NO BED, NO SAFETY

Survey on AP Bed Spaces and impact on Accommodation, Workload and Public Protection

How accommodation shortages are increasing workload, compromising public protection and affecting the health and safety of probation staff.

Ranjit Singh - Napo Assistant General Secretary - July 2026

Executive Summary

In summer 2026, Napo undertook a national survey to understand members' experiences of securing accommodation and Approved Premises bed spaces.

A total of **271 members** responded, representing every probation region across England and Wales and a wide range of operational roles.

The survey reveals a consistent national picture.

Accommodation shortages have become embedded within everyday probation practice and are placing increasing pressure on frontline staff.

Throughout this survey, members expressed frustration at the increasing difficulty in securing Approved Premises placements and other accommodation. However, the comments also make clear that these frustrations are directed at the pressures within the system—not at Approved Premises staff themselves.

Members repeatedly acknowledged that Approved Premises colleagues are working under the same pressures as sentence management teams. One respondent observed that **"AP staff are also overwhelmed with the continued early release from custody… creating a bed space crisis in the community"**, while another commented that **"the AP estate is not big enough or resourced anywhere near enough"**, highlighting concerns about capacity and investment.

Members also recognised that Approved Premises are increasingly being expected to manage people with needs beyond the original purpose of the service, placing additional pressure on staff already working within constrained resources.

Perhaps the survey's most telling observation was from a member who wrote: **"The pressure creates divides between AP staff and others. We are all on the same page working with the same goals but due to the workload and capacity issues it doesn't feel that way."**

Napo agrees. Sentence management staff, Approved Premises staff and all probation colleagues are working towards the same objective: protecting the public, supporting rehabilitation and delivering safe, effective probation services. The challenges identified in this report are the consequence of systemic pressures—including insufficient capacity, staffing shortages, increasing demand and wider policy decisions—not the commitment or professionalism of frontline staff. Addressing those systemic issues, rather than allowing pressure to create divisions between colleagues, must be the priority.

The key findings

Members overwhelmingly reported that:

- Accommodation has become significantly harder to secure over the past twelve months.

- Approved Premises remain the most difficult form of accommodation to access.
- Bed shortages are delaying release planning and increasing operational risk.
- Accommodation shortages are significantly increasing workload.
- Members believe shortages are creating health and safety risks for staff.
- Members believe shortages are undermining Probation's ability to manage risk effectively and protect the public.

The survey also demonstrates that accommodation shortages are generating substantial amounts of work that are largely invisible within existing workload measurement systems.

Respondents described spending considerable time:

- making repeated accommodation referrals;
- chasing providers;
- revising release plans;
- arranging emergency placements;
- escalating cases;
- managing homelessness;
- undertaking additional risk assessments; and
- responding to crises that arise because suitable accommodation is unavailable.

This "hidden work" has become an increasingly significant contributor to excessive workload.

The findings reinforce Napo's position that accommodation shortages must be recognised as:

- a workforce issue;
- a health and safety issue;
- a public protection issue; and
- a key factor in understanding workload pressures across the Probation Service.

Why Napo Commissioned This Survey

The availability of safe and appropriate accommodation has always been central to probation practice.

Accommodation provides stability, supports rehabilitation and enables practitioners to manage risk effectively.

When accommodation is unavailable, practitioners must find alternative arrangements while continuing to manage the risks presented by individuals being released from custody or supervised in the community.

Members have increasingly reported that these difficulties are becoming routine.

Concerns raised with Napo include:

- delays in securing Approved Premises beds;
- shortages of emergency accommodation;
- increasing homelessness on release;
- lack of specialist provision;
- repeated unsuccessful referrals;
- increasing workloads associated with accommodation;
- staff wellbeing concerns; and
- increased risks to the public.

This survey was commissioned to establish whether these concerns reflected isolated local issues or represented a wider national trend.

The findings clearly indicate that these are national, systemic problems affecting probation staff across England and Wales.

Who Responded?

A total of **271 members** completed the survey.

