



**Investigation into the circumstances surrounding the  
death of a man at Wharflane House Approved Premises  
In December 2011**

**Report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman  
for England and Wales**

**October 2012**

This is the report of an investigation of the death of a man at Wharflane House Approved Premises, in Stoke-on-Trent. He was found hanging in his room in December 2011. He was 22 years old. I offer my condolences to his family and friends.

The investigation was carried out by an investigator. The staff at Wharflane House and the man's offender manager co-operated fully with the investigation.

The task of supervising high risk offenders in the community is a challenging one and requires the balancing of continuous assessment of risk with recognition of, and encouragement towards, small improvements in behaviour. The investigation found that staff at Wharflane House, and the man's offender manager, provided good support and advice to help him address his drinking, which was a major issue for him and a trigger for his offending.

The man lived at Wharflane House for four months. When he returned at his curfew time of 7.00pm, he had been drinking but did not seem distressed. Although the investigation found that better guidance for staff on managing residents with alcohol problems would be helpful, I am satisfied that the staff could not reasonably have predicted his actions later that evening and it is unlikely that anything could have been done to prevent his death. Nevertheless, it is positive that the Probation Trust has now improved its evening staffing arrangements at approved premises to ensure that experienced staff are more regularly available.

This version of my report, published on my website, has been amended to remove the names of the man who died and those of staff and prisoners involved in my investigation.

**Nigel Newcomen CBE**  
**Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

**October 2012**

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## SUMMARY

1. On 31 January 2011, the man was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment for an offence of robbery. He had previously self-harmed while in custody but did not do so during this sentence. He was released on licence on 9 September 2011 from HMP Onley. He had been referred to Wharflane House Approved Premises and was required to live there as part of his licence conditions.
2. Generally, the man settled well at Wharflane House. He attended an alcohol awareness group and also attended all required meetings with his offender manager and key worker. When he began a relationship, he informed staff in accordance with his licence conditions. He did not always tell staff about contact with his sister (which was not allowed without social services and probation approval) or that he had a mobile phone with internet access, which was also prohibited. On two occasions, his offender manager wrote to him about unacceptable behaviour; one was a formal warning.
3. He found it difficult to control his drinking. For his first nine weeks at the approved premises, he was tested almost daily for alcohol. On 19 occasions, he gave positive readings. For the last six weeks of his life, he was tested seven times and gave five positive readings. Many of the readings were for relatively low levels of alcohol. On 14 October, he returned to the hostel drunk and distressed and spoke to his key worker about ending his life. After calming down, he went to bed. This was the only time he expressed thoughts of self harm to hostel staff.
4. He had begun a new relationship in November and his girlfriend came to stay nearby, on 23 December, for a planned visit of ten days. This did not work out and she returned home just a few hours after her arrival. On 28 December, he spoke to his offending manager about his girlfriend's rapid departure and the relationship ending which he appeared to accept. They also spoke of his successful allocation to supportive housing in Derby which he was positive about. After the meeting, his offender manager asked the police to carry out a welfare check on his girlfriend. He was annoyed about this when he heard about it from his mother.
5. At the end of December, the man spoke to staff at 1.25pm and asked for a curfew extension. This had not been arranged in advance and his request was turned down. He spent some of the afternoon drinking and returned to Wharflane House in time for his 7.00pm curfew. A number of residents described him as staggering. As staff considered he was drunk they encouraged him to eat some food and retire to his room.
6. At 11.00pm, night staff conducted room checks but could not get into his room. Emergency services were called and found that he had hanged himself with a ripped sheet around his neck and attached to the fire hinge on the back of the door. Ambulance staff confirmed he was dead and not able to be resuscitated.

7. We do not consider that the man's actions that night could have been predicted or prevented. However, staff at the approved premises were not clear about the requirements of alcohol testing and we make a recommendation about the management of residents using alcohol. The Probation Trust were initially unaware of a national requirement to contribute to funeral costs in such circumstances, but this was subsequently rectified.

## THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

8. An investigator opened the investigation on 6 January 2012 and collected the man's records. She met the manager of Wharflane House Approved Premises and other staff members. She was shown the man's room and given a tour of the premises. She returned to interview staff, including his offender manager, on two further occasions. Notices were issued to residents explaining the investigation, but no one responded to these notices. At the request of the investigator, staff asked residents who were there at the time of his death to be interviewed but none volunteered.
9. The investigator met the investigating police officer and maintained contact with him throughout the investigation. The police transcribed the man's mobile phone messages at her request.
10. The investigator liaised with the Coroner's officer and received a copy of the post-mortem report and police statements. She telephoned the safer custody department at HMP Onley and verified that the man had not been subject to suicide prevention procedures there during his last period of custody.
11. A family liaison officer from this office contacted the man's mother on 20 January to explain the purpose of the investigation and to invite her to raise any questions or concerns she had about the care her son received in the approved premises. She asked:
  - Why had he been located to the approved premises?
  - What were the conditions of his licence?
  - What had happened on his return to the hostel at 7.00pm?
  - Should they have received help with funeral expenses from the Probation Trust?
12. The man's family received a copy of the draft report as part of the consultation period. Written representations were provided by his mother in response to the findings of the investigation. Although the comments have led to no changes in the investigation report, the investigator has addressed the issues raised in separate correspondence to her.
13. A copy of the draft report was sent to the Probation Trust. They accepted the contents of the report and the recommendation.

## WHARFLANE HOUSE APPROVED PREMISES

14. Approved premises (AP), formerly known as probation and bail hostels, accommodate high risk offenders under probation supervision. They are still often referred to as hostels. The Approved Premises Manual 2011 provides national guidance and policy.
15. Wharflane House Approved Premises can accommodate 23 residents and is part of the Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust. Residents' rooms can be searched at any time but staff have no power to search residents. They can request to search residents' bags when they return to the hostel. Residents are not allowed mobile phones with cameras or internet access. A system of internal verbal, written and then final warnings is operated as well as formal enforcement of the licence by the offender manager. Ultimately a resident can be recalled to prison.
16. The manager oversees Wharflane House and another approved premises in the local area. The deputy manager is responsible for the day to day running of Wharflane House and the management of the 11 staff members and additional relief staff. Staff include probation service officers (PSOs), who work as key workers with the residents. In December 2011, Wharflane House was staffed by regular members of staff who had worked there for some time, together with long-term relief workers and weekend supervisors who were familiar with the hostel.
17. Each resident has an offender manager (OM) based at their probation office who is responsible for managing the individual's licence in liaison with the approved premises' staff. Staff at Wharflane House run a number of in-house groups, such as an alcohol awareness group. Residents have access to services such as employment and housing advice as well as two local community alcohol partnerships.
18. All staff have access to the probation computer system (known as CRAMS) which records all offender manager (OM) contacts and other information. Contact and information at the approved premises is recorded on a number of different documents – drug and alcohol testing sheets, curfew sheets, movement sheets, handover sheets – and important information is recorded on CRAMS.
19. Since the end of 2010, the Probation Trust has been developing best practice guidance. After the man's death this was implemented at Wharflane House, on 9 January 2012. The Trust's research had shown that between 4.30 – 11.30pm is the riskiest time in approved premises for violence and disturbances. One of the significant changes has been to the staff rota which now ensures experienced PSOs are on duty in the evening rather than unqualified night staff.

## KEY EVENTS

20. The man had convictions dating back to May 2007, mainly for alcohol related violent offences. He was remanded into HMP Brinsford and HMYOI Stoke Heath from 27 May 2009 until 23 November 2009. During this time, he was monitored under suicide and self-harm procedures for 17 days in June and again on 17 August. Records do not show when the latter monitoring ended and there are no details about what prompted the monitoring.
21. The man pleaded guilty to a robbery on 2 December 2010 and was sentenced to 16 months custody on 31 January. No concerns about his risk of suicide or self-harm were identified during this period in custody. He was released on licence from HMP Onley on 9 September 2011. A referral for approved premises accommodation had been made by his (then) offender manager. The offender manager wrote that he was:

