

Approved Premises: the mid-2022 'State of Play'

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In 2001, in England & Wales, Probation Hostels were redesignated Approved Premises (APs), and have undergone, and are still undergoing, major changes. These small institutions, accommodating usually 20-30 residents in the community, were mainly used to house individuals either serving a community sentence or on pre-trial bail. For some twenty years now, their residents have instead been almost exclusively individuals on release from prison - often following a long and/ or indeterminate sentence.

In mid-2022, about 100 APs are directly managed by HMPPS. An additional 14 APs are commissioned by HMPPS but managed by separate independent organisations, some of which are small historic charities whilst others are specialist accommodation providers.

HMPPS now requires all APs to accommodate only individuals that are "*high-risk*" and/or with complex needs. Both sectors of APs are therefore now better staffed and equipped compared with a few years ago, and cameras and monitoring devices are very evident.

HMPPS has recently formally adopted a wider Accommodation Strategy nationwide, within which APs are the "*Tier 1*" provision, for the highest risk cases. It is seeking to expand this provision, while at the same time develop Tiers 2 and 3, for accommodating other individuals that are being released from prison.



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What are the main current issues for the APs, in mid-2022?

- COVID19 pandemic: All APs are now recovering from the hugely challenging effects of the pandemic. APs kept going when almost all of the rest of the probation 'system' was either shut down or 'home-based'.
- Expansion: HMPPS's projections forecast a rise in demand for AP places, and the main route to increasing the number of beds by '200 in two years' is to commission more independent APs, especially in London and the SE where demand should be highest.
- Occupancy: At the time of writing, APs - especially the female ones - are not filling up with residents in the way that projections suggested that they should. The issues around this are complex, and might prove temporary.
- A regrading within HMPPS's own APs: A recent big step was the regrading of a whole sector of AP staff from Band 2 to Band 3 status and pay, to provide some recognition of the nature of this work.
- New contracts for the independent APs: The contractual relationship with HMPPS is about to go through another major change, laying the ground for competitive tendering.
- Referrals, especially in the female estate: Given that APs are NOT prisons, there are

questions around which residents can or cannot be managed in an AP. Some of the most difficult cases to resolve are female cases, where much of the problem can be that the self-destructive behaviour of some female residents is so relentless, and so destructive to other residents as well as to herself, that she ends up having to be recalled, which means the cycle has to start all over again. Although the independent sector is only just over 12% of the total AP provision, independent APs have over 50% of the provision in the female estate. This is, thus, a very live issue for IAPs who face wider costs and challenges such as not having Crown Immunity, and so have to buy property and liability insurance in the commercial market.

- Terrorist cases: Individuals imprisoned for terrorism offences are often required to live at an AP on first release, and while most residents are required to move on after just 12 weeks, new provisions mean that terrorism cases will be required to *stay for a full year* before moving on.

In both sectors of the AP world, life is currently not dull!