worker went into local prisons, and in some cases, had managed to place individuals straight into accommodation on release. Some probation staff were unaware of the change of approach by many local authorities to providing assistance to single homeless people and childless couples, in line with the non-statutory guidance to the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*. This may have influenced their perceptions.

The MHCLG and Ministry of Justice (2019) have published best practice guidance and research into the production of prison release protocols. These set out the agreed responsibilities of local authorities, local prisons and probation providers, and arrangements for completing homelessness assessments and producing and sharing personal housing plans. We saw a good example of this in

²² Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2020). *Statutory homelessness live tables, Detailed local authority level tables: July to September 2019*.

Essex, where the CRC director had taken a leading role in a homelessness trailblazer initiative and had been instrumental in drawing up a protocol, facilitated by Essex County Council. However, some staff interviewed were unclear that they could be involved in seeing and contributing to personal housing plans.

The MHCLG is progressing the Rough Sleeping Initiative in line with the government's commitment to end rough sleeping within this parliament. Funding has been provided to local authorities under the Rapid Rehousing Pathway for a series of initiatives, including navigators to enable individuals who are homeless and with complex needs to access appropriate support and housing. We found that many probation practitioners were not sufficiently aware of these initiatives or what would happen after they had referred individuals to local authorities. As one commented:

"I don't follow up. There are navigators, but we don't know what they do".

Good practice example

Julie had a lengthy history of offending, local authority care, drug and substance misuse, sex working and personality disorder issues. She was accommodated by one local authority in housing which was kept through three recalls. Subsequently, she was referred to another authority, which accommodated her and provided her with a navigator while her housing application was assessed. The navigator provided her with intensive support.

Partnership working

Effective local partnership working with councils, the police, health services, the Department for Work and Pensions, and voluntary sector agencies is critical for ensuring that the needs of homeless probation service users are met. In 2019, MHCLG consulted on a proposal to introduce Homelessness Reduction Boards at a local level to enhance and coordinate efforts among partners across the existing complicated delivery network. The response to the consultation is awaited. Those who responded to the call for evidence for this inspection were clear that there is a need for more joined-up, coordinated arrangements at a local and national level.

In each of the areas visited we spoke with representatives of some of the local housing authorities, and senior managers in the NPS and CRC, to assess the strength of partnership working. In some areas, there were stronger links with the NPS than the CRC; in Essex, the opposite was true. In one area, the head of the homeless section considered that links with both the NPS and CRC required strengthening at strategic and operational levels. It was clear that the split of probation services between the NPS and CRC had weakened partnership working, which had been under-resourced. Senior managers were hopeful that, with the forthcoming unified model for offender management in 2021, they would be able to devote more attention to this activity.

Where effective partnerships have been nurtured over several years, this has resulted in improved commissioning and access to services for individuals subject to probation supervision.

Good practice example

In Southwark, the NPS is actively involved at a strategic level with the borough's Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Panel and at an operational level with the Homelessness Forum. A senior probation officer leads on liaison with the local authority, and there is an arrangement for a member of the local housing team to be based in the probation office four days a week to work alongside the housing advice worker (HAWK), who is funded by probation. The local authority worker fulfils statutory housing functions, while the HAWK worker provides advice services, including on accessing the private rented sector. The Borough of Southwark was a trailblazer for the implementation of the *Homelessness Reduction Act* and, despite having the fourth highest level of homelessness applications in the country and receiving one-sixth of the Duty to Refer submissions in London, is able to find accommodation for many NPS service users when they are released from prison or complete a period of residence in an approved premises. There are plans to extend the services of the seconded member of staff to CRC service users.

Local authorities and residential social landlords have a duty to cooperate with probation, police and prisons under the local MAPPA. They are usually represented on senior management boards and MAPPA Level 2 and 3 panels, which consider the minority of individuals who pose the greatest risk and require higher levels of inter-agency coordination. While they do not have a duty to house these individuals, they will generally make efforts to accommodate them to reduce the risk to the public from serious harm, usually after a period of residence in an approved premises. Two MAPPA chairs identified that one of their most pressing issues was accessing suitable accommodation for elderly individuals and others with specific care needs, who may not be considered acceptable by many care homes. HMPPS has identified a need to develop a memorandum of understanding with adult social care services, to ensure a smooth transfer of information, assessments and funding when those with care needs are due for release from prison.

There are particular problems where an individual does not have a local connection, or where it is considered that they need to be managed elsewhere. Each MAPPA covers several housing authorities, and some of these authorities will have outsourced their housing provision, making it more difficult to agree on who should house hard-to-place individuals. In some areas, MAPPA housing protocols have been developed to address this difficulty.

Good practice example

In Northamptonshire, a MAPPA housing panel meets to consider the needs of Level 2 and 3 individuals who are hard to place. There is an agreement among the local authorities that, where a placement outside an individual's home area is required, responsibility will be allocated to authorities on a rota basis. These arrangements have worked well, and all such cases have been appropriately housed.

Integrated Offender Management operates across police force areas to ensure effective coordination of management of groups of priority offenders. While local authorities and housing advice services are involved with many of these partnerships, the most serious shortfall identified by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in service provision to manage these groups, in 14 areas, was provision of suitable accommodation. In Luton we heard how the PCC is providing funds to an existing accommodation project to ensure a higher level of floating support to manage these more volatile individuals.

Good practice example

In Surrey, the PCC has match-funded the Seetec charity 'Your Ambition' to provide eight supported bed spaces with Transform Housing and Support, a supported accommodation provider. Opened in May 2019, the project prioritised referrals from Surrey police, Surrey Integrated Offender Management (IOM) teams and the CRC. Surrey IOM has been targeted specifically due to the CRC's analysis of data on accommodation needs, which concluded that housing problems increase by up to 50 per cent for those in the cohort.

Delivery structures in the NPS and CRCs

The *Transforming Rehabilitation* Target Operating Model (Ministry of Justice, 2014) specified that resettlement services "must include providing direct support in custody in helping offenders find accommodation," for both individuals who would be supervised by CRCs and those supervised by the NPS. The vision for *Transforming Rehabilitation* was that CRCs incentivised to reduce reoffending would work in partnership with residential social landlords and private sector landlords to source accommodation. CRCs do not have a contract target for offenders accessing accommodation, though there is a related assurance metric for those released from prison. It was always going to be difficult to measure reoffending and attach causality to any particular intervention, and with CRC contracts coming to an end, the financial incentive to commit resources to finding accommodation for service users has weakened.

Some CRCs have been financially challenged and have had to reduce activity to core work. An examination of CRCs' rate cards or directories of services indicates that, while all are required to provide an accommodation service as part of their Through the Gate work, six do not provide a specific accommodation service in the community. In some areas the accommodation resource was very thinly stretched. In London CRC an accommodation service is provided; however, there were only five St Mungo's staff employed to deliver accommodation services in the community across the whole of London as part of its supply chain.

CRC services typically consist of advice and support on accommodation issues, signposting and referral to accommodation providers, and liaison with local authority homeless services. Some also provide training on how to manage a tenancy. A few have rent deposit schemes for accessing private sector tenancies, and a couple provide floating support services that enable individuals to maintain their tenancies and deal with wider support issues. These services may be provided internally through CRC staff, or through supply chains. Some involve former service users in providing advice and support, and in Durham Tees Valley CRC this is done by mentors.

In 2019, the Through the Gate service across England and Wales was enhanced with an additional £22 million per year funding from the Ministry of Justice and a revised specification, which targeted accommodation resources according to extent and complexity of need.

It was initially anticipated that the NPS would purchase the accommodation services it needs through the CRCs' rate cards, and this continues to some extent. However, following gaps in CRC provision and initial dissatisfaction with what was on offer, the NPS Accommodation Needs Strategy identified a case management support role in each local delivery unit (LDU), which could be used to assist with this work. In one LDU we visited, the equivalent of two full-time probation services officers (PSOs) were dealing with accommodation advice and referrals. In another, a PSO was being recruited to take on this work, while in a third, a PSO was to take on a role providing support to an accommodation project housing high-risk offenders. In London NPS, the HAWK service was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, through the CRC, to provide housing advice, floating support and access to the private rented sector.

Staff experience and training

Probation practitioners need a basic understanding of housing legislation, guidance and local processes to understand the issues that those on supervision face, and to provide appropriate guidance and assistance. While they do not need to be housing specialists, they do need to understand how to assess an individual's housing situation and plan appropriate strategies to enable them to progress towards having suitable, settled and sustainable accommodation.

Most staff interviewed did not have any formal training on addressing accommodation issues, apart from briefings on the Duty to Refer and, for some, half-day sessions run by the National Housing Advice Service. Some trainees received input on housing issues during their qualifying training; others did not. Three-fifths of staff interviewed said they had insufficient training on how to assess and address service users' accommodation and associated support needs. Many staff learned how to respond to accommodation issues from colleagues on the job; some lacked confidence in their abilities:

"When someone is homeless you are on a wing and a prayer".

Another commented that they only knew what was happening about an individual's accommodation applications when the service user informed them.

While there were some experienced staff who were more knowledgeable, there were some offender managers who, in view of the considerable problems and barriers facing individuals without settled accommodation, seemed to adopt a stance of learned helplessness. This was echoed by many of the service users interviewed.

"Probation can't help us with housing... I only go there to stop being recalled, not for help".

Many service users spoke of probation staff as being kind and well-intentioned but hampered by lack of resources.

"It really helps when you can see that someone cares. It makes you want to help yourself".

Staff found it helpful when there were specialist staff or local authority housing officers in the office who they could turn to for advice. Some areas had directories of accommodation resources available to frontline staff.

Responses from our call for evidence indicated that there is a need for housing specialists to work either in probation or with probation services. They were needed to advocate for service users and to gather support for their housing assessments and applications, to challenge local authority decision-making where necessary, and to negotiate placements, particularly for those who are difficult to house and those with a combination of housing and care needs. Some of the Through the Gate staff interviewed had not had any specialist training on housing issues, and neither had some of the accommodation specialists working in the NPS, who had to learn by experience. Those working with the larger charities, such as NACRO and Shelter, were able to access a wider range of bespoke training.

