Housing Advice In Prisons Protocol NI

A Joint Up Approach To Meet The Housing Needs Of Those In Custody

Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb

The Landscape In 2009

- Review of the NI Criminal Justice System in 2000 - Strong recommendation of a more collaborative approach to housing.
- Despite a legislative provision to assess homelessness in advance of release, this was not happening
- No systematic provision of housing advice or support in custody.
- No post release floating support provision
- Every hostel had their own unique referral form and process

Signatories

- NI Housing Executive (NIHE)
- NI Prison Service (NIPS)
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)
- Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (CHNI)*
- Housing Rights
- NI Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)*

Housing Executive



A protocol for the management of the accommodation and related support needs of people in custody in Northern Ireland

The protocol was produced in partnership with

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE

PBNI Probation Board For Northern Ireland

housing rights service

niacro

and is supported by

CHNI Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland

NIFHA Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

“It’s a cycle of cell, street, repeat”, “Without a home to go to after being released, it is virtually impossible to maintain or start drug rehabilitation, get a job, build back positive relationships, or reintegrate back into and contribute positively to society”.

Campbell Robb - CEO of NACRO

Within 48 Hours

- Obtain formal prisoner consent Identify and explore range of accommodation options to enable bail application to be made, OR
- Where bail is granted in principle, arrange placement in approved accommodation with relevant support
- Identify any potential issues with previous accommodation (if tenancy already held) and advise person to either contact original landlord and notify the prison housing team.

PRISON STAFF

With 28 days

- Key time for tenancy sustainment support
- Identification of future housing needs
- Make linkages to all relevant agencies
- Identification of complex/recurring issues (Complex Lives Team should be notified and referral made to Housing Adviser)

PEER ADVISERS

Mid Sentence

- Provision of specialist housing advice and advocacy
- Case Strategy Meeting to determine specific needs of client
- For those recently sentenced following remand - revisit tenancy retention issues/offer debt support

HOUSING RIGHTS

PROBATION

PRISON STAFF

release - 3 months

- Identify accommodation requirements and discuss range of options
- Submit formal application for accommodation to NIHE, if appropriate,
- Identify and secure temporary accommodation where appropriate
- If social rented accommodation not a viable option, refer to specialist for advice on renting privately or alternative options.

HOUSING RIGHTS

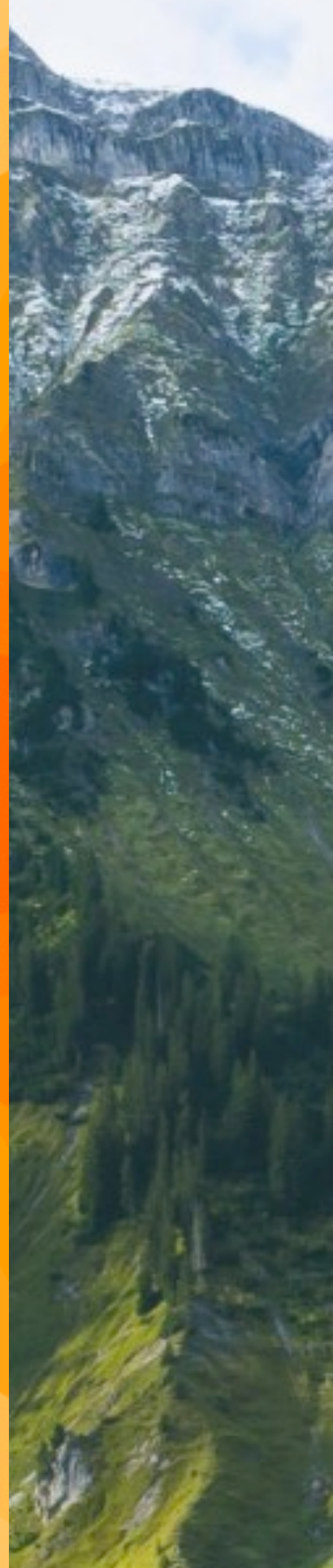
PROBATION

PRISON STAFF

NIHE

Frequent Support

- Negotiation with landlords/lenders around rent and mortgage arrears.
- securing benefits to pay for housing costs whilst inside
- Advocating for statutory homeless support
- appropriate termination of tenancy
- accessing temporary accommodation
- preventing abandonment action on prisoner's homes
- creating caretaker tenancies



Housing Rights Team

Prison Peer Housing Advisers

- 9 across all 3 prisons including young offender and female prison peers

- Direct advice and advocacy provision, triages all housing queries. Gives basic advice, completes necessary forms, identifies if cases need to be referred to the HADW

- All peers are trained with a nationally recognised housing advice qualification. This has led to instances where peers have secured paid employment in the sector on release.

Housing Rights Team

Housing Advice Development Officers

- At least one in each prison. 2 and a half in the largest prison HMP Maghaberry

- Direct advice and advocacy provision, only deals with cases after they have been established as complex by the prison peer advisers

- Provides mentoring and support to Probation and Prison Service Staff

Housing Rights Team

Peer Co-ordintor

- Manages and supports the prison housing advice peers

- Is the central referral point for all 3 prisons

- Submits paperwork completed by peers to relevant agencies

Housing Rights Team

Beyond The Gate Team

- Pre and post release support team

- providing support from 6 weeks prior to release until 6 weeks following release.

