

Getting help with resettlement in prison

As you get close to your release date you may be thinking about support you need to resettle in the community.

There should be resettlement services provided at the prison to help you with this. This includes help with housing, employment and benefits.

You should also get support with health issues including being linked to support services such as substance misuse services.

Employment advice and support

If you would like help finding work for your release, ask to speak with an employment adviser.

They may be able to help you with the following:

- Think about the types of jobs you could apply for depending on your skills and interests
- Help you prepare a CV
- Give advice about job searching and making job applications
- Practice interview skills

If you are eligible for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) you may be able to apply for and start paid work whilst you are still serving time in prison. For more information, see our Information sheet about *Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)*.

Organisations which may be useful can be found under 'advice services' at the bottom of this information sheet.

Housing advice

If you need help with accommodation for release, you should ask to see a housing or resettlement adviser, your keyworker, or your Offender Manager.

Referral to your local council

The role of the prison

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities, including prisons, to get involved earlier with the aim of preventing homelessness for individuals.

This means that staff at the prison must refer anyone who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to local housing authorities for an assessment. They must do this regardless of whether you might be considered priority need, have a local connection or if you are suspected of being 'intentionally homeless'.

Before making a referral, prisons must have your consent to make the referral and to include your contact details.

You can ask to be referred to any local authority in England and may also be referred to more than one authority. However, it can be very difficult to get housing in an area if you do not have a local connection there and you will often be referred to a different area.

It is important to note that the prison's responsibility only extends to making this referral. The *Homelessness Reduction Act: Duty to Refer Policy Framework* has more detail about this duty - please contact our Advice and Information service if you would like a copy.

You can also present to a local housing authority yourself to see if they can help. You can walk in when you are released, write to the local authority housing department, or phone the local authorities housing department. Many local authorities also have a 'homelessness' section on their website with an online referral form.

If the council office is closed, check their website as there should be an emergency number to call.

The Shelter website provides a useful template on how to ask for help and a tool to find contact information for your local council. These can be found here:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/get_help_from_the_council/sample_homelessness_application_email

The role of the local authority

The local authority then has a duty to assess you for housing if you tell them you are homeless or will be homeless within 56 days, and will decide how they can help. This is called 'making a homelessness application'.

If it is possible that you could be vulnerable, they might have a duty to offer you temporary accommodation whilst they find out more information.

However, it is important to note that making a homelessness application does not guarantee that you will be offered housing.

The local authority decides what action to take and whether they have a duty to house you long-term. They will look at:

- Whether you are legally homeless
- Whether you meet immigration conditions
- Whether you are in priority need
- Whether you are 'intentionally homeless'
- Whether you have a local connection to the area

The local authority must still provide you with free housing advice and information if they do not offer you long-term housing.

If you think you should be getting help from the council, speak to your keyworker, Offender Manager, a housing adviser, a legal adviser, or the Shelter helpline (details below).

There is also more information about local authorities housing duties at:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/homelessness_applications/duty_of_public_authority_to_refer

Other housing options

There are different types of housing which might be available depending upon the amount and kind of support you need and the area you are returning to.

Hostels and Supported Accommodation

Some areas have hostels and other supported accommodation. These often have entry criteria based on things like your age, gender, local connection and support needs.

For example, one hostel might be for men over 25 with a history of alcohol misuse, whilst another might be for women with mental health issues or other vulnerabilities.

To get a place in a hostel you normally must get a referral from a named agency, such as the local council or a homeless support service. In some places there are waiting lists. Be aware that it is usually very difficult to get a place in supported accommodation if you do not have a local connection to that area.

The following websites can be used to search for homeless services in your local area:

www.homeless.org.uk/search-homelessness-services

Private Rented Accommodation

Private rented accommodation might be an option for you.

You should think about whether you have money to use for deposit and rent in advance. If not, ask a housing adviser if there are any schemes in your local area to help with this, such as 'rent deposit schemes'.

You should also consider if you have references you could use.

You should think about how you would be able to pay rent and how much you can afford.

If you are likely to need to claim housing benefit to pay your rent, you should check you are eligible and see what the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is for the area you are looking at. This is the maximum amount of housing benefit that you could get to pay for privately rented accommodation in this area.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates can be looked up here:

<https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>

Other housing options

There may be other accommodation options in your local area which are not covered above.

Make sure you speak to a housing or resettlement adviser to find out what your options might be.

You could also speak to Shelter who help with housing issues and homelessness. You can call them on 0808 800 4444, on weekdays between 8am - 8pm, and on weekends between 9am - 5pm.

Benefits and grants

Job Centre Plus

If you need to apply for benefits for your release, ask to speak to Job Centre Plus staff at the prison. They should meet with you before you are released to work out what benefits you will be entitled to on release.

You could also ask to speak to your keyworker or Offender Manager for advice.

Universal Credit has replaced these benefits for most people:

- Housing Benefit
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income Support

A claim cannot be made in advance of release but you can start to get the required documentation in order so we would suggest asking to see Job Centre Plus staff, the resettlement team, or your Offender Manager as you approach your release date.

You should ask Job Centre Plus staff, the resettlement team or your Offender Manager if you need help with setting up a bank account or need ID for your claim.

Upon release, you should make an online claim as soon as possible. You can contact the local Job Centre for assistance, or a Universal Credit helpline agent should be able to help you submit a claim over the phone.

Further guidance on Universal Credit claims for those leaving prison can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-prison-leavers/supporting-prison-leavers-a-guide-to-universal-credit>

Local Welfare Assistance Schemes

Local Welfare Assistance Schemes are run by some local councils to provide support in an emergency.

Each local scheme will have different eligibility criteria and offer different types of support.

You will usually need to be on a low income or receiving certain benefits. There may also be other criteria.

You will not normally receive money. You could get vouchers for food or clothing. You could get items you need for your home such as a bed, cooker or a fridge.

Information about benefits and other grants

Turn2us is a national charity that can give you advice on welfare benefits and other charitable grants that might be available to you.

You can contact their helpline on 0808 802 2000 (Monday to Friday between 9am–8 pm).

The Hardman Trust have a directory which provides information on different forms of financial support available, including funds available for business startups.

You can call them on 01983 550355 or write to: PO Box 108, Newport, IW, PO30 1YN. Please contact our Advice and Information Service if you would like us to send you the funds section of their directory.

Other finance and debt advice

If you need advice about money or debt you can contact MoneyHelper for free, impartial help on 0800 138 7777.

Health and Social care on release

If you are not registered with a GP in the community, you can ask someone from healthcare to help you arrange this for your release. This is particularly important if you are receiving medication that will need to continue once you are released.

If you are currently receiving treatment for a health issue whilst you are in prison, this should continue when you are released into the community. Healthcare staff in the prison should make sure relevant services in the community are told about your health needs and when you are being released.

If you have been receiving support for mental health issues in prison this might include a referral to mental health support in the community such as the local Community Mental Health Team (CMHT).