“assessed as a high risk of harm to the general public and potential partners. From 2008 -2011 he has developed an escalating pattern (severity and frequency) of alcohol related violence....in my assessment a hostel is required where he can be monitored for levels of alcohol consumption and to bring him off the streets at night until there is evidence he is managing his own risk. He says pro social statements but continues in offending behaviour.”
22. With reference to questions about suicide attempts or self-harm in the referral, the offender manager wrote: “self-harm cuts to arms and overdose. Last incident in 2009. Some in custody but most in the community”.
23. On the day of his release, the man met his new offender manager (OM) at the probation office in Burton. They discussed the requirements of his licence, which ran until 11 May 2012, and included a number of extra conditions. (Extra licence conditions were added due to an offence of violence against his pregnant ex-partner in 2008 and an alleged offence against his sister.) His licence conditions included:
  - Live at Wharflane House Approved Premises
  - To comply with the requirements specified as directed by your supervising officer to address your alcohol misuse and anger management issues
  - Notify your supervising officer of any developing intimate relationships with women/men
  - Not to approach son and ex-partner without prior approval by offender manager and social services
  - Not to seek to approach or communicate with your sisters without prior approval of your supervising officer and social services
  - Not to enter family home without prior approval of supervising officer
24. When he arrived at Wharflane House, the man was told he was on a curfew from 7.00pm-7.00am and he would be alcohol tested daily for the first week. The approved premises' rules require residents to take an alcohol test when

required by staff but do not stipulate when or how often this should be done. The manager explained that alcohol testing was used:

“to give them some motivation for keeping their alcohol use low and we always say we sort of aim for the drink drive limit so if you’re below 35 milligrams then that seems fairly reasonable ... if anybody’s above 35 then we’ll be saying we’re a bit concerned about this ... what is that about, so it’s using it as a tool for discussion and not to trip people up”.

25. The manager explained that a positive test, or a series of positive tests, would not always result in action against the resident:

“We would have to be able to prove that the person’s risk [to the public] was increasing. Just because they get a row of high alcohol reading wouldn’t mean that they would be recalled. It would certainly suggest there’s a problem here that we need to put an intervention into place and if it continues what’s going wrong, what else can we do...”

26. At his induction, the man said he did not intend to drink while at Wharflane House and gave a negative test. He had a mobile phone with camera and internet access but was told he would have to change it to a basic model.
27. On 10 September, he told a member of staff that he had drunk one pint of lager the day before. He said he was fine if he did not mix his drinks. The staff member reminded him about his resolution the previous day not to drink at all and reinforced that he should only drink within safe limits (not above the drink drive limit). The next day, 11 September, he gave a positive alcohol reading after self-reporting he had drunk cans of both lager and cider.
28. On 12 September, the man’s offender manager (OM) had a meeting with him. They discussed his positive test the day before and he was advised that, if his drinking became excessive and frequent, there would be serious consequences. She noted that: “he appears to have established a momentum for change, needs encouraging to remain motivated”. She recorded her concerns about drinking cider, which he said made him more likely to be violent. The manager asked his key worker to examine this with him. The OM wrote after the meeting:

“Admitted being a poor copper in the past and previous self harm issues but suggested that there are no current concerns and he feels ‘happy’ but did admit that he can become a negative thinker when things go wrong.”

29. The man tested negative for alcohol that evening, but on 13 September he gave a positive reading. On 14 September, he saw a substitute key worker and discussed drinking cider. He asked what was reasonable and was told that they would not expect much more than the drink drive limit (score of 35). That night, he gave a reading of 23.
30. The OM spoke to staff from the programmes department of the Probation Trust for advice about which group would be the most suitable for him. He

was due to join Wharflane House's alcohol awareness group the following week and it was decided that the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) would be most appropriate. His attendance on the course was added as another licence condition.

31. Between 15 and 20 September, the man gave five negative alcohol readings. At an appointment with his OM on 16 September, he said he had been to the pub and had stopped drinking after a couple of drinks. Acknowledging that this was a good start, she suggested to him that this might be linked more to compliance with his licence rather than not wanting to drink. He was given a drink diary to complete.
32. On 20 September, he saw his OM again and they discussed the build up to his offence:

“Discussed previous offences and he related that it is all the same scenario. Jay went on to suggest that self-harm is the same, he feels so overwhelmed that he distracts himself with cuts. Reflected this back to him that his offences have followed similar patterns in that his emotions and negative feelings have built to the point of explosion and therefore asked what he could learn from this.”
33. The man said that he needed to try to deal with problems as they arise. In interview, his OM said that they had spoken about his risk of self-harm:

