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THE CHANGING ROLE OF PROBATION HOSTELS: VOICES FROM THE INSIDE

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Abstract This paper explores the role and purpose of Probation Approved hostels from the perspective of residents and hostel staff. Findings are drawn from a case study into the operation of a Probation Approved hostel and the experiences of those people either working or residing within the hostel.

The fieldwork was conducted over twenty-one months, including the period that the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was introduced. In conjunction with participant observation within the hostel, comprising informal conversations and interviews, forty-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with residents (24) and staff (17), and twelve Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee meetings (MARACs) were observed.

Key findings are that different levels of staff in the hostel and residents have different opinions regarding the purpose of hostels. From the talk of respondents it is suggested that the differences can be accounted for by the levels of work undertaken by respondents. The significance of this is that some staff groups do not understand the work of their colleagues, and that residents do not appreciate the purpose of the residency in a hostel.

Keywords Probation, hostel, Approved Premises, offenders, purpose, public protection.