2.3 Conclusions and implications

There has been insufficient joined-up strategic direction on accommodation provision for offenders at a national level across HMPPS until the last 12 months, and an offender accommodation strategy is keenly awaited. At present, there is no cross-government accommodation strategy for offenders that sets out how different government departments will contribute to ensuring that offenders have sufficient access to settled housing, and thereby reduce the risk to the public of harm and reoffending.

In some areas there has been no accommodation strategy, with CRCs and NPS divisions often operating independently. This is particularly noticeable in the area of partnership working with local

authorities and accommodation providers, which in many areas has been under-resourced and less effective. Stronger collaboration and partnership working at all levels is needed to maximise impact, reduce duplication of effort and devise solutions to homelessness, so that individuals can be safely and more effectively managed in the community.

Many probation practitioners have insufficient knowledge and understanding of housing guidance, legislation and arrangements with local authorities, with the effect that they are less able to guide service users appropriately. Some staff who are engaged in accommodation work lack sufficient specialist training. The provision of training and development pathways for generalist and specialist probation practitioners would improve their ability to assess, guide, motivate and assist service users to obtain and retain settled accommodation.

The original intention under *Transforming Rehabilitation* was that accommodation services would be provided by CRCs and their supply chains as a means of reducing reoffending, incentivised by performance-related payments. However, this has failed to provide the level of services required to enable sufficient individuals to obtain and maintain settled accommodation. In some areas, the NPS has lost confidence in CRC accommodation services and has been developing its own resources and partnerships, with a particular focus on accommodating individuals who pose a risk of harm. The level of CRC resources devoted to accommodation services in the community has been insufficient in some areas. The prospect of the new unified offender management model in 2021 provides an opportunity to establish, in each new probation delivery unit, clear pathways for those under supervision to progress into long-term sustainable accommodation.

3. Accommodation provision and support

This chapter considers how accommodation services for individuals supervised by probation services are commissioned. It reviews the availability of accommodation-based and floating support services, before examining CRC accommodation services in the community and Through the Gate. It also considers examples of NPS co-commissioned services before reviewing national commissioning of the BASS scheme, and pilot initiatives to enable released prisoners who might otherwise resort to sleeping rough to access tenancies in the private rented sector.

3.1 Overview

Commissioning of accommodation services

There is a wealth of data about the particular accommodation needs of individuals under probation supervision that can be used to inform decisions on commissioning. Most probation services use the OASys assessment system, which includes scores for the stability and suitability of an individual's accommodation situation and judges whether this is linked to their risk of reoffending and the risk of them causing harm to others. In the sample of 40 cases inspected where the individuals did not have settled accommodation, inspectors judged that this was a factor in the individual's pattern of offending in just over half. In slightly more it was linked to the risk of harm they posed to others. OASys data also provides information on the other issues individuals face that may impact on their ability to settle, and the additional support they might need to do so. In two-thirds of this sample, mental health issues were linked to accommodation need; drug misuse was a factor in just over half and alcohol misuse in one-third. Many of the women in our sample had more complex needs; many had experienced abuse and required a service that was trauma-informed.

One woman's story was of concern. She was released on a tag back to her abusive partner's accommodation, despite raising concerns about her own safety:

"I didn't have any other choice".

She was regularly breaching her order due to being prevented from leaving the house by her partner. The result was that she was taken off her order entirely:

"I was left with no support, no nothing".

Data on the accommodation status of individuals is collected at the point they begin a prison licence or a community sentence, and when these end. Accommodation status is also recorded before they receive a prison sentence. Records indicate whether an individual is homeless or rough sleeping, and whether they are in temporary accommodation or 'sofa surfing' with friends or family members. Together, these circumstances are classed as unsettled. Settled accommodation includes home owners, those with social or private sector tenancies, or supported accommodation that is likely to last for at least three months.

Sofa surfing was common practice in Stockton:

"All me clothes are at my Dad's, but I'd only sleep there twice or three times a week. Then I'd be trying to get a bed at friends or whatever, but when I couldn't, I'd sleep at me Dad's, and when I was a bit smelly or whatever, I'd get a wash there".

Accommodation status at start of community sentence²³

	2018-2019	2017-2018
Settled accommodation	60.5%	68.3%
Homeless	4.3%	4.5%
Other unsettled accommodation	7.8%	8.8%
Unknown	26.9%	17.8%

Accommodation on release from custody²³

	2018-2019	2017-2018
Settled accommodation	49.4%	53.1%
Homeless	16%	15.4%
Other unsettled accommodation	9.0%	10.3%
Unknown	15.4%	11.0%
Approved premises	10.3%	10.3%

This wealth of data is available for each NPS and CRC LDU and can be segmented by gender, race, age, offence and sentence length. However, although we found examples of where data is used to make business cases for particular projects or interventions, in most areas there were no detailed delivery plans setting out how accommodation needs would be addressed. Services appeared to have developed incrementally without clearly specified accommodation pathways for how the needs of different groups would be responded to. Service performance was judged by numbers of individuals seen and interventions completed rather than specific accommodation outcomes achieved. A notable exception was the HAWK service working in NPS offices across London.

Good practice example

The Single Homeless Project (SHP), commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and funded through London CRC, delivers the HAWK housing advice service in 25 target London boroughs with 15 advice workers co-located full-time in NPS probation offices. They work with a team of staff who have expertise in accessing the private rented sector, and colleagues who provide a floating support service to enable individuals to access and retain their tenancies.²⁴ They estimate that the main long-term housing option for 73 per cent of London NPS service users is renting in the private sector, as they do not have sufficient priority to meet the threshold for social housing. Their services provide advice and support, deal with finance and debt issues and deliver pre-tenancy training. In 2018-2019 they exceeded their targets for referrals and achieved housing outcomes for 785 individuals, enabling 232 individuals to obtain private rented tenancies, 226 to maintain their tenancies, 231 to access temporary accommodation, 63 to move into supported accommodation and 33 to obtain social housing.

Less than a quarter of responsible officers we interviewed considered that there was a sufficient range and quality of accommodation and associated support services available locally. Responses varied according to the situation with the local housing market and the stance of local authorities and housing providers towards accommodating the single homeless, and more difficult offenders in particular. While the Borough of Southwark was better at housing service users, they were often placed outside the borough in order to find affordable accommodation. As staff commented:

²³ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

²⁴ Floating support means housing-related support that is not linked to accommodation and not normally provided by a person's landlord. It is usually provided face-to-face on an outreach basis.

"We have had the issue of service users being housed outside the borough. Service users are resistant to being moved outside the borough".

In Stockton, the housing authority was able to find accommodation for most, but some of it was poor quality. Responsible officers commented:

"Housing Solutions generally find people accommodation. Some properties are not ideally situated".

"There is a lot of accommodation provided by private organisations that is poor quality and offers no support. There are two locations in Stockton, neither of which have a good reputation, and some service users would rather stay homeless than move there".

In South Essex there was a larger transient population who found it more difficult to establish a local connection for housing services. In most areas, people with convictions for sexual offences or arson, and foreign national offenders without recourse to public funds, were the most difficult to accommodate.

Where there was a strong homelessness forum, such as in Southwark, or where probation services had strong relationships with commissioners, such as in Humberside, probation services were much better placed to influence the commissioning of accommodation services with partners and could use data on their accumulated needs to best effect. Each local area faced different challenges, which required different responses.

Supported housing

Under the Supporting People programme, the funding of which was ring-fenced until 2009, probation commissioned a range of supported housing and floating support services for individuals on community sentences and prison licences, in conjunction with local authorities and health services. In most areas, probation services are no longer involved in such commissioning arrangements, though they should be consulted by local authorities when they are drawing up their plans. These services commissioned under the Supporting People programme were often designed to support individuals as they transitioned from prison until they were able to manage their own tenancies. Service providers would draw up an individualised support plan for each person to help them to live independently. On completion of their stay, in some areas they would be given priority for social tenancies or, if on housing benefit, be able to rent properties that were exempted from the Local Housing Allowance cap. Floating support might be available for people who moved into their own tenancies.

The funding for supported housing is now managed by local authorities, which have seen considerable budget cuts over the past 10 years. Spending on Supporting People services fell by 59 per cent in real terms between 2010-2011 and 2015-2016 (National Audit Office, 2017, p.28), and research from Homeless Link (2019, p.15) shows that in less than 10 years there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the number of bed spaces available for single homeless people. There appears to have been no central tracking of the subsequent reduction in offender-specific services, though it is clear that many have closed or been merged with general services for the homeless, which do not necessarily meet the needs of this group of people.

During the course of this inspection, we were made aware of a number of offender-specific projects that had recently closed, including the loss of 90 beds in Kent and 14 in Middlesbrough, as local authorities prioritised groups of people who were seen to have higher needs. In the areas we visited we found only one such project remaining: Rosemead in Southend, which caters for 10 ex-offenders with complex needs in its main house, including many with substance misuse problems, and another 5 in dispersed accommodation.

It was very evident that, while service users saw housing as a vital part of their desistance, it was interlinked with many other factors. This is one of the reasons why supported housing was seen to be preferable by some service users:

"Ideal would be supported accommodation as need help with my drinking even if it means leaving".

"Need to be busy to keep me away from trouble".

"It's not only the accommodation, you need the support around the accommodation".

"It's just when I come out of prison, I feel lost in a big world".

In areas with some of the highest levels of rough sleeping, St Mungo's (2018, page 5) found:

'Funding for specialist floating support services has been particularly hard hit. Generic housing support services experienced an increase of 5 per cent in funding between 2013-2014 and 2017-2018. During the same period, there was a 41 per cent decline in funding for substance use services and 46 per cent for mental health services. Funding for ex-offender services declined by 88 per cent'.