- Helps accessing and setting up home, managing money, accessing services such as GP, bank, mobile phone, addiction teams, counselling

Housing Rights Team

NIHE in HMP Maghaberry

- Brand new arrangements, now places NIHE staff members physically in HMP Maghaberry

- currently 2 people

- Their role is to carry out homelessness assessments and notify of statutory duty

- Where the decision is negative, the prisoner still have access to independent advocacy to challenge this via the Housing Advice Team

NI Prison Population

22/23 daily average 1,685

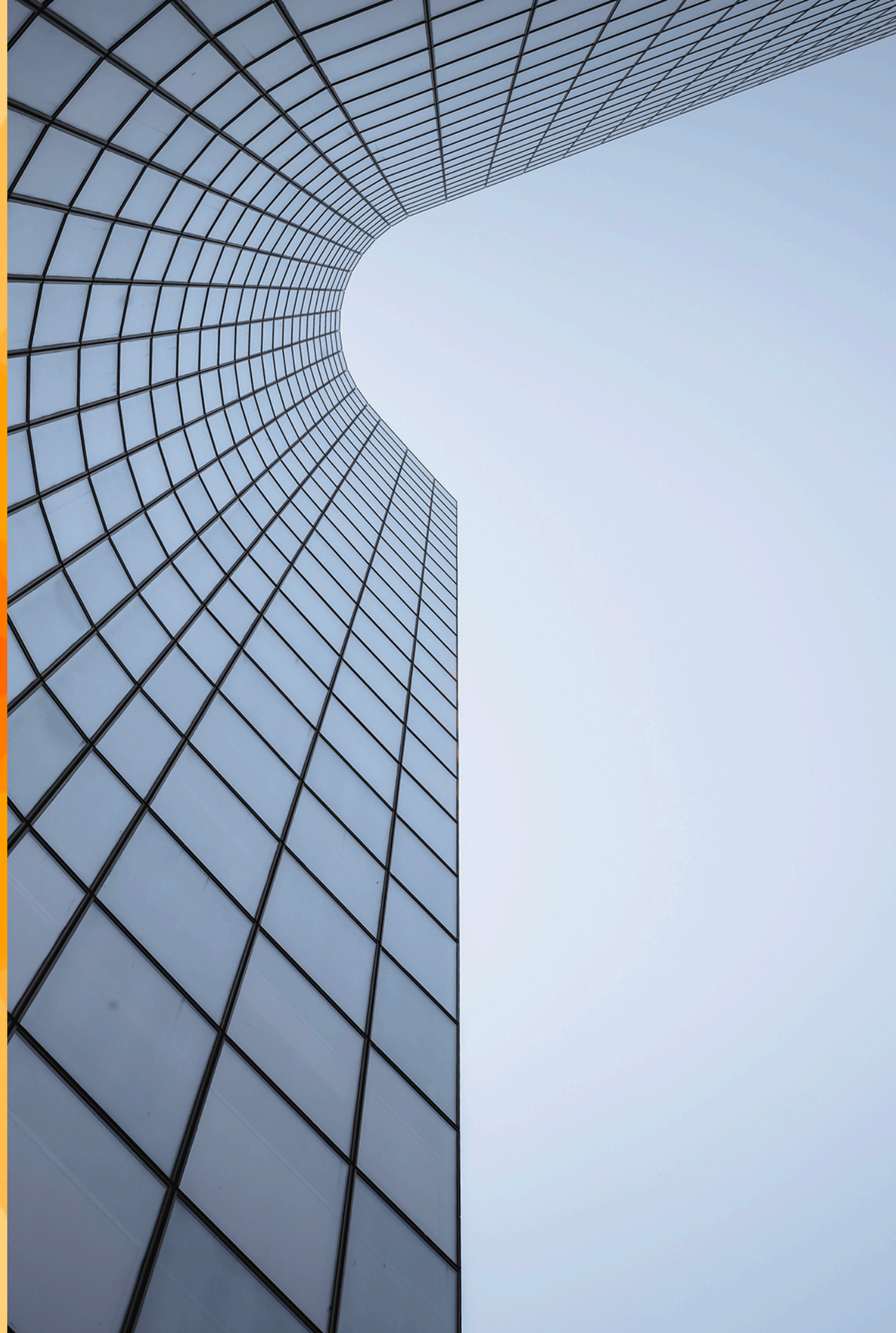
female population average 78

Remand figures one of the highest in Europe

Double compared to England and Wales

80% of all committals are remand

40% of our daily population are un-sentenced.



Key Issues

- NI has a significantly higher number of long term remand prisoners - impacts tenancy retention.
- Significant shortage of temporary accommodation (only 7 female bed spaces in NI)
- Those released directly from court often fall through the net.
- Movement from one health trust area to another.
- Threatened homelessness still legally 28 days (England 56)



Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

(implemented in 2018)

- The three main aims of the HRA are to:

- Prevent more people from becoming homeless in the first place by identifying people at risk and intervening earlier with evidenced solutions

- Intervene rapidly if a homelessness crisis occurs, so it is brief and non-recurrent

- Help more people recover from and exit homelessness by getting them back on their feet

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Responsibilities

- Before making a referral, a public authority must:

- Have consent to the referral from the individual

- Allow the individual to identify the housing authority in England which they would like the notification to made to

- Have consent from the individual that their contact details can be supplied so the housing authority can contact them regarding their referral.

- **The Prison Service are named as one of the authorities which has this duty**