“I was aware that he'd previously cut his arms.....it was a historical risk of self-harm and nothing current and like I say when we talked about it, it was he said a method of release. He said when things got too much he'd explode and that was a release he felt then ... he was saying that when things get too much for him that is a strategy he used in the past, but he didn't mention any current use of that strategy and was quite focused on a future and change”.
34. That evening, the man missed the train to get him back in time for his curfew. He asked a station worker to call the hostel and it was agreed he would get the next train arriving back at 8.00pm. He then fell asleep on the train, missed his stop and arrived back at 9.35pm. His alcohol test showed he had been drinking but he was within the agreed safe limits.
35. The OM sent him a letter the next day about his behaviour the day before. She recognised that he had contacted Wharflane House because he was not going to meet his curfew, but he had drunk four pints of strong lager which was likely to cause him to fall asleep on the train. She commented “hostel staff have reported that your attitude, in general, is positive and you engage well in supervision sessions with myself”. She wrote that he would not get a final warning on this occasion, but his curfew would remain at 7.00pm for a further two weeks to “allow you to demonstrate your ongoing commitment to engage in the hostel regime and your licence”.

36. The next day, 22 September, after drinking seven cans of lager in the park he gave an alcohol reading of 58 when he returned to the hostel. The following morning, he was told his drinking levels were unacceptable. He gave a negative reading that evening.
37. On 24 September, the man met his key worker for the first time, as he had been on leave. They discussed his alcohol use and how this made him a “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” character. He said he would continue to drink alcohol but knew he lost control after four to five pints. On a positive note, he said he wanted to try and get a job or a place on a plumbing or electrical course.
38. The man tested negative four times for alcohol and once positively between 24 September and 28 September. During this time, he attended a meeting to discuss getting employment. At a meeting with his key worker and offender manager, on 28 September, he was encouraged to think about managing his overall alcohol intake rather than binge drinking. It was agreed that if he could show some improved management and there were no further curfew problems, they would consider random testing “which may also be more of a challenge as he may try and beat the system”. He tested negative for alcohol that evening, but tested positive over the next two days, 29 and 30 September.
39. He was next tested for alcohol on 3 October when he gave a positive reading. From 4 October, he gave 12 negative readings. During this time, he completed a referral for supported housing. He was participating in art work and staff described him as a promising artist. On 6 October, at a meeting with his OM and key worker, he was asked to complete his drink diary routinely as he was no longer being tested daily. He told the OM that drinking alcohol “builds his confidence. We discussed other methods of building confidence, such as MIND group but think TSP will help initially and to monitor that”.
40. On 11 October, the man received a verbal warning because he did not attend a residents’ meeting. Later that morning, he was seen in the dining room with his “head in hands” and spoke to his key worker about feeling paranoid and the strain of being in at Wharflane House. His key worker encouraged him to be positive and felt he was more relaxed after they had spoken. He later saw his OM and discussed his frustration at being monitored especially because he had tested negatively for alcohol. She acknowledged his efforts but reinforced that “when things not going well he is a significant risk”. That afternoon, it was decided to lift his curfew twice the following week if his progress continued.
41. On Friday 14 October, the man returned to the hostel and was described as “very drunk, angry and emotional.” He asked to see his key worker and said that he had found out from his sister (with whom he was not meant to have been in contact with) that his ex-partner (and mother of his child) was pregnant again. They spent 90 minutes talking and the key worker wrote:

“He made threats to finish his life and said he would throw himself under a bus. Asked him how he managed to get himself in this state financially,

explained he had cashed his giro and spent it all on alcohol. Said he had considered not returning to the hostel as felt he couldn't continue with hostel regime and being watched/supervised. Decided to motivate him for the short term until he was sober and could be dealt with the next day. Explained I was considering opening an ACCT [suicide/ self-harm prevention monitoring] document and he would be watched over the weekend. He stated this would increase his depression due mainly in my opinion to his excessive alcohol."