Some of the supported housing projects and floating support schemes that have closed provided a higher level of cover to deal specifically with sexual offenders and others who posed a high risk of harm. In many areas, access to supported housing is now via centralised local referral panels, where those with specific offending histories may not receive the same priority as previously, especially if their risk cannot be accommodated. It is important to note that at least 3,713 individuals supervised by the NPS left prison homeless in 2018-2019, and many of these will have convictions for sexual or violent offences.²⁵

In recent years, there has been growth in what is termed non-commissioned supported housing. This is where residential social landlords, sometimes acting as managing agents for private landlords, have agreed with local authorities to provide intensive housing management for people who need additional oversight to manage the property. These can be single dispersed units but are often houses in multiple occupation. The level of additional support is often less than for commissioned housing-related support, and the same system of quality assurance does not apply. These properties are exempt from the Local Housing Allowance and receive additional housing benefit funding. These schemes vary considerably in quality. Where landlords are socially minded, individuals may have better quality accommodation and a higher level of support. However, the West Midlands has seen a large growth in these schemes, some of which have been of lower quality and have drawn in many with offending histories who have clustered in certain areas, which has proved problematic.

Good practice example

In North Essex, NACRO acts as a social lettings agency and provides accommodation for 21 service users in single self-contained and small shared units under intensive housing management. Under a shared agreement with the NPS and CRC, it provides two hours of support per week for each individual from a tenancy sustainment officer. The NPS and CRC provided start-up costs, and additional support for individuals is provided by the CRC's own community integration officers. This is an additional service provided through the rate card for NPS service users.

CRC accommodation services in the community

Most CRCs provide accommodation advice services in the community themselves or through their supply chains. It is not a requirement that they provide such a service. Where they do not do so, individual responsible officers liaise directly with local authority homeless units, sometimes using mentors to support individuals with attending appointments. Some CRCs have been able to gain access to units of supported accommodation for their service users by providing top-up support, either in monetary form or through allocating staff to work more intensively with the service users.

²⁵ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly Release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

There are examples of particularly innovative work in some areas where CRCs provide accommodation in partnership with others or assist providers to set up schemes for housing individuals on supervision.

Good practice example

The Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland CRC has collaborated with the YMCA and Derby Homes (a subsidiary of Derby City Council) to establish an accommodation facility in fully furnished flats above the probation office. This provides up to 13 accommodation places. Residents are able to stay for up to 6 months and are supported to develop life skills and to find move-on accommodation. Thirty-five individuals have been accommodated since November 2018 and 9 have successfully moved on to date.

Good practice example

Key Stage in Luton provides 62 units of accommodation in shared properties for service users referred by the CRC. The scheme is run by a housing management company, which has formed a not-for-profit community interest company, and manages properties on behalf of private landlords. The scheme provides support for individuals under intensive housing management, with higher rate housing benefit paid directly to the company. Support is provided by staff who have worked in the criminal justice system and includes helping with budgeting, recreational activities, engagement with other support services, move on and leisure activities, including boxing and a running club. Prospective service users can be interviewed in prison via court video link to facilitate immediate entry on release, if a place is available. If they do well, they are helped to progress into their own tenancies, with a reference and, if necessary, a rent deposit funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Through the Gate services

The provision of accommodation services is a key element of Through the Gate delivery. These services are provided in all resettlement prisons by CRCs and their supply chains and were enhanced with a new specification and more resources in April 2019. At the same time, provision was expanded to NPS service users in non-resettlement prisons, via CRC rate cards, with a minimum guaranteed level of purchase of services. This provision is now operating in two-thirds of these prisons. Non-resettlement prisons are more specialist prisons that deal with longer-term prisoners and sexual offenders, most of whom will be supervised on release by the NPS.

A process evaluation by HMPPS of the newly enhanced Through the Gate service is nearing completion, and an evaluation of the outcomes achieved will be completed later in the year. Some Through the Gate schemes include specialist accommodation workers in their delivery; in others, this work is completed by other staff, who cover a range of resettlement functions.

The performance of Through the Gate accommodation services by CRCs is measured by an assurance metric, which looks at the percentage of prisoners who have settled accommodation on release. Against a target of 90 per cent, 64.6 per cent was achieved across England and Wales in April to September 2019 (excluding London CRC), ranging from 38.8 per cent in Norfolk and Suffolk CRC to 81 per cent in South Yorkshire CRC.²⁶ London CRC has had considerable problems recording and extracting data, which has meant that its data has been unreliable this year. However, work has been undertaken to rectify this process, which has improved recording in 2020. National performance on this measure has decreased slightly over the past two years and has yet to show any improvement following the allocation of extra resources to Through the Gate services from April 2019.

We examined a sample of 116 prison licence cases released in February 2019 and followed them up for 12 months to identify changes in their accommodation status over this period. This was a

²⁶ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Update to September 2019*.

representative sample of NPS and CRC cases drawn from the six local delivery units where we planned to inspect. Of these cases, 22 per cent were homeless before entering prison and another 19 per cent were living in temporary accommodation. Following release, the percentage who were homeless had increased to 28 per cent, while 18 per cent moved into temporary accommodation. Just five prisoners (7 per cent) were found accommodation by the Through the Gate teams.

In the first round of our core inspection programme of CRCs, completed in 2018-2019, we found that 24 per cent of our overall national sample of 667 Through the Gate cases were released homeless, and a further 27 per cent were released to temporary accommodation. Of those released, Through the Gate teams found temporary accommodation for 7 per cent of individuals, and responsible officers found accommodation for 11 per cent. The picture presented is of many people going into prison homeless and coming out homeless, with Through the Gate services making a small but important impact.

Enabling individuals to retain or obtain settled accommodation on release from prison can have a significant impact on the chances of them reoffending or returning to prison. In this inspection sample of 116 offenders released from prison in February 2019, of those without settled accommodation after release, 63 per cent had been recalled or resented to custody by the 12 months point, compared with 35 per cent of those who had settled accommodation. Similarly, 65 per cent of those without settled accommodation had reoffended compared with 44 per cent of those with settled housing.

Following sentence, prison staff assess individuals' accommodation situation. Where the prisoner is serving a short sentence and there is an opportunity for them to retain their accommodation, Through the Gate staff should assist the prisoner to do this, for example by ensuring that rent is paid through Universal Credit or private means. In this inspection sample, we found that this work was completed in only about one-third of relevant cases.

Following reception into prison, Through the Gate staff complete a resettlement plan, which should include actions to address any accommodation issues. If the prisoner is serving a long sentence, this plan is reviewed 12 weeks before release. The range of actions taken should include advising prisoners on their housing options, completing a Duty to Refer to the local authority and facilitating the local authority's assessments and support plans, referring to housing providers and liaising with responsible officers in the community. In order for prisoners to access benefit payments on release, they may need help with obtaining identification documents and opening a bank account. It is difficult to discover from probation records how frequently or well these latter tasks are completed. We did hear of one example where this was working well:

'One male participant praised his Through the Gate worker at HMP Rochester. She helped him with a CV, ID and linked him with a mentor service to assist his journey from Kent to Northampton'.

In Stockton, service users spoke favourably of the mentors from the WISE Group. These in-reach services were praised, for example when support workers came into prison to meet their clients before their release – in a sense, bridging the gap between the prison and the community. For many, this gap was a significant worry. One person described their Through the Gate experience:

"The Through the Gate assessment was done within five days, then twelve weeks before release, they developed a plan, assigned a mentor and they sorted an interview in prison. My mentor found me accommodation, and it would be ready two weeks after my release day. So, they put me in temporary accommodation during that wait".

In other areas the experience of service users we spoke with was less positive:

"Hadn't heard of Through the Gate, was released onto the street, scared and vulnerable, got a tent. Came out on a Friday, so was homeless all weekend until the council opened on the Monday".

Another man was released without an address on New Year's Eve. He reflected that, because it was New Year's Eve, there was nowhere open for him to find housing, so he had to sleep on the streets until 02 January.

There is a particular problem with homeless prisoners serving repeated short sentences who need more intensive support, as the following case illustrates:

Poor practice example

David is a 24-year-old male sentenced to 24 weeks' custody following a theft offence. Factors linked to his accommodation needs include substance misuse and mental health. David did not attend appointments with his responsible officer following release from prison, and so their focus has remained on locating him and enforcement. In the 10 months since the initial sentence, David has re-offended and had several recalls to custody. It has only been in this month, when the Duty to Refer was referenced in the resettlement plan, that any meaningful work has been done to try and secure accommodation. There is little evidence that the responsible officer was meaningfully involved in reviewing with David after a recall or further offence, and there was no reviewing of the plan to address accommodation and his associated needs. This is an example of the 'revolving door' that the Through the Gate policy sought to address.

Achieving settled accommodation via Through the Gate services was more problematic in London prisons, which experience a high rate of churn and a difficult housing market. One prison governor commented:

"There is a significant shortage of housing in the area. St Mungo's have one housing manager and one and a half staff working on accommodation issues in my prison. They do the front-end work, but it rarely results in housing outcomes".

Through the Gate work on accommodation was of a variable standard. It was often better where prisoners were sent to a prison near their home area, where resettlement services could work more closely with local providers. It was worse where the prisoners were held at a greater distance or were released from non-resettlement prisons. As one prison governor commented:

"The service isn't universal – if a man is being released to Manchester, for example, it will be a struggle to secure accommodation. All the local staff have good links in this contract package area – but anywhere else, the contacts are not in place".

In some areas, stronger links are being made between NPS responsible officers and local authorities to plan for individuals' accommodation on release. In Northampton, there is a project to identify prisoners who are due to be released six months in advance, and to liaise with local housing providers. In London NPS, responsible officers refer high-risk and MAPPA prisoners who are approaching release to the HAWK service to source accommodation, which can be more difficult to find for this group of individuals.

NPS co-commissioned services

Since 2017, the NPS has had a budget for co-commissioning services. In several areas this has been used to work with other statutory agencies to increase access to accommodation for those under supervision by the NPS. The following two examples, which we learned about on this inspection, are from the North-East division of the NPS:

Good practice example

Project Beta is a partnership between the NPS, local authority housing departments and Tyne & Wear reform prisons. It is delivered by local authority staff in Durham and NPS staff in Darlington.

