

Prisoners: housing on release

This factsheet looks at your housing options when you come out of prison

If you are still serving a sentence of 12 months or less, 'Through the Gate' services are available in prison and can advise you how to find housing on release from prison.

NACRO's Resettlement Advice Service on 0300 123 1999 can advise you on your housing options after leaving prison.

Family and friends

It is often difficult to get housing on release from prison, so this can be a good short-term option.

Hostels and nightshelters

Hostel places are limited - you may need to go on a waiting list. Some hostels are only for certain groups, e.g. people with mental health problems, or under 25s. You may be able to claim benefits to pay the rent.

Nightshelters usually only offer a basic mattress and food for free. They are run by churches and charities and are available in the winter.

Supported housing

Supported housing can help you adjust back into the community. The level of support depends on the type of accommodation and your needs. You may need a referral. Most projects have waiting lists.

Finding homelessness services

You can search for accommodation, advice and other services for homeless people at homeless.org.uk

Private renting

Renting privately can be expensive. You may be able to claim benefits to help with paying rent. How much you can get depends on your income, age, and the size and location of the property. If you are under 35, benefits will usually only pay for a room in a shared house. Landlords or letting agents will want references, a deposit, rent in advance, and proof that you can pay the rent.

Apply as homeless

If you apply as homeless, the council must assess your needs and devise a personalised housing plan (PHP) with steps you and the council will take to find somewhere suitable for you to live. If you were referred to the council while still in prison, the assessment process may start before you are released.

On release, the council has to give you somewhere to live while it looks into your homelessness application only if it believes you *may be* homeless, eligible (some people from abroad aren't eligible) and in 'priority need'. Seek advice if the council refuses to provide you with somewhere to stay, you may be able to challenge this.

Some people, e.g. those with dependent children and pregnant women, are in 'priority need' automatically. Other people can be in 'priority need' if they are vulnerable, for example due to old age, mental or physical illness, history of being in care or in an institution. Former prisoners are not automatically vulnerable, though it can be a factor, especially if you are finding it difficult to manage outside of prison.

If you are vulnerable, you will be in priority need if the council decides that, without accommodation, you would be more likely to come to harm than an 'ordinary person' would. The council can look at the support that is available to you when assessing your situation. Only consistent and predictable support should be considered.

Longer-term accommodation

If you are in priority need and not 'intentionally homeless', the council will only arrange longer-term housing if - after following the PHP - you still can't find anywhere to live.

But if the council says you made yourself homeless 'intentionally', e.g. because you lost your home after you went to prison for committing a crime, it will only have to house you for a short period. Get advice on whether you can challenge this.

The council will check if you have a local connection with its area. If you don't, it may ask another council to help you.

Further advice

You can get further advice from england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice, local Shelter advice service or local Citizens Advice. If you have nowhere to sleep tonight, are at risk of harm or losing your home within the next 2 months, call Shelter Helpline on **0808 800 4444** for advice and information on your options.*

*Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks.



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Note

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