42. The next morning, the key worker and the man discussed that he was a risk to the public and himself when drunk. He was reminded that he should not contact his sister. The key worker did not assess him to be a risk to himself at that time.
43. The OM issued him with a formal warning; at the same time it was acknowledged as positive that he had sought out his key worker to discuss his feelings on the day. She wrote:

"I am extremely concerned regarding the choices you made, particularly in light of the fact that we have worked closely to analyse your offending behaviour. When dealing with a challenging situation of an emotional nature you react by consuming alcohol to excess which then heightens your risk of harm to the public. Despite this understanding of your risks you have pursued the same behaviour which culminated in your offending behaviour. You prioritised your alcohol consumption over the payment of your rent."
44. She withdrew his curfew extension and told him that she expected him to give some negative alcohol screens each week. She also reminded him that he was not allowed to communicate with his sister and that he must pay his rent at the hostel otherwise he risked being recalled to prison.
45. At a session on 19 October, the OM explained that he had come very close to being recalled to prison. His explanation that his sister had instigated contact was accepted. He tested positively for alcohol that evening and again on 20 October, but both were within the drink drive limit. Over the next four days, 21 – 24 October, he tested negatively, but the following three days he gave readings over the drink drive limit. On 29 October, his reading was particularly high, and a member of staff told him that his drinking was putting him at risk of losing his place at the hostel. Two days later he again tested positive for alcohol, but he then gave nine negative readings until 11 November when he tested positive. He told his offender manager that this was the longest period of abstinence he had had without medical support. During this time, he continued to attend the TSP course, completed the alcohol awareness group at Wharflane House, participated in country walks organised by staff and paid off some of his rent arrears. He also admitted to the OM that he recognised that he had a problem with alcohol.
46. On 16 November, four weeks after receiving the formal warning, a senior manager review took place. It was agreed that the man had made some

conscious improvements in relation to number of negative alcohol tests, engagement with offending programmes and housing appointments.

47. In line with the requirements of his licence, on 17 November, he reported that he was developing a friendship with a young woman over the social networking website Facebook. He said that he was accessing the site at the local library as he said he did not have a mobile. (In fact he appears to have held on to his mobile which had internet access.) He said he had disclosed to the woman that he was living at the approved premises and was considered a risk to children. They had not yet met, but she planned to visit the following weekend and stay in a local hotel. Hostel staff agreed to move a pre-arranged curfew extension from the Friday night to the Saturday.
48. On 25 November, the key worker smelt alcohol on the man's breath when he spoke to him about his rent arrears. He tested positively for alcohol at 10.00am and admitted having drunk a can of lager an hour before. He was due to meet his new girlfriend at the railway station that morning. He was reported not to be happy about being tested. He tested positively (but within the drink drive limit) that evening at 7.00pm.
49. The man discussed his new relationship with his key worker on 27 November and with his offender manager the next day. His OM and key worker advised caution about rushing into a relationship. They reminded him that in the past a relationship breakdown had led to him offending. He said he would keep discussing his feelings with hostel staff and his offender manager. He gave two negative alcohol readings in the next two days.
50. At his TSP course on 6 December, the man complained about the restrictions at Wharflane House and wanted to know how long he would be there until he could move on. He requested that his curfew be changed to accommodate his girlfriend's visit at the weekend. His key worker and OM agreed that he needed to return to the Wharflane House at 6.00pm to be alcohol tested and then his curfew would be moved to 11.00pm, when he would be tested again. They felt that he needed to be given the chance to show he could manage himself as his licence ended in May, after which there would be no probation support. On 11 December, he was tested for the first time in two weeks and gave positive readings at 6.00pm and 11.00pm, but both indicated a very small amount of alcohol. Staff considered that he had behaved responsibly over the weekend of his girlfriend's visit.
51. At his next session with his OM, the man asked about extending curfews over the Christmas period as his girlfriend was again planning to visit and stay locally for ten days. After discussion with her senior probation officer, his OM agreed some extensions, with additional alcohol testing at 6.00pm. He gave his girlfriend's address to staff so checks could be carried out as she had children and he was considered a risk.
52. On 21 December, the key worker noted that the man had marks on his hand. He explained he had punched a wall in frustration after a disagreement on the telephone with his girlfriend who had said that his curfews were making the

relationship difficult. The next day he discussed with his OM how he could have behaved differently and how intimidating this would have been if his girlfriend had been present.