Prisoners considered for Project Beta are those who are given a custodial sentence of 12 months or more, who are assessed as posing a high risk of harm and/or assessed as a high risk of reoffending, and who have an identified housing need.

Project Beta staff work with service users in prisons in the North East. They arrange a first prison visit no later than six months before release, then maintain contact with the prisoner until release. The initial visit considers the housing needs of the service user, and together they complete an agreed action plan. The service user is met on the day of release to ensure all their respective needs to maintain the accommodation are considered, including access to ID and benefits. Most of the accommodation is found with private sector landlords; however, some social landlords have been willing to accept these high-risk individuals.

Support continues for the individuals for three months after securing a tenancy and includes providing wrap-around services to ensure a successful long-term tenancy. Project Beta staff liaise between landlord and service user and undertake home visits to ensure that the terms of tenancy are being met.

An evaluation of the first year of operation has been funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner. It found that:

- 89 per cent of service users have maintained their tenancy for three months
- 80 per cent of whom have gone on to sustain the same tenancy for six months.

Good practice example

Hull and East Riding Accommodation Project

The head of the LDU has been involved with the local authority in commissioning homeless services for many years, including services for offenders. In 2018, when NPS co-commissioning funds became available, it was decided to set up a scheme with Humbercare, a provider of housing support services with a history of working with the probation service, to enable service users to access their own rented accommodation. Some of the accommodation is sourced directly from private landlords, while Humbercare acts as a managing agent for other units. The NPS contributes £25,000 per annum towards the floating support worker and two probation services officers to manage referrals and provide pre-tenancy training courses. The local authority, with the Community Safety Partnership, contributes £80,000 per annum. In the first two years of the project, 202 NPS service users have been housed and 114 remain in settled accommodation.

In Middlesbrough, while they don't have any co-commissioning funds, the NPS is working with the local authority, which has agreed to provide funding for a support worker to deliver a dispersed accommodation scheme for ten service users, through a residential social landlord under intensive housing management. Referrals will come through a probation services officer dedicated to the scheme.

Nationally commissioned services

The new contract for the Bail Accommodation Support Service (BASS) was awarded to NACRO in 2018. Under the previous contract there had been vacancies, and it had been decided that service users on licence who posed a low or medium risk of harm could access the scheme to make use of spare capacity. However, changes to the home detention curfew (HDC) process in 2018, with a presumption in favour of HDC being granted as long as risk of harm could be safely managed, meant that the scheme was soon full, with a waiting list of prisoners without accommodation who had been deemed suitable for release under HDC. As one prisoner governor commented:

"We also have a shortage of BASS beds. We could have about another 20 people out today. We have 10–20 people looking for BASS accommodation at any one time".

BASS is also available as an alternative to recall on prison licence, where accommodation is an issue and risk requires managing, for example if there is risk of domestic abuse. Pressure on available spaces is likely to increase further with the re-emergence of the Bail Information Scheme as part of the Exceptional Delivery Model in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which will require places for some service users without accommodation who might otherwise be remanded in custody.

BASS is a short-term resource, providing shared accommodation on an interim basis, with the expectation that service users will move on to settled accommodation after a few weeks. The number of floating support hours available to residents used to be more extensive. However, following the *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms in 2014, it was decided to reduce support to no more than an hour per week for bailees only, per resident, on the presumption that support to HDC and licence cases would be provided by CRCs. Following the BASS competition in 2018, a minimum of half-an-hour support per resident per week is now provided in addition to any support delivered by probation.

There are plans to increase the number of BASS places available from 550 to 605 over the coming year, and to improve the quality of accommodation and its geographical distribution. At present some individuals are placed at some distance from where they would normally reside and find it hard to settle. In one case examined, the service user was released to BASS accommodation on HDC as he did not have another approved address. No BASS provision was available locally and he had to wait a few weeks before a property came up in Newcastle, which distance- and culture-wise was a long way from Stockton. The service user only stayed there for five days as all his links were in Stockton.

While BASS does provide separate accommodation for women, logistically it can prove difficult to allocate women to it, and communication can be problematic as illustrated in the following case:

"The Offender Management Unit referred me to NACRO (BASS) – had to fill in an application form, answer questions, looking really bleak. HDC was imminent but kept being told no beds in any of the ten areas you could pick from. I was handed a piece of paper telling me that I was due at Southend Bass in 24 hours. Felt really happy but anxious as I know they'd breached a lot of women. Travel was strange – I didn't know where I was going, and I have all my bags and stuff. Then I ended up having to go to Maidstone CRC first as Southend CRC weren't aware of me coming".

The responsibility for assisting service users to find alternative accommodation when they move on from BASS falls between BASS support staff and responsible officers. There have been occasions when notices of eviction have had to be served on residents for the local authority to recognise that they are at risk of homelessness, as their period of stay is time-limited. The proportion successfully moving on from BASS into settled accommodation in 2019-2020 is around 75 per cent. The definition of settled accommodation here is different from other accommodation metrics and includes those moving into temporary accommodation. Unsuccessful move-on includes circumstances where the accommodation is unsuitable due to poor standards or a location that poses a risk of harm to self or others.

Approved premises

In addition to BASS accommodation, the NPS manages over 2,200 approved premises beds for high risk offenders leaving prison – often as a condition of parole release. There is considerable pressure on places in approved premises, and it was not unusual for individuals to be given a 12-week notice to quit when they arrived. We heard of examples of service users being moved out precipitously to accommodate higher-risk individuals. Approved premises managers were concerned that work to address moving on should start before individuals arrived, though this was seen as a shared

responsibility between responsible officers and approved premises staff. Of those who move on successfully from approved premises, many go to live with families or into supported accommodation, and a smaller number obtain a private or social tenancy. However, we were told of examples where individuals left approved premises homeless or without settled accommodation. There is at present no published information on the extent to which this occurs.

Moving on from the approved premises was seen to be a concern by some of the residents we spoke with, in particular following eviction for non-compliance, as in this case:

"Once evicted, they can't support you, so you go off the radar. The approved premises gives you that support but once you leave you lose all connections. And go off on the wrong path".

The Ministry of Justice has commissioned three prison accommodation projects in HMPs Leeds, Pentonville and Bristol. The original idea was that voluntary sector providers would work with non-MAPPA offenders serving shorter sentences, who were at risk of rough sleeping, for up to 12 weeks before release. They would arrange for them to move into private sector tenancies and then provide floating support for up to two years to enable them to settle.

There has been some success in achieving this objective at HMP Leeds, but it has proved more problematic in the other two prisons. Partly this is because of the churn in the prison population and partly because of the discovery that many potential rough sleepers receive very short sentences. It has proved very difficult to access private tenancies in the more expensive areas of the country because of cost and competition for accommodation, and it has not proved possible to work with service users long enough to prepare them to take on a tenancy and provide evidence of this to prospective landlords. As a result, released prisoners on this pilot scheme in the southern prisons have frequently had to move into transitional accommodation with support as a first step, and as a response to their complex needs.

3.2 Conclusions and implications

Most of the supported accommodation and floating support services for individuals released from prison or subject to probation supervision have been lost or subsumed into general homelessness services since the ending of the Supporting People programme. Probation is no longer involved as a commissioner of these services. This has reduced access to supported accommodation for offenders and made it more difficult to house those who pose a higher level of risk, such as sexual offenders, who are less likely to be seen as suitable for the remaining services.

At the same time there has been an increase in accommodation projects, funded by higher rates of housing benefit under intensive housing management. These lack consistent external quality assurance arrangements and are of variable quality. While most CRCs have not entered into arrangements with housing providers that increase the supply of supported accommodation for service users, some have developed innovative arrangements with residential social landlords. In these cases, the CRC has provided top-up support, either in cash or through the allocation of staff time, which has guaranteed access to places, often in dispersed housing schemes. With the CRC contracts coming to an end, it is important that such innovations are consolidated and not lost.

The expansion of Through the Gate services has not yet had a significant impact on the number of individuals gaining settled accommodation. The problem is worse for those being released from more distant or non-resettlement prisons, where the links with local authorities and providers in prisoners' home areas are more tenuous. Through the Gate services have an important role to play in helping to preserve tenancies, working with prisoners to plan for release, obtaining the prerequisites they need to access benefits, and facilitating assessments by local homelessness services and housing providers. This can form one end of a bridge to providing accommodation in the community. At the other end of the bridge there is a need for community probation practitioners working with local authorities and housing providers and liaising with the accommodation services in prison. Through the Gate services cannot themselves develop effective partnerships with accommodation services across the country.

In some areas the NPS has begun to devise parallel accommodation pathways, particularly for high-risk prisoners, linking directly with local authorities and accommodation providers. For high-risk prisoners, including many with convictions for sexual offences and some with complex care needs, devising an accommodation pathway and undertaking the necessary work and negotiations at a local level need to start early and continue beyond residence in approved premises into suitable long-term accommodation.

Different accommodation pathways may be needed for lower-risk, more chaotic individuals with complex needs and histories of repeated homelessness and short prison sentences. Immediate access to tenancies may not always be possible due to availability, the level of support required or the wishes of individuals. Some will require transitional supported accommodation for a period, as the emerging findings from the prison pathfinders appear to show. There is a clear need for people who would otherwise be homeless on release from prison to have somewhere immediate to stay. Expansion of BASS, which is heavily oversubscribed, may be one option for those with lower support needs, to respond to the numbers of younger 'hidden homeless'.

4. Probation service delivery

This chapter considers the quality of service delivery. It looks at the quality of assessments by probation practitioners of individuals' accommodation circumstances and associated needs and considers the quality of planning to address these issues, before moving on to review the effectiveness of service delivery. The final section highlights service users' perspectives on the struggle to find settled accommodation where they feel safe.

