



Developing Work with Sexual Abusers,
Preventing Sexual Abuse

Northern Ireland Branch

Housing in the Community for People Who Sexually Offend

This paper was written on behalf of the Northern Ireland Branch by Stephen Sherry PBNI and branch member. It is published here by the NI Branch for the purpose of providing information to branch members and members of the public.

Introduction

Sexual offences can cause significant and sustained emotional, psychological and physical damage to the victim/ survivor, as well as fear and alarm within the wider community. There is no typical sexual offence and no typical person who commits sex offences. Not all those who have committed a sexual offence pose a high or immediate risk nor are they inherently dangerous to the wider public. However this is not always the public's perception.

The vast majority of those convicted of sexual offences who receive prison sentences will eventually return to live in the community. Their accommodation reflects that of wider society. Many will return to their own homes, families and their town of origin. They will have owner occupied properties or social housing provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or a Housing Association. They may reside in the private rented sector.

However, others may have no accommodation to go back to following their release from prison due to fear of violence should they return to their area of origin or because of the needs of the victims.

Some may be assessed as presenting a potential risk to the public and for a period may be required, as a condition of their sentence, to reside in temporary supervised hostel type accommodation or 'Approved Premises' where they are closely monitored. They can be subject to curfews, electronic monitoring and other restrictions such as alcohol and drug testing.

Community understanding and tolerance of Approved Premises is extremely important. Without such facilities capacity to protect the public would be significantly diminished.

The Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI)

The Criminal Justice Order (NI) 2008 created the public protection arrangements. The arrangements bring together a number of agencies and departments including the police, probation, prison service and a number of other agencies to work together to provide effective assessment and management of the risks posed by certain sexual and violent offenders. The public protection arrangements aim to provide a multi-agency, co-ordinated system of risk assessment and risk management that will be effective in reducing the immediate and long term risk of sexual or violent re-offending.

Every relevant person will be considered by multi-agency public protection processes and subject to a risk management plan which will address the factors which may contribute to specific risk(s) of serious harm by that individual.

The agencies involved in the risk management process in Northern Ireland recognise and pay careful consideration to the fact that access to suitable and sustainable accommodation is a significant factor in preventing re-offending and reducing the risk which those who commit sexual offences present within the community. The risk of homelessness only adds to the difficulty in managing the risk, with individuals constantly “moving on.” This presents an added difficulty for the agencies involved in monitoring and visiting offenders and can also lead to deterioration in the individual’s emotional and mental health, potentially increasing the risks they present to the public.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is Northern Ireland’s strategic housing authority offering a range of services to people living in socially rented, privately rented and owner occupied accommodation as well as supporting and working with a number of other public bodies. The vision of Northern Ireland Housing Executive is one in which housing plays its part in creating a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and fair society.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive plays a key role in working with local communities and other agencies, whether public, private or voluntary sector, to tackle issues that make a real difference to everyone's quality of life. One of these issues is addressing homelessness, including homeless offenders who are part of the public protection arrangements Northern Ireland

The Housing Executive’s statutory duty to homeless people is contained within the Housing (NI) Order 1988. This legislation requires the Housing Executive to assess the duty owed to people who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness in relation to eligibility for such services as temporary accommodation and permanent housing.

The Order also makes provision for the Housing Executive to financially assist voluntary sector organisations to provide a range of services to assist the Housing Executive in fulfilling its statutory duties.

What happens in practice?

In practice, the majority of those who commit sexual offences living in the community make their own accommodation arrangements through privately owned or privately rented housing, without recourse to alternative social housing or temporary accommodation.

However, for the minority who are unable to secure independent accommodation temporary residence in an ‘Approved Premises’ or in homeless type accommodation may be offered or at times directed as a condition of release from custody as part of their risk management plan.

Temporary Supervised Accommodation

Whilst the Probation Board for Northern Ireland does not own or manage accommodation for offenders, it works in close partnership with a range of voluntary and community organisations, and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, through Supporting People¹, to offer accommodation to offenders in Approved Premises across Northern Ireland.

¹ Supporting People funds a range of housing related support services for vulnerable people to improve their quality of life and attain independence http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/supporting_people_programme.htm

These professionally run establishments work to Probation Approved standards for offender management. Supporting People monitor the performance of these services through their contract management framework. The Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland conducts planned and unannounced inspections of the Approved Premises. The Approved Premises providers have consistently been commended for making a significant contribution to the work of the Probation Board and partner agencies in managing risk and protecting the public.

The majority of referrals to the Approved Premises are for offenders being released into the community from prison. They are normally subject to licence conditions to reside there and these offenders are given priority when spaces become available. PBNI supervises and enforces these licences until their date of expiry. Each offender is risk assessed jointly by PBNI and hostel staff and other relevant partners, including the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the agencies which compose the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI). Individual risk management plans are created and enforced for each person for the duration of their stay. Failure to comply will lead to the individual being returned to court or recalled to prison.

Work is undertaken with hostel residents to address the factors which have contributed to their previous offending behaviour. They are required to live positive lifestyles and engage in training and employment opportunities. Those with offending histories are progressed towards resettlement in approved locations where they will continue to receive support to sustain them in their new accommodation and be risk managed by Probation staff working in coordination with colleagues in the Police Service of NI and other criminal justice agencies and statutory bodies such as the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Floating Support

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides financial assistance to voluntary sector organisations to provide support services to help offenders move on from Approved Premises into independent accommodation. It also provides this support on an ongoing basis to those who have difficulty living independently to help sustain them in their tenancies. These services are also funded and monitored by Supporting People.

Recent Developments

PPANI SMB has recently developed a protocol ensuring the suitability of addresses is assessed in relation to offenders subject to public protection arrangements who are ready to move-on into the wider community

Useful Numbers

NSPCC HELPLINE: If you have concerns about the welfare of a child, please call:	Freephone 0808 800 5000 help@nspcc.org.uk
Youth Justice Agency	02890 316418
POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND	02890 650222
STOP IT NOW! (NI) – Working to prevent sexual abuse. If you have concerns about your own thoughts and behaviours towards children or are concerned about others contact the Stop it Now Helpline:	Freephone Helpline 0808 1000 900 www.stopitnow.org.uk
Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland (PPANI) Coordination Unit Office:	028 9025 9612 info@publicprotectionni.com
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	80 to 90 North Street, Belfast BT1 1LD. 02890262400



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