Homeless Offenders in the Community:
The Issues and Challenges for Probation Supervision

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Summary Research and evaluation into probation practice has traditionally focused on the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural approaches when working with offenders. However, the focus more recently has moved towards examining the extent to which offenders’ personal and social circumstances impact on probation supervision and emerging literature provides strong evidence linking improved social factors to desistance from offending. This paper is based upon a larger study of homeless individuals coming into contact with the criminal justice system in Dublin in 2003. Drawing on findings from a series of focus groups with Probation and Welfare Officers and Probation and Welfare Service records, it attempts to quantify the number of homeless individuals referred to the Probation and Welfare Service, examines the significance of the social and personal circumstances of these homeless individuals and focuses on the issues and challenges that emerge for Probation and Welfare Officers when working with such a client group. Overall, while both homeless and non-homeless offenders share many of the risk factors associated with offending, it is argued that homeless offenders present specific challenges given their marginalised existence and often chaotic lifestyles. The paper engages with the literature in questioning if the remit of probation work needs to be broadened to include a stronger focus on the community and those social factors most associated with desistance.