4.1 Overview

Assessment of accommodation needs

Pre-sentence reports were completed in only 35 per cent of our sample of 116 individuals released from prison. In the majority of these cases, it was judged that accommodation needs had been addressed sufficiently. A pre-sentence report was available to the court in 21 of the 40 community cases and prison releases without settled accommodation that we examined in more depth. In only half of these reports, inspectors judged there was a sufficient analysis of people's accommodation needs.

Opportunities to intervene at court are sometimes limited. This was illustrated by the case of one male, who was bailed despite being homeless and knowing that the offence carried a sentence of up to five years:

"It's easier inside than outside... I was begging them not to put me back out on the street, but they said if I didn't leave the cell I would be forcefully removed".

Overall, assessment was considered sufficient in 24 of the cases. The main deficit was in relation to identifying and analysing accommodation and associated support needs.

Data from HM Inspectorate of Probation's first round of core inspections of adult probation services found that those with an accommodation need were more likely to have associated needs in relation to drug and alcohol misuse, families and relationships, lifestyle and associates, and employment, training and education. Service users told us that having a place to stay would enable them to think about their other risks and needs from a safe and stable position:

"Need somewhere warm and safe so can help and start dealing with my other issues".

There were very high levels of mental ill-health in the sample of service users interviewed in Stockton. Every participant had some mental health concern, from anxiety to personality disorder. This is affected by, and affects, accommodation.

"I thought I would be excited about leaving prison, but I wasn't, just blank. I didn't have anywhere to go".

In the cases involving women, this was coupled with addiction in every instance (and in some cases for the men), but there did not seem to be an approach to dealing with this dual diagnosis, and this meant there were high levels of tenancy failure. They frequently lost their possessions because of these moves and the women felt that this then affected their mental health.

A comprehensive, holistic assessment of needs, often involving other agencies, is necessary for identifying the most appropriate accommodation placements and support required. There were some good examples of assessments, as in this case of a rough sleeper with complex needs who was being supported by a multi-agency team:

"The responsible officer has been involved heavily with trying to sort out housing issues for this individual. They demonstrated an excellent understanding of the issues and behaviours linked to homelessness for this case".

There were examples of where an individual's account of their circumstances was taken at face value and not checked out sufficiently, which put others at risk of harm:

"On reception into custody the service user advised they could live with sister. This appears not to have been robustly checked in terms of suitability and was never going to be anything other than a short-term measure. The case manager admits in hindsight more checks should have been done as the sister was a previous victim".

There were positive examples of liaison with the police to check addresses for registered sex offenders, though this could sometimes delay moves into private rented accommodation. In London, because of the speed of turnover of the rented housing market, this meant that the accommodation could be lost in the meantime.

Poor practice example

Rahul is a 31-year-old man currently serving a 12-month community order for a total of five counts of failure to comply with sex offender registration. The pre-sentence report fails to fully explore the fact that Rahul has no access to public funds, having entered the country in 2005 as a minor unaccompanied child from a war zone. Rahul stays with a friend in a one-bedroom property, so is essentially sofa surfing, albeit that he has been on this one sofa for some time. The responsible officer is now the fourth officer. No one has got a grip on this case to explore avenues for getting settled accommodation. This is disappointing given that accommodation issues have had an impact on the latest failure to report offence.

Planning to address accommodation needs

In HM Inspectorate of Probation's first round of adult inspections, planning to address accommodation issues was judged sufficient in 64 per cent of CRC cases and 76 per cent of NPS cases. Of the 40 cases considered for detailed scrutiny in this inspection, planning to address accommodation issues was considered sufficient in just over half. We found that service users were generally involved in planning and their views were taken into account. In interviews with inspectors, service users stressed the need to have somewhere safe. In Northamptonshire the preferred accommodation across all the participants was supported housing – private tenancies were seen to be less safe.

Perhaps surprisingly, several plans failed to address the issue of accommodation need at all, even though it was clear that these people did not have settled accommodation.

There were some examples of good plans:

"A clear plan with an accommodation objective was in place. The additional needs, such as mental health, pro-social behaviour and alcohol treatment, were identified in the plan too".

However, several failed to address individuals' associated needs or lacked sufficient detail on how accommodation needs would be tackled. In only about one-third of relevant cases was there a record of a Duty to Refer being made to the local authority, and in only one case was there a record of the probation practitioner having access to the personal housing plan made by the local homelessness team in response.

Several complex cases required close liaison and communication between a variety of agencies to assess and plan to address individual need. Sometimes there was confusion as to who was leading on addressing accommodation issues. These cases could involve a number of referrals and negotiations between various parties, which took more time than had been allowed for, as in this example:

Poor practice example

Wendy is a woman with learning difficulties who requires supported accommodation. She was sentenced to ten months imprisonment. It was unclear who was leading in exploring accommodation: Through the Gate staff or the NPS. Only one accommodation option was being explored at a time, so when the approved premises rejected her, limited time was available to explore other options. Wendy has been allowed to return to live with the victim despite being assessed as posing a high risk of serious harm towards him. There are concerns that the victim is physically abusing Wendy, financially exploiting her and coercing her into sex work. No other accommodation options have been effectively explored, and Wendy and the victim continue to live together. A referral to adult services was not made soon enough and the NPS did not challenge the service when it did not provide the necessary assistance. Wendy is highly vulnerable and most of the accommodation available was not appropriate, for example hostel accommodation. No support was provided to develop her independence skills, and she depends on the victim of the offences for support.

There were, however, examples where detailed preparation bore fruit, as in this case which involved an older service user with care needs:

Good practice example

Ian is a 75-year-old man who was released after serving a two-year sentence for arson at his property, following a dispute with his daughter who lived there too. Much work was undertaken to secure housing and support for his release, including an adult social care referral and assessment. A Duty to Refer application was made to the local authority, and a Wise Group mentor was allocated and worked hard to secure a private rented flat. Ian has a number of health problems and is a wheelchair user. Good-quality ground floor accommodation was secured in an appropriate area. The private landlord paid for emergency accommodation when it became clear that the flat was not yet appropriately configured, to avoid Ian being street homeless while adaptations were made.

Delivery of interventions

In the first year of our core adult inspection programme, inspectors judged that work to address accommodation issues was sufficient in 53 per cent of CRC cases and 71 per cent of NPS cases. Where appropriate, plans were in place to address accommodation needs. CRC delivery was sufficient in two-thirds of cases, and for NPS cases it was nearly four-fifths. Where planning was insufficient, delivery was still judged appropriate in half of NPS cases, but only a quarter of CRC cases. This higher level of performance by the NPS is to be expected, given the need to ensure that the circumstances in which higher-risk service users are living are appropriate to manage them safely. However, the shortfall in NPS provision, if replicated across the 24,358 individuals in 2018-2019 who lacked settled accommodation at the start of their order or licence, would suggest that the accommodation needs of approximately 7,000 higher-risk service users per year are not being met.²⁷

There were important shortfalls in delivery for both the NPS and CRCs. In the sample of forty cases reviewed in detail during this inspection, interventions to address individuals' accommodation and associated support needs were judged sufficient in just 17 cases. After 6 months, 20 were still in unsettled accommodation, of which 7 were homeless. Seventeen had reoffended and sixteen were now in prison. Accommodation had been found for 22 individuals at some point, and in two-thirds of cases this was judged to meet their support needs. There were some successes, which reflected patient ongoing work by responsible officers in conjunction with local authorities and housing providers, as in this case:

²⁷ Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Community Performance Quarterly Release to March 2019 Accommodation Circumstances Tables*.

Good practice example

Laura is a 30-year-old woman subject to a 24-month suspended sentence order after stabbing her partner, in the context of domestic abuse. She has a recognised personality disorder and is subject to a mental health treatment requirement (MHTR). She has been proactive in working with the local authority and moved from sofa surfing to her own new-built council flat, with good support and liaison from her responsible officer. She is settling well and beginning to reduce her risks. Laura was proactive and worked well with the council to get priority status. The housing options officer has an offender specialism and liaised well with the proactive responsible officer. The responsible officer helped Laura to use coping strategies learned from her dialectical behavioural therapy and managed the MHTR well. This kept Laura stable while she was living between friends and family, during the period when the flat was being completed. Laura's mum helped her to furnish the flat.

In the larger sample of 116 prison releases we tracked for a year after release, 28 per cent were initially homeless, of which 11 per cent were rough sleeping, and another 18 per cent went to unsettled accommodation. After 12 months, 17 per cent were still homeless, of which 4 per cent were rough sleeping, and 15 per cent were in unsettled accommodation. Over this period the number in supported accommodation increased by 12; the number in privately rented accommodation increased by five; and the number in social rented accommodation increased by just two. The increase in the numbers in supported accommodation was in part due to people moving on from approved premises.

The impact of obtaining settled accommodation for some cannot be underestimated, as this service user commented:

"My life has completely changed because of having my own place".

It is important that accommodation placements are appropriate to individual need. For example, in Stockton the grief felt by women at losing their children was noteworthy and grief counselling was considered beneficial. In the women-only Rocsolid accommodation project, service users were receiving support for their emotional wellbeing. It is also important that, where necessary, support continues when people move into accommodation to enable them to settle and maintain their tenancies. In our sample of 40 cases, in 8 of the 22 cases where accommodation was found, it was judged that ongoing support was insufficient.

In a few cases, not enough attention was paid to ensuring the safety of service users or others in considering where individuals were living. Some women felt unsafe where they were placed. One woman on a home detention curfew (HDC) was vulnerable for two reasons. Her desire (and need) to have an address in order to be granted HDC meant that the safety of her accommodation wasn't properly considered. It also meant that as a woman with trauma, mental health and substance misuse issues, she was released to a place where there were no support services on offer.

"You want to get out, so you give an address that wasn't the safest address but it's an address".

In another case, a man assessed as high risk with convictions for violence had his place withdrawn by an approved premises for failure to pay his maintenance charge. An unplanned move to the home of a new partner and her two children resulted, as no move-on plan had been made, despite him needing to live alone.