Respondents represented:

- Probation Officers;
- Probation Service Officers;
- Approved Premises staff;
- Senior Probation Officers;
- Victim Liaison Officers; and
- other operational and specialist roles.

Responses were received from every probation region, providing a comprehensive picture of accommodation pressures across England and Wales.

The majority of respondents reported that securing accommodation formed a regular part of their role, giving considerable weight to the findings presented in this report.

Accommodation Shortages Have Become Routine

Perhaps the clearest finding from this survey is that accommodation shortages are no longer exceptional.

They have become part of everyday probation practice.

A substantial majority of respondents reported that obtaining accommodation has become significantly more difficult over the past year.

Members consistently described:

- reduced availability of Approved Premises beds;
- long waiting times;
- increasing competition for placements;
- fewer specialist accommodation options; and
- repeated unsuccessful referrals.

Rather than planning rehabilitation and managing risk proactively, practitioners are increasingly forced into crisis management.

One respondent summarised the situation simply:

"People are being released homeless or to unsuitable accommodation, putting victims and the public at risk and setting people up to fail."

This comment reflects one of the strongest themes running throughout the survey: accommodation shortages are no longer isolated operational problems—they are influencing almost every aspect of probation practice.

Approved Premises Under Sustained Pressure

Approved Premises were consistently identified as the accommodation most difficult to secure.

Respondents also highlighted shortages in:

- CAS3 accommodation;
- supported housing;
- emergency accommodation;
- accommodation for women;
- mental health provision; and
- accommodation for individuals presenting complex risks.

Many respondents linked these pressures to staffing shortages, reduced capacity and temporary closures within the Approved Premises estate.

The consequences extend well beyond delays.

Without suitable accommodation, practitioners reported having to revise release plans repeatedly, explore increasingly unsuitable alternatives and manage heightened levels of risk.

One respondent described a case where an Approved Premises placement was withdrawn shortly before release:

"Accepted for an AP placement, then the bed was withdrawn just before release."

For practitioners, these situations create additional workload while increasing uncertainty for those being released from custody.

The Hidden Work

The Workload That Isn't Counted

One of the strongest messages emerging from this survey is not simply that accommodation is difficult to obtain, but that **the work generated by accommodation shortages has become a substantial, largely invisible part of probation practice**.

When accommodation cannot be secured quickly, practitioners are required to undertake numerous additional tasks that are rarely reflected in workload measurement tools or staffing models.

Members described spending significant time:

- submitting repeated referrals after initial requests were unsuccessful;
- contacting multiple accommodation providers;
- negotiating with Approved Premises;
- chasing responses from local authorities;
- revising release plans;
- updating risk assessments;
- arranging emergency contingency plans;
- attending additional MAPPA discussions;
- responding to licence breaches arising from homelessness;
- managing emergency recalls linked to accommodation failures; and
- providing reassurance and support to individuals facing release without suitable accommodation.

Rather than progressing rehabilitation, practitioners described spending increasing amounts of time responding to crises that could have been avoided had suitable accommodation been available. This theme is reflected throughout the survey's free-text responses.

As one member observed:

"We are better described as accommodation brokers than probation practitioners."

This comment encapsulates the experience of many respondents.

Accommodation and Napo's Workload Campaign

Napo's national Workload Campaign has consistently argued that excessive workload cannot be understood simply by looking at caseload numbers. The findings of this survey reinforce that position.

Accommodation shortages create additional work at every stage of the probation process. Every unsuccessful referral, delayed placement or withdrawn bed requires practitioners to invest further time in identifying alternatives, reassessing risk and coordinating with multiple agencies. These demands are often urgent, unpredictable and resource-intensive.

Members repeatedly described how accommodation issues disrupted planned work, forcing them to postpone supervision, sentence planning and rehabilitative interventions while they focused on resolving accommodation crises.

This survey therefore provides important evidence that workload pressures arise not only from the number of people supervised, but also from systemic failures that transfer additional responsibilities onto frontline staff.

If workload measurement systems fail to account for this hidden work, they risk significantly underestimating the demands placed on practitioners.