53. On 25 December, Christmas Day, the man's alcohol test at 6.00pm showed that he had drunk a lot. A weekend supervisor recalled conducting this test. Although he did not write any observations down, he told the investigator that he was moaning about having to come back to the Wharflane House to be tested. He described him as being a "really nice person" when sober but that "as soon as he has a drink he starts becoming more and more, not confrontational, but his language becomes, and his attitude becomes, harder to like".
54. A relief worker at Wharflane House, who had previously worked as a PSO there, was on duty that evening with a colleague. She said they asked the man to turn down his music at about midnight. He responded that "his head is fucked at the moment". When they returned an hour later the music was off.
55. On 27 December, the key worker went to find him at 9.30am and found him still in bed. He eventually explained that his girlfriend had arrived on 23 December for her ten day visit as planned, but they had quarrelled and she had left soon afterwards.
56. The next day, on 28 December, he saw his OM and explained that after he argued with his girlfriend, he left the hotel to calm down (a strategy they had discussed) and when he went back she had left. He told the OM he had sent her a message to say the relationship was over. She wrote in the notes of their session:

"Discussed how he manages his feelings as historically he has self harmed, drank to excess and committed offences in similar situations and he stated that he has just forgotten about it and moved on, states he has changed and does not want to go backwards as it's not worth it, suggested he needs to focus on himself. Advised that emotions are not that easy and he needs to have strategies to manage, stated he has he is focusing on the future. He also noted that the relationship moved too quickly."
57. The OM told the man that it was likely he would be able to move into supportive housing in Derby before his licence expired and that she would extend his curfews in the build up to that. He asked for a curfew extension until 11.00pm that day, as he was going to see his mother, but she agreed to 9.00pm. (He did not visit his mother.) She telephoned Wharflane House and spoke to the key worker to explain the curfew extension for that evening. Following the conversation, she recorded: "discussed his general mood and behaviour, staff noted concerns he has been fairly morose and I noted my surprise that he seemed fairly upbeat and focused on the future with me!"
58. At the time of their conversation, she did not think that he was upset or thinking about hurting himself. With hindsight, she felt that he was "too happy". Following their meeting, she was concerned about his girlfriend's

sudden departure and asked the police to check on her wellbeing. The police confirmed that she was fine.

59. In a police statement made after the man's death, one of the residents said that he told him that his best friend had recently hanged himself. He said he had wanted to see his body but had not been allowed. He was agitated and anxious but the resident was not concerned about his welfare. Another resident also said that he had mentioned to him, about seven days before his death, that a friend had committed suicide.
60. On 29 December, the key worker spoke to him, who was not pleased that his girlfriend had been contacted by the police, or staff's suspicions that he might have harmed her. The key worker explained his OM had a duty of care to ensure the woman's safety. He said that although the man understood, he was focussed on himself. They agreed that he should learn from the experience and look forward to fewer curfews and moving to his own property. The key worker felt he was "slightly happier" by the end of the session. In interview, the OM said she had intended to talk to him at his next appointment about why she had arranged the police check.
61. After the man's death, a resident told police that he heard him shouting obscenities during a telephone call on the evening of 30 December. Another resident told the police that he told him that night that he had sorted things out with his girlfriend and that he was looking forward to a fresh start. (The week before he had told him that he had argued with his girlfriend on the telephone after she had found out she was pregnant.)
62. At 1.25pm, the man asked a PSO if his curfew time had been changed for that evening. Nothing had been arranged so he was told that he had to return for his usual 7.00pm curfew.
63. The weekend supervisor spoke to him when he returned for his curfew. He could tell that he had been drinking and suggested he get something to eat (a buffet had been provided) and to go to his room. Asked in interview about alcohol testing him, the supervisor said:

"There was no need because he was obviously drunk. He'd obviously had a drink anyway, so really and truly the best thing for me was just to move him out of the way for a bit and then he could come back down later."
64. The supervisor was also concerned that by taking the man to be tested he would have left the other worker on her own in the office operating the door. As she was not a regular worker she did not know many of the residents.
65. The relief worker said she saw the man come in and speak to the supervisor at the hatch when she started her shift at 7.00pm. He had mentioned that he had a drink, but she did not observe him to be very intoxicated. At 8.00pm the night supervisor came on duty and she gave a verbal handover about every resident although she did not recall saying anything about him being drunk. In his police statement, the night supervisor says that the weekend supervisor

told him that the man had returned drunk and been told to go to his room to sleep it off.