A majority of service users said they were treated with kindness and "as human beings" by probation, which was an important step. However, with a few notable exceptions, most felt probation did not try to help them with their housing. Of the 32 service users who completed a survey with EP:IC, 18 reported the effort made by probation as poor or very poor. One woman in temporary housing said that probation had given her advice to call the local authority but once that advice had been given, there was no further support. We found that many of our interviewees

recognised that probation was now very stretched in terms of its resources and that a lack of support was commonplace rather than personal:

*"Probation... I reckon they could do more, but it's nothing like it used to be".
"It's a fragmented service".*

The following case is an example of insufficient attention being given to a service user's circumstances, which increased the risk of reoffending and harm:

Poor practice example

Bashir is a 24-year-old Somali man on a suspended sentence order with a six-month electronically monitored curfew requirement, unpaid work and a drug rehabilitation requirement (DRR), for an offence of possession of a knife. Shortly after beginning the order, he appears to have fallen out with his father where he was curfewed, and seems to have been homeless since, 'sofa surfing'. He has not complied with his unpaid work and is in breach of the unpaid work and his curfew. The breach has taken a long time to be heard, and it is unclear whether the court-ordered reviews in relation to his DRR have been happening. A referral has been made to the homelessness unit, but this has not been followed up, and he still appears to be staying with friends and associates.

The requirement to address accommodation need does not end once temporary accommodation is found. In just over half of our detailed examination of 40 cases, insufficient attention was given to finding a longer-term housing solution. This requires good communication with local authorities and housing providers, with ongoing support from probation practitioners, rather than being a one-off activity. Communication with other organisations was considered sufficient in only half of cases where they were involved. The following case illustrates why good communication and support for this individual's accommodation journey was needed:

Poor practice example

Neil was sentenced to a community order following an offence of theft from a shop. He is also a registered sexual offender following a sexual assault on an adult female, as well as having previous convictions for acquisitive and drug-related offences. The CRC accommodation worker was initially engaged, and although he completed a Duty to Refer, he also instructed Neil to bid for properties himself and did not arrange any further contact. Neil has a history of transient accommodation and chaotic lifestyle and was at that time using substances and living in a shed. His capacity to access the local authority bidding system and then understand what to do was extremely limited, yet he was offered no support. Although the council accepted a duty to assist him following the Duty to Refer application, there does not appear to have been sufficient thought given to his needs. For example, shortly after he moved into temporary accommodation, a known drug dealer was moved into the room below and proceeded to assault Neil, who then understandably left the property.

Service users' views on the difficulty of obtaining settled and suitable accommodation

Many service users spoke about the 'long road' to getting settled accommodation:

"They kept recalling me for seven years because I kept reoffending to get put back inside as I couldn't get accommodation. But then after seven years, they wiped my rent arrears and that's how I ended up getting this place through the council". (Male, Essex)

Several described a sense of hopelessness and a lack of help with accommodation, which made returning to prison an easier option:

"[I am homeless] every time I have been out of jail, which is at least 15 times. I come out for about 2 months and if I ain't got nowhere then I just recall myself". (Male, Essex)

"But I'm not getting a chance! I know people who come out of prison and go bang at it, 'cause they don't know how to get help. People come out of jail and commit crime to go back to jail 'cause they feel safer in jail". (Male, London)

"I hate jail, I would never wish it on anyone but 100 per cent it was more comfortable". (Male, London)

"Now I understand why people feel happy to be back in prison after a recall". (Male, London)

"Once I split up with my partner and went to the council and they said there was nothing they could do. It destroyed me. I was living out of my car, it was freezing. You're just not cared about, it brings back all those feelings from childhood, like my mother didn't care... What's the point, you might as well go back to prison". (Male, Northampton)

There was also a sense of confusion and a lack of communication between services. One participant referred to the way he was passed between many different services within his first week of release, none of which helped because he didn't meet their criteria, and that can be enough to lose heart and motivation to succeed.

In Stockton, while there was a range of accommodation available, much of it seemed to be concentrated in some of the rougher areas and was of variable quality. Some of the properties were described as being dangerous, for those attempting to avoid alcohol and drugs, and also for women, who commented on the number of pimps looking for workers. Although interviewees recognised this gave them a chance to be housed without stringent suitability criteria (which some might otherwise fail), some lacked supervision and there were many risks associated with recidivism – and women in particular said they were "terrified", "fearful", and "scared" of being housed in these areas.

Similar concerns were expressed by service users in Southwark. Most people we spoke to were in multiple occupancy accommodation and commented on the behaviour of others putting them at risk.

"I've had cells better".

"Probation tends to send you to multiple occupancy places. You get one room in a filthy state".

4.2 Conclusions and implications

In many cases coming before the courts, there is a gap in information about a defendant's accommodation status, either because no report is prepared, or in some cases because the assessment of accommodation issues is insufficient. Those with accommodation needs are more likely to have a range of other associated needs that require exploration, often in association with other services.

Planning to address accommodation needs is generally better in the NPS than in CRCs across England and Wales. Improvements are needed in linking with the personal housing plans produced by local authorities following on from the Duty to Refer. There needs to be greater clarity in some cases about which service is leading on specific actions to avoid confusion or duplication, between Through the Gate, local authorities, responsible officers and accommodation providers. For the more complex cases, including many initially released to approved premises, planning needs to start earlier with a view to achieving longer-term housing outcomes.

Accommodation interventions by the CRCs nationally have been generally insufficient. There is also room for improvement with NPS service users, where provision of settled and suitable accommodation is often intrinsic to the management of risk of harm to others. Too many individuals are released from prison homeless. There is a gap in the provision of effective accommodation

pathways and interventions, and too many individuals remain homeless or in unsettled accommodation at the end of their supervision. This especially applies to those who have been on post-release supervision, who are more likely to reoffend and return to custody. Finding somewhere to live is just the first stage of the journey towards obtaining settled and suitable accommodation and should not be seen as a one-off activity. There are gaps in the provision of associated support, which is important if an individual is to settle. Responsible officers have a key role in longer-term coordination of accommodation interventions, enabling individuals to move on from short-term temporary arrangements to more permanent accommodation solutions.

With a few notable exceptions, most service users interviewed felt probation did not try to help them with their housing. We were told that probation expected the service user to take the initiative and responsibility for their own housing. Few people felt upset or disgruntled by this because they felt probation was not the place to go for "actual help". It was a place to attend to ensure you meet your conditions, but not a place to get help. We heard from six service users about probation officers who had made a difference. What made these staff stand out appeared to be tenacity. They did not give up, even when the service user "tested" them in the early days. When the service user saw they would stick to their word over and over, then they responded and began to work with them too.

5. Overcoming barriers, improving performance and quality

This chapter considers the barriers that those supervised by probation face in obtaining and retaining settled and suitable accommodation, and how these can be addressed. It looks at the different ways in which performance on accommodation outcomes is measured, and how quality of accommodation is assured. Finally, we review service users' views about the services they would like to see, before concluding by considering plans for future commissioning of accommodation services.

5.1 Overview

Addressing barriers

It can be difficult for service users to navigate the various bureaucratic systems in order to get settled accommodation and appropriate support. Service users across every location told us they feel confused and even lost in the system. But they also felt that probation staff were somewhat lost too and did not know what was on offer and who to go to. One service user felt this acutely:

"To me there should be clear pathways for offenders who want to stop doing crime but there isn't one. You come out and you're on your own".

According to the Greater Manchester Authority, the majority of prisoners at HMP Forrest Bank who are at risk of being released homeless are serving sentences of less than 28 days. They need intensive early intervention and coordination of support services. As a consequence, the CRC Through the Gate team has set up a specialist team to work with them and to link with local authorities. It is important that the Duty to Refer is completed as early as possible, so that local authorities can complete their assessments before release, rather than on the day of release. This is especially since three in every seven releases occur on a Friday afternoon, when there is little time to resolve matters before the weekend.

The availability of supported housing is much reduced but could be used to better effect if arrangements for move-on tenancies were improved. The downside of supported housing and provision under intensive housing management is that the charges are so high that it is difficult for individuals to afford them if they are working. Some people with support needs do not wish their occupation of accommodation to be conditional on their agreement to a support plan. 'Housing first' schemes will be preferable for some people with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse issues, who would value more choice in how they receive support. This approach provides accommodation whether or not individuals engage in health interventions (for those with psychiatric conditions) or abstain from substance misuse but provides access to ongoing support which is offered flexibly and without time limits, with 'no strings attached'.

Two systematic reviews have reported on re-housing or housing retention as an outcome (Baxter et al, 2019; Woodhall-Melnik and Dunn, 2016). Both found strong, consistent evidence across studies that use of a 'housing first' approach can decrease homelessness and increase housing retention rates for people who are typically considered to be hard to house (i.e. homeless populations with psychiatric symptoms, addictions or concurrent disorders). An example of such a scheme has been running with women under probation supervision in Tameside, Greater Manchester since 2015.²⁸ The scheme works with 77 women, over 90 per cent of whom have sustained their tenancies, and there has been no reoffending within this group.

²⁸ <https://www.aksahomes.co.uk/news/jigsaw-support/pioneering-homelessness-service-to-rehouse-women-offenders-in-greater-manchester-receives-national-award>

There can be barriers for service users accessing social housing via local authorities or housing associations. Access to the housing register can be restricted for those who are considered to have made themselves 'intentionally homeless' and those who are deemed to have no local connection. MHCLG has issued guidance on the issue of 'intentionality', as it cannot be presumed that by committing an offence an individual would know that they would go to prison and therefore lose their accommodation. However, further clarification may be needed with some local housing authorities. Previous rent arrears can also be a barrier, and negotiation with the local authority may be needed to come to a resolution on how they can be paid off, before an individual can be given sufficient priority on the housing register.

For many, finance was a barrier to obtaining accommodation in the private sector, especially if they were on housing benefit or Universal Credit. This was particularly noticeable in London but felt by service users everywhere.

"I've got £250 rent arrears so couldn't get a council property. Being in and out of prison messed up my benefits and work so it just got worse".