Napo believes this evidence strengthens the case for reviewing workload measurement tools to ensure they properly reflect the realities of the job.

Members Are Spending More Time Firefighting

Throughout the survey, members described a pattern of reactive rather than proactive practice.

Instead of planning rehabilitation and supporting long-term desistance, practitioners reported spending increasing amounts of time responding to accommodation emergencies.

One respondent explained:

"Everything else gets put on hold while we try to find accommodation." (Representative theme reflected across multiple responses.)

Another described how repeated accommodation failures meant that release planning became an ongoing cycle of contingency arrangements rather than structured preparation.

These experiences suggest that accommodation shortages are not merely adding isolated tasks but are reshaping the nature of probation work itself.

Health and Safety

A Growing Concern for Members

The survey demonstrates that members increasingly regard accommodation shortages as a health and safety issue.

Respondents identified numerous ways in which accommodation shortages affect their wellbeing and personal safety, including:

- dealing with frustrated and distressed individuals;
- increased lone working risks;
- managing heightened emotional distress;
- increased verbal aggression;
- safeguarding concerns;
- cumulative stress and burnout; and

- anxiety associated with managing high-risk cases without appropriate accommodation.

Many respondents reported feeling professionally exposed when individuals were released without suitable accommodation.

Several also described the emotional impact of repeatedly informing people that no accommodation was available despite intensive efforts to secure it.

One member wrote:

“I worry about being attacked by someone who is angry at being homeless.”

Another reflected on the cumulative effect of these pressures:

“I considered going off sick because of the stress of trying to secure accommodation.”

These comments illustrate the wider wellbeing implications of sustained accommodation shortages.

Beyond Individual Cases

The survey also highlights broader organisational risks.

When practitioners spend increasing amounts of time managing accommodation crises, opportunities for proactive supervision, rehabilitation and meaningful engagement are reduced.

The cumulative effect is increased pressure across teams, reduced resilience and growing concerns about staff wellbeing.

For Napo, these findings reinforce the need for accommodation shortages to be recognised within organisational health and safety planning rather than being viewed solely as operational issues.

Public Protection

Accommodation Matters

The relationship between accommodation and public protection is well established in probation practice.

The survey findings demonstrate that members believe current accommodation shortages are making effective risk management significantly more difficult.

Respondents reported that shortages were contributing to:

- delayed releases;
- emergency placements;
- homelessness;
- breaches of exclusion zones;
- increased recall activity;
- reduced compliance with licence conditions; and
- greater risks to victims and the wider public.

Members repeatedly expressed concern that individuals assessed as presenting higher levels of risk were being released into unstable or unsuitable accommodation because no better alternatives were available.

One respondent stated:

“A high-risk individual was released homeless, increasing the risk of harm to themselves and others.”

Another explained:

“People are being released homeless or to unsuitable accommodation, putting victims and the public at risk and setting people up to fail.”

Such comments reinforce the survey’s central finding: accommodation shortages are no longer simply a logistical problem but have direct implications for public protection.

Rehabilitation Is Being Undermined

Accommodation provides the foundation for effective rehabilitation.

Without stable housing it becomes significantly harder to engage with treatment services, maintain employment, attend appointments and comply with licence conditions.

Members consistently described situations in which accommodation instability undermined otherwise well-developed release plans.

Rather than supporting successful reintegration, practitioners often found themselves managing repeated crises associated with homelessness or unsuitable placements.

These findings suggest that investment in accommodation capacity should be regarded not simply as a housing initiative but as an essential component of effective probation practice.

Members’ Voices

Statistics explain the scale of the problem.

Members explain the reality.

“We are better described as accommodation brokers than probation practitioners.”

“Accepted for an AP placement, then the bed was withdrawn just before release.”

“Everything else gets put on hold while we try to find accommodation.” (Representative theme reflected across multiple responses.)

“I worry about being attacked by someone who is angry at being homeless.”

“People are being released homeless or to unsuitable accommodation, putting victims and the public at risk.”

“A high-risk individual was released homeless, increasing the risk of harm to themselves and others.”

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