66. A number of residents who saw the man that evening gave the police statements. One resident had had a quick drink with him in the local pub just before he returned to the hostel. He described him "as drunk, but it didn't seem that bad as he was walking normally and talking normally". The resident said they had exchanged small talk and he did not mention being upset about anything. One said he saw him "staggering" in the street but shook his hand and said his speech was fine. Another said he saw him "swaying from side to side". One resident said he was at the front hatch queuing to sign for his curfew. He said he "seemed drunk, he was happy, but was trying to press the buzzer and could not manage to as (he) was staggering around a lot".
67. While waiting to sign in, the man asked one resident how long it had been before he had been allowed back to Burton (where they were both from). He told him two years and asked him how long before he was allowed back there, but he did not reply. He signed his curfew sheet and said "got to get my head down". Another resident said he knocked on his door at about 10.15pm that night but did not get an answer. When he tried the handle, which he usually did, it would not open and he went away.
68. At 11.00pm, after putting the alarms on for the night, the night supervisor and the relief worker started their curfew checks, entering each resident's room to check they were there. Just after 11.00pm, they went to the man's room but were unable to open the door. They called out to him but received no response. Using his body weight, the supervisor attempted to force the door but was unable to open it more than an inch. He placed his hand through the door and felt him behind the door. His skin was cold. They locked the door and the relief worker returned to the office to call the emergency services while the supervisor continued with the checks.
69. The emergency services arrived within ten minutes and the fire officers got into the man's bedroom. He had tied a ripped sheet around his neck and attached the other end to the back of the door. He was cut down and pronounced dead by ambulance staff.
70. A half empty bottle of vodka was found in his room. According to his family, he had spoken to his mother when he returned to Wharflane House and had not said anything of concern. He had posted a message on Facebook at about 8.30pm saying goodbye. His mobile phone messages show that he sent his last message at 7.19pm and read his last message at 8.48pm. None of the messages revealed his intention to take his own life. A poem about his heart break was found in his room after he died, but it is not known when it was written.

### Family Liaison

71. The manager of Wharflane House, and on-call duty manager that night, arrived there just after midnight. The police asked for the details of the man's next of kin, but only his mother's address had been recorded, with no phone number. Because of the distance to her home, the police said that they would ask the local police force to inform her of her son's death. Unfortunately, this did not take place until the following morning at 8.00am. The man's mother told our family liaison officer that the police officer had very little information.
72. Later that morning, the manager was contacted by the man's sister. She passed on all the information she received from the police and the Coroner. She also spoke to the man's father.
73. A number of Wharflane House staff and the man's OM attended his funeral, with his family's permission. The OM returned his property to his mother. At the time, neither the manager nor her manager were aware that the Approved Premises manual 2011 states that in such circumstances: "Trusts are required to offer to pay reasonable funeral costs of up to £3000". After they were informed of this by the investigator, the funeral costs were paid by the Trust.

### Resident support

74. Those residents awake and around the hostel at the time of the man's death were spoken to at the time. All the others were told the next day. One resident who had previously been monitored as a risk of self-harm was spoken to for a considerable time by the manager and other staff.

### Staff support

75. The manager stayed at the hostel until 4.00am and spoke to the night supervisor and relief worker extensively. Staff were offered the services of the employee assistance programme. All the staff spoken to by the investigator felt well supported by their manager and the Probation Trust after the man's death.