Delays in getting Universal Credit mean that those released from prison get into debt immediately if they have to rent. There are circumstances in which probation staff can help individuals to get rent paid directly to a landlord, but many landlords are wary of those on benefits, as they fear they will not get paid. The requirement for payment of rent deposits, bonds or rent in advance is another barrier. There is no universal rent deposit scheme; different arrangements apply in each area. In Essex, probation had to rely on the historic Essex Trust fund and the Vicar's Relief fund from St Martin-in-the-Fields, but sometimes the maximum £900 that could be amassed from these sources would not be enough to secure a sufficient deposit.

The rates of Local Housing Allowance for housing benefit were frozen for several years, which meant that there were very limited numbers of properties that individuals on benefit could afford to rent, and there were none within Southwark. This has led to the local authority frequently having to place people outside the borough, with the downside that moving can take people away from their support networks. On 20 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Local Housing Allowance will be increased to cover 30 per cent of local market rates, which should ease this problem a little. The difficulty of finding privately rented property is especially acute for those under 35 years in London. These people are only eligible for the shared room rate of housing benefit, unless they are a MAPPA Level 2 or 3 case or have been in a homeless hostel for three months, in which case the higher single room rate applies. There are fewer houses in multiple occupation in London because landlords have realised that they can make more money from over 35s who are entitled to the single room rate of housing benefit. The maximum single room rate of benefit in Southwark under the Local Housing Allowance is twice that of the shared accommodation rate, so landlords are turning shared accommodation into one-bedroom flats.

Where landlords can afford to be choosy about which tenants they take, having a criminal record can be a disadvantage:

"I tried to get onto some private agencies but once they found out my record and done checks and that... once I got accepted for somewhere, it was only a studio flat, and then I said to him 'I'm gonna be truthful, I've just come out of prison' and he went 'ah right, that's fine, move in Thursday'. Then Wednesday night came, and he said, 'I've had a chat with the owners, and you can't move in now'".

"They think you'll have raggy lads around".

In areas where probation and accommodation providers have worked assiduously with landlords, provided service users with certified pre-tenancy training, have a good record of placements and managed risk of tenancy failure well by providing additional support, these barriers can sometimes be overcome. The Single Homelessness Project in London, for example, has provided a good practice guide for working with landlords.

It was interesting that a few participants referred to themselves as a barrier to getting accommodation, referring specifically to their motivation and emotional wellbeing. Many spoke about knowing they had to help themselves but felt demotivated and as though it would all be for nothing, so it was not worth trying. The role of knowledgeable probation practitioners in persevering and supporting the individual's motivation to gain settled accommodation is important.

Performance measures and targets

Accommodation outcomes are a useful proxy measure for the extent to which probation providers are working to reduce reoffending, as reoffending is likely to be higher on aggregate when individuals are homeless or in unsettled accommodation. Although the NPS and CRC use similar measures of accommodation outcomes, they have different targets. CRCs have an assurance target for the proportion of individuals who are in settled accommodation following release from prison; it is set at 90 per cent. They do not have an accommodation target for those at the end of their community orders or post-release supervision. This can have a distorting effect, as resources can be drawn away from work on accommodation issues with those on community sentences towards work with those being released from prison. We can see this in some areas that do not have a specific resource in the community targeted at finding accommodation, though it is acknowledged that homelessness is higher on average for prison releases. By contrast, NPS divisions have a service level agreement target for 70 per cent of those at the end of their community orders or prison licences to have settled accommodation.

It is surprising that CRCs should have a higher target for their cohort of recently released prisoners than the NPS has for termination of all orders and licences, especially since the NPS cohort will in general include individuals who pose a higher risk of harm to the public.

The national aggregate performance for CRCs on their measure, for the period April to September 2019, is 63.7 per cent, which excludes London CRC because of issues with data quality.²⁹ The range of performance is very wide, with South Yorkshire CRC achieving more than twice the proportion in settled accommodation than Norfolk and Suffolk CRC (81 per cent compared with 38.8 per cent). Reasons for these disparities will in part be due to differences in local housing markets, but it is unlikely that these can fully explain the variation and warrant further exploration.

NPS performance in relation to the proportion of people under supervision in settled accommodation at termination of licence or community sentence is 75.2 per cent, against the lower 70 per cent target.³⁰ There is a smaller degree of variation, ranging from 83 per cent in the North West to 64.4 per cent in London. Given the nature of many supervised by the NPS, a more challenging target would be appropriate.

A further measure of performance was introduced in October 2019, which looks at the percentage of prisoners who are homeless on the night they are released, with a target of 70 per cent to be in some form of accommodation, temporary or permanent. This target recognises that many prisoners will experience temporary arrangements immediately following release; but 70 per cent is a long way short of what is needed, and it would be worrying if 30 per cent had nowhere at all to go on the night after release.

In the sample of 116 prison releases that we inspected, there were inaccuracies in the recorded accommodation status in 47 per cent of cases. Inaccuracies were also found in just over half of the 40 cases we reviewed in our qualitative sample. It appeared that some of those inputting this information were unfamiliar with the categories, and in some instances were unfamiliar with individuals' precise accommodation status. Quality assurance of this data is not routine and having performance targets can lead to a focus on reviewing 'failures' to improve performance rather than

²⁹ Ministry of Justice. (2020). *Community Performance Update to September 2019 Community Rehabilitation Company Tables*. This data excludes information from London CRC.

³⁰ Ministry of Justice. (2020). *Community Performance Update to September 2019 National Probation Service Tables*.

reviewing all the data. It is important to get categorisation right, as this information is invaluable when commissioning and reviewing the needs of those under supervision with local partners.

As we saw previously, there is no consistent method for recording and reporting on the numbers of individuals who have been notified to local authorities under the Duty to Refer. Neither is there a system for tracking these referrals. This is especially important, since much is riding on this process for individuals to gain settled accommodation, and it is vital to understand whether this aim is being achieved through this development.

There are many examples of promising practice in the way accommodation services are delivered, and the HMPPS Community Interventions Directorate is currently pulling these together. However, we saw very few examples of any outcome evaluations of accommodation schemes, and none that related to their impact on reducing reoffending or harm. This will be important for future commissioning, and for probation providers to learn from best practice about what is most effective in enabling individuals to settle and retain their accommodation.

Quality assurance of accommodation

Many of the service users interviewed shared concerns about the quality of the accommodation they were placed in, which seemed to be a problem in all areas. One of the reasons a property is unsuitable is its physical state of repair. We heard this mostly in Stockton, that although it was easier to be housed there, the state of the properties was of concern. Rats, damp, non-functioning utilities and cracked windows were mentioned multiple times. We heard from one young man who explained he was housed in a property that was filthy and marked with blood. While probation was able to replace his mattress, he was told this was his only option in terms of accommodation so he would need to manage.

While local authorities monitor the quality of supported housing, this is not always the case when properties are funded under intensive housing management. Some local authorities have introduced more controls, and Wigan council has developed an ethical framework for landlords, but there are considerable differences around the country as to what systems local authorities have in place.

Probation providers do not have a consistent framework for assuring the quality of the accommodation into which they refer service users. In the Hull and East Riding accommodation project, they gave examples of where they had turned properties down or ceased using them, because they were not content with their quality. However, around the country the responses we received on quality assurance processes were anecdotal and not systematic.

Future commissioning

Accommodation is a very real issue for those on probation, in every location we visited. One of the biggest challenges facing probation was a lack of housing stock, particularly good-quality housing stock. Service users interviewed often had multiple and complex needs and often felt vulnerable, physically and mentally, in the accommodation they had been given. Probation were said to understand service users' concerns and risks, and were generally seen to be kind, but there were very limited options for probation officers. There was not one accommodation type that seemed to be most preferable. Private housing was seen to be just as risky in terms of safety by some (notably women) as supported housing. No consistency was noted. Different service users require different accommodation pathways depending on the type and level of support they need.

Service users were asked about what they would do if they were in charge of probation to help people with accommodation. The range of suggestions highlighted the fact that accommodation was not an isolated risk factor. Suggestions included financial assistance, help with clothes and food, physical attendance at housing meetings, mental health support and someone to talk to about emotions.

The challenge for the future delivery of accommodation services is considerable if performance in enabling individuals to achieve settled accommodation is to improve. We found examples where service users were having to wait between two and four weeks to be seen for an appointment with

an accommodation specialist, which did little to reflect the urgency of some situations and was very demotivating.

With the probation reform programme bringing all offender management back together within the NPS from June 2021, there is an opportunity to redesign accommodation pathways in the new probation delivery units, building on best practice, as exemplified by NPS co-commissioning and CRC innovations. A further building block would be stronger links between probation practitioners and the range of services available in local authority homelessness services, to enable service users to understand what is available and how they might progress towards settled accommodation.

HMPPS is planning to commission some accommodation services on a dynamic framework, with contracts designed around Police and Crime Commissioner areas, to reflect the local landscape of accommodation provision and the opportunities for co-commissioning. Accommodation services for women will be incorporated in each area into a combined women's services specification.

The most significant gaps in accommodation services identified in this inspection have been around accessing additional units of accommodation and accommodation support services. Schemes that provide floating support services have been shown to increase access to the private and social rented sector and enable individuals to retain tenancies. However, they won't be suitable for all service users and, especially for those who would otherwise be released from prison homeless, there needs to be immediate access to some form of temporary accommodation to address their immediate needs.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

The scale of the challenge of assisting individuals to obtain and retain settled and suitable accommodation is huge, given the shortage of accommodation and the many barriers service users face, and requires considerable attention and resources in order to make progress. The largest number of prisoners released homeless are on short prison sentences; therefore, interventions need to be designed to start at the earliest possible stage and to track people through the system, prioritising them both in prison and in the community. Access to supported housing, both commissioned and non-commissioned, is limited, and needs to be increased for those who require accommodation-based support. This will require additional probation resources, either in the form of a cash contribution through co-commissioning, or through commitment of staff time. Many service users will prefer their own tenancies, but for those who have become institutionalised or lack the skills initially to manage a tenancy, floating support will be required to help them make this transition successfully. This support is not readily available in all areas and will need to be commissioned on the dynamic framework in some probation delivery units.

