

## National Probation Service Approved Premises (Hostels)

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What are Approved Premises?

Approved Premises provide controlled accommodation for offenders under the supervision of the Probation Service. They provide a greater degree of supervision for offenders than is possible in other forms of housing.

Approved Premises were formerly known as bail and / or probation hostels. Most Approved Premises are owned and managed by the **National Probation Service** for England and Wales. A small number are run by voluntary sector providers but all are required to work to the same operating standards.

Residents follow a structured regime, which includes an overnight curfew. There is 24 hour supervision at the Approved Premises by trained staff.

#### Who lives in Approved Premises?

Approved Premises accommodate offenders who have committed a very wide range of crimes. Approved Premises are not specialist accommodation or treatment centres for sex offenders; they hold a range of offenders on bail or on licence\* in the community for whom no other types of accommodation would be suitable. Approved Premises are available for both male and female offenders.

#### Are they safe?

Approved Premises are the safest option for many offenders as it allows their risk to be managed. They are required to comply with all the conditions of their order or licence, including the curfew and any additional restrictions imposed on their movements.

Facilities like these are a vital part of the public protection process. They enable successful resettlement of offenders back into the community, while contributing to the reduction of re-offending.

Residents are also required to comply with house rules which set out the standards of behaviour expected of them. There are rules forbidding them to act in such a way as to cause disruption to neighbours and the immediate community, or to bring the premises into disrepute.

Any breach of the conditions of residence or the house rules renders an offender liable to clear sanctions; either eviction; a return to court or their **immediate re-call to prison**. This policy is stringently enforced and there are

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\* Licence is the term to describe the agreed conditions and restrictions with which a released prisoner must comply when they are first returning to the community at the end of the custodial element of their sentence.

a great many examples of offenders being recalled to prison as a preventative measure to avoid the risk of further offences being committed.

Approved Premises are relied on by other bodies, like the police. They add to public safety, not diminish it.

### **What would happen if Approved Premises were not available?**

If some high risk offenders were not able to go to an Approved Premises on release, or as a condition of bail or a community order, then they would be placed in other, less secure forms of accommodation, such as local authority housing, voluntary sector hostels, privately rented flats or bed and breakfast establishments. It is much more difficult to manage offenders safely and effectively in these settings. This would significantly reduce the protection afforded to the public, since offenders would be less tightly monitored and lapses of behaviour would be less likely to be detected.

In many cases offenders require hostel places because they have offended against a member of their own household (for instance in cases of domestic violence) and it would not be appropriate to allow them home until their risk can be properly managed.

### **Who decides which offenders go to Approved Premises?**

Almost all residents in Approved Premises are placed there by the **Courts** (on community orders or on bail) or the **Parole Board** (on licence). Admissions decisions are made by the Probation Service, based on a thorough risk assessment.

When a place at Approved Premises is found for new residents, an assessment will be made as to whether they pose any risk to the public or themselves. Offenders who cause particular concern will be referred to the local **Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel (MAPPP)**. This is headed jointly by the police and probation managers with contributions from other partners such as the local police crime manager, the local police offender manager, senior probation staff and other officials from health, education, social services, housing and the Prison Service as required.

At the MAPPP, the offender's case will be discussed in detail and a plan of action agreed that all agencies will follow to manage the risks the offender poses. Options for staff include additional daytime curfews or licence conditions which place further restrictions on an individual's movements or activities.

Each referral is therefore subject to at least two, and sometimes three, levels of scrutiny before a final decision is taken.

### **Living in Approved Premises – what happens?**

Approved premises provide enhanced supervision in order to promote public protection. No other community facility can provide this range of restrictive

and protective measures. We are confident that the use of approved premises does not place local residents at an increased risk of harm, but improves our ability to protect the public. The public protection measures that approved premises facilitate include:

- **Security measures**  
Stringent internal and external security measures are in place, including CCTV coverage, alarmed exits and restricted window openings.
- **Tagging**  
There are electronic monitoring facilities for residents subject to electronic tagging
- **Staffing levels**  
Approved Premises will always have a minimum of two members of staff on duty at all times, and frequently more than the minimum.
- **Resident Monitoring**  
There is daily monitoring and recording of incoming mail. Residents undergo routine observation and recording of their behaviour.
- **Curfew periods**  
A standard minimum curfew (from 11pm to 6am) exists in all Approved Premises.
- **Tailor-made Curfew Periods**  
Extended curfew periods can be imposed on the order of the Court, the Parole Board or the AP manager, for example at school arrival and departure times.
- **Treatments**  
Residency at an AP can frequently ensure someone keeps up with Mental Health treatment, their Domestic Violence, Alcohol Abuse, Drug Abuse treatments or other offending behaviour programs.
- **Sex Offender Prevention Orders**  
This is an order, applied for by the police and granted by the courts, that specifically prevents specified activity, like contacting named individuals.
- **Drug Testing**  
There is provision for on-site drug testing where residents are suspected of, or have a known history of, illegal substance misuse.
- **Exclusion Zones**  
Some Offenders are prohibited from entering certain geographical areas as part of their probation order or licence.

Non compliance with this order may result in an offender going to Prison.

- **Contact restrictions**  
This prevents offenders having contact with named individuals, such as victims of their crimes.
- **Police**  
Joint management of offenders means regular liaison with, and visits to Approved Premises by, police.
- **Recall to Prison**  
Breach of license will result in recall to prison. A robust enforcement system is in place, including the facility to initiate 'fast-track' recall to prison where necessary.
- **Room searches**  
Anything found in a room that is illegal or not permitted, like drugs, would result in a sanction such as recall to prison and could also lead to police action.

### **Are local people or schools told where Approved Premises are and who is in them?**

Head teachers should be aware, via MAPPAs, of the arrangements in place for managing high risk offenders, including the location of and vital role played by approved premises in their areas. The police, as part of MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements), will tell school head teachers if and when they think there is a specific risk posed by an individual...

Any disclosure regarding an individual offender is made to heighten vigilance, as part of the management of risk. The police will advise head teachers about how they might share the information, for instance with other staff or parents and who they should contact if they have any concerns. All schools should have their own child protection policies.

Whether in supervised accommodation or living independently, it is a police decision whether to notify members of the public about the whereabouts of a particular individual. Such decisions will be made following discussion within MAPPA.. It is unlawful, under the Data Protection Act, for the police or probation service to routinely disclose information about the location or management of individual offenders to third parties.

The experience of the police and the probation service is that risk to individuals and the general public can be increased when information is mishandled.

Vital Statistics

There are 104 hostels across the England and Wales, spread across virtually every one of the 42 probation area.

Overall, they provide around 2300 bed spaces.

Residents are obliged to pay rent from their wages or benefits.

Only 4 new hostels have opened in the last five years and many have been operating for their current location for several decades.

National Probation Directorate  
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