## ISSUES

### Self-Harm

76. The man had some history of self-harm, but the last recorded incident was in 2009 in custody. When he spoke with his offender manager soon after his release he spoke about using self-harm as a release mechanism when things built up. He identified similar triggers for both his offending and his self harm. The end of a relationship had been identified as one of these triggers. However, he was not known to self-harm when under the influence of alcohol.
77. On 14 October 2011 he spoke of suicide to his key worker when he was drunk and distressed. Although his key worker spoke to him about putting in place self-harm monitoring, he decided not to. The next day he did not consider him to be a risk.
78. When the man met with his OM on 28 December, he gave the impression that he was coping with the breakdown of his relationship. She discussed his presentation with the key worker, who said that staff felt he was quite morose. With hindsight, she thought he might have been putting on a brave face. He was spoken to at length previously when he mentioned thoughts of harming himself and was helped to develop strategies to cope with challenging situations. He was not assessed as being at risk of suicide or self-harm by either approved premises staff or his offender manager. We are satisfied that there were no obvious indicators that he intended to harm himself.
79. A number of staff who had a close relationship with him regretted that they were not on duty on the evening of 31 December. They considered they had built a good relationship with him and wondered whether he would have opened up to them about his intentions if they had been there. Following a good practice review at the approved premises the most qualified staff are now on duty during the evening, which has been recognised as the most risky time for residents.

### Alcohol testing

80. The man took his life after drinking during the day. A half empty bottle of vodka was found in his room. He did not have an alcohol test when he returned to Wharflane House so it is difficult to judge how much he had had to drink at that stage. The toxicology report found a blood alcohol level of 240 mg/dl. The coroner confirmed that this is a high reading but not a fatal one – normally 350/400 mg/dl is considered a fatal level. A driver would be prosecuted if the level was in excess of 80 mg/dl.
81. One of the condition's of the man's licence was to work with his offender manager to address his alcohol misuse. As a result he was attending the alcohol awareness group, Thinking Skills Programme and being tested for alcohol regularly. There is no evidence that he was involved in offending during the four months he was at Wharflane House.

82. In response to the high number of negative tests, and as motivation for the man to begin to show if he was able to self-manage, his daily testing regime was changed to random testing. After having almost daily tests for two and a half months he was then tested only seven times in the six weeks before his death. Of these seven times, two tests were negative.
83. The investigation has found that Wharflane House staff had different views about what random testing meant. The manager explained that staff should test when there was evidence, or a suspicion, that someone has been drinking (but should not be undertaken if the individual then reacts in an aggressive way.) Some staff would test if they thought someone was drunk and would discuss with the resident what they had been doing. Another worker said that to test when drunk was unnecessary as there was already evidence that the person had been drinking. He also felt that the risk of violence from a drunken resident would deter him from carrying out a test.
84. When the man returned, apparently drunk, he was advised to get some food and go to bed. If a test had been carried out at this point, it is possible it would have given him the opportunity to talk about his concerns. It is unfortunate that none of the staff on duty that night knew him well or were key workers. When he had returned to the hostel on a previous occasion and was upset, he had spoken to his key worker who was able to calm him down. However, he did not appear distressed when he returned.
85. There was no clear guidance to staff about when they should undertake random alcohol tests. It was not explicitly stated that residents should be tested if they appeared drunk or if staff were suspicious they had been drinking. We understand that since the man's death the Probation Trust has begun to develop a comprehensive guide about when to alcohol test residents.
86. There are also safety concerns about leaving someone unchecked after they have been drinking heavily. Staff at the approved premises were not consistent about what, if any, obligation they had to check on a resident in these circumstances. Physical checks take place at 11.00pm and 6.00am but these are curfew checks.
87. An alcohol test or a physical check on the man might not have deterred him from taking the action he did, but the investigation has indicated a variation in practice among the staff group and a lack of clear guidance. We therefore recommend:

**The Probation Trust should ensure that there is clear and comprehensive guidance for staff working in approved premises about managing residents with alcohol issues.**

## **CONCLUSION**

88. The man had been living at Wharflane House approved premise for some months and despite some problem with alcohol, he appeared to be progressing well. He had recently broken up with a girlfriend. On the day of his death he spent the day drinking and returned intoxicated. He was encouraged to go to his room to sleep off the effects. Some time that evening, he hanged himself in his room.
89. The investigation has found there was a lack of clarity about arrangements for alcohol testing, but there is no suggestion that this was a contributory factor to his death. We are satisfied that his actions could not reasonably have been predicted or prevented by staff at the approved premises who had been supportive of him during his time there.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Probation Trust should ensure that there is clear and comprehensive guidance for staff working in approved premises about managing residents with alcohol issues.

Accepted by the Probation Trust.