Access to the private rented sector is limited in some areas by very high rents, shortage of supply and requirements for considerable up-front costs. In all areas, having a criminal record and lack of references is a barrier, so private sector rental schemes need access to funds for deposits, and to provide recognised pre-tenancy training and floating support where necessary to gain the confidence of potential landlords. Given the many barriers service users face, probation practitioners need to be knowledgeable about accommodation provision, understand what is possible, and be tenacious and motivated to enable those on supervision to progress. Too many service users feel lost in the system and are unclear about where and how best to get help. Responsible officers need to work in an integrated way with local authorities and accommodation providers to avoid confusion and duplication.

Performance measures and targets across the NPS and CRC are inconsistent. We understand that work is in hand to review them and display them in a more accessible format. Targets need to be appropriately challenging and stretching, but work is also required to ensure that the data on which they are based is recorded accurately, and readily understood and owned by the probation practitioners who are responsible for identifying and entering the correct status. Quality assurance of data is needed to ensure that accurate information is provided for commissioning with local partners. Given the significance of working together with local homelessness units to enable service users to access accommodation, a more robust system for recording and tracking information

exchange under the Duty to Refer is required, so that the effectiveness of this partnership can be evaluated, and improvements made. This will require joint work between HMPPS and MHCLG to enable each party to be held to account for performance.

The quality of accommodation in which some individuals on probation supervision are placed is unacceptably poor. It is recognised at national level that there needs to be more guidance about quality assurance of the accommodation into which service users are referred, and HMPPS should produce a set of minimum standards and expectations to assist in ensuring quality and consistency.

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Annexe 1: Glossary

Alcohol Treatment Requirement (ATR)	A requirement that a court may attach to a community order or a suspended sentence order aimed at tackling alcohol abuse
Allocation	The process by which a decision is made about whether an offender will be supervised by the NPS or a CRC
Approved premises	Hostels approved under Section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007, managed either by the National Probation Service or by independent organisations. Approved premises are used as a short-term residence for an offender considered a higher risk of serious harm, who requires close monitoring and supervision, and support to begin to integrate back into the community
Barriers	The things that make it difficult for an individual to change
CPA	Contract Package Area is the geographical area within which each of the 21 CRCs manages low and medium risk of harm offenders subject to a community order, suspended sentence order or licence
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
Drug Rehabilitation Requirement (DRR)	A requirement that a court may attach to a community order or a suspended sentence order aimed at tackling drugs misuse
Floating Support	Housing-related support that is not linked to accommodation and not normally provided by a person's landlord. It is usually provided face-to-face on an outreach basis.
Foreign national offender	A foreign national who has been convicted of a crime in the UK
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS): the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services.
Integrated Offender Management (IOM)	Integrated Offender Management brings a cross-agency response to the crime and reoffending threats faced by local communities. The most persistent and problematic offenders are identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together
Intensive Housing Management	Intensive Housing Management is a term used to describe the services provided by a supported housing landlord, differentiating it from a general needs landlord. The services are provided to ensure the ongoing viability of the tenancy with respect to the needs of the tenant. Such services are eligible for a higher level of housing benefit.
LDU	Local Delivery Unit
Licence	This is a period of supervision immediately following release from custody and is typically implemented after an offender has served half of their sentence. Any breaches to the conditions of the licence can lead to a recall to prison where the offender could remain in custody for the duration of their original sentence
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others. Level 1 is ordinary agency management where the risks posed by the offender can be managed by the agency responsible for the

	supervision or case management of the offender. This compares with levels 2 and 3, which require active multi-agency management
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
nDelius	National Delius: the approved case management system used by the NPS and CRCs in England and Wales
NPS	National Probation Service: a single national service which came into being in June 2014. Its role is to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of offenders, including those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA
OASys	Offender assessment system currently used in England and Wales by the NPS and CRCs to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision
Partners	Partners include statutory and non-statutory organisations, working with the participant/offender through a partnership agreement with the NPS or CRC
Providers	Providers deliver a service or input commissioned by and provided under contract to the NPS or CRC. This includes the staff and services provided under the contract, even when they are integrated or located within the NPS or CRC
Pre-sentence report	This refers to any report prepared for a court, whether delivered orally or in a written format
Probation officer	This is the term for a 'qualified' responsible officer who has undertaken a higher education-based course for two years. The name of the qualification and content of the training varies depending on when it was undertaken. They manage more complex cases
PSO	Probation services officer: this is the term for a responsible officer who was originally recruited with no qualification. They may access locally determined training to 'qualify' as a probation services officer or to build on this to qualify as a probation officer. They may manage all but the most complex cases depending on their level of training and experience. Some PSOs work within the court setting, where their duties include the writing of pre-sentence reports
Rate card	A directory of services offered by the CRC for the NPS to use with its offenders, detailing the price
<i>Transforming Rehabilitation</i>	The government's programme, introduced in June 2014, whereby individual offenders are managed by either the National Probation Service or by a Community Rehabilitation Company

Annexe 2: Methodology

The inspection set out to answer the following questions:

Does leadership support and promote the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive accommodation service for all service users?

- Is there an effective vision and strategy at national and local level driving the delivery of high-quality accommodation services and accommodation provision for all adult service users who lack settled and suitable accommodation?
- Do operating models support the delivery of effective accommodation services, meeting the needs of all service users?

Are staff empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive accommodation service for all service users?

- Do the skills and profile of staff support the delivery of high-quality accommodation services for all service users?
- Are arrangements for learning and development for those delivering accommodation services comprehensive and responsive?

Is there a comprehensive range of high-quality accommodation services in place, supporting a tailored and responsive service for all service users?

- How has the number and type of locally commissioned offender beds changed over the past five years?
- Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of accommodation needs of service users, to ensure delivery of well-targeted services?
- What analysis has the NPS and CRC made of the accommodation needs of service users? What accommodation services do service users say they need, and what is the quality of the services provided according to service users?
- Do the NPS and CRC provide the volume, range and quality of accommodation services to meet the needs of service users?
- Are relationships with providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality accommodation services to service users?

Is timely and relevant information available to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach to the provision of accommodation services for all service users?

- Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement of accommodation services?
- What evidence is there of effective practice in meeting service users' accommodation needs?

Are high-quality well-focused, personalised and coordinated accommodation services delivered, engaging the service user?

- Does the implementation and delivery of accommodation services and accommodation provision effectively support service users' desistance?
- Does the implementation and delivery of accommodation services and accommodation provision effectively support the safety of other people?
- What are the barriers to service users accessing settled and suitable accommodation?

Are Through the Gate services personalised and coordinated, addressing service users' accommodation needs?

- Does resettlement planning focus sufficiently on service users' accommodation needs?
- Does resettlement activity focus sufficiently on supporting service users to obtain and retain settled and suitable accommodation?

Call for evidence

Before undertaking the fieldwork, we put out a call for evidence in relation to the inspection questions and were pleased to receive responses from 19 different organisations. We analysed submissions from four NPS probation divisions, HMPPS Wales, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 12 organisations providing advice, advocacy, support or housing services, and CLINKS, which is a national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system. We also met with staff from HMPPS Community Interventions Residential and Accommodation Support Services unit, and MHCLG's Directorate of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

Fieldwork

We piloted our fieldwork methodology in the Northamptonshire local delivery unit, involving both NPS and CRC staff. With minor amendments, we then conducted fieldwork in Stockton-On-Tees, the London Borough of Southwark, and the South Essex LDU, in each area looking at the work of both CRCs and the NPS. We had planned to go to South East Kent, Greater Manchester and Cardiff; however, these visits had to be cancelled when coronavirus struck. As a consequence, we have had to restrict our main findings to probation services in England.

In each area visited, we reviewed a comprehensive set of evidence in advance provided by managers from the CRCs and NPS divisions, and we also reviewed the material sent to us by Kent, which was to be the next area visited. In total, we examined ten cases in depth in each of the four areas visited, taking a qualitative approach to evidence gathering: reviewing files and interviewing the responsible officers. We selected cases that were not in settled accommodation at the point of commencement of supervision or licence, some six months previously. We ensured a 50:50 split between commencements of community sentences and prison licences.

Across the four areas visited, we conducted a total of 58 meetings and focus groups. These included meetings with senior strategic and operational managers from the CRCs and NPS divisions, focus groups with middle managers and with responsible officers, discussion with accommodation providers and visits to accommodation projects. In each area we spoke with the MAPPA manager, a manager of an approved premises, a manager of a local authority homelessness service and a governor from a resettlement prison.

In addition, we sampled 116 cases across 6 areas, which was representative of individuals released from prison 12 months previously. This included NPS and CRC cases, long and short sentences and a range of offence types. This was a quantitative study, based on file reading alone, to determine the accommodation circumstances of prisoners in the period since release, to consider how these circumstances changed and whether the individuals reoffended or returned to prison.

A key part of our methodology was interviews with service users in each location. We contracted with Empowering People: Inspiring Change, an organisation providing research and consultancy by people with a mixture of learned and lived experience of the criminal justice system. The four lived experience consultants conducted a total of 75 interviews, in person or via the telephone, including 52 men and 23 women. Interviews took place in probation offices, approved premises, community facilities and accommodation projects. The lived experience consultants asked about people's history of accommodation problems, experience of Through the Gate services, and the quality of probation and accommodation services, along with barriers to finding and retaining settled accommodation. The interview notes and tapes were analysed, with summaries of key themes produced each week, and collated subsequently into a final report.

Subsequent enquiries

After the fieldwork, further telephone interviews were conducted with staff from the HMPPS Community Interventions Residential and Accommodation Support Services unit and the probation programme unit, to follow up specific lines of enquiry. A review was completed of accommodation findings and examples of good practice from the first two years of HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection programme of the NPS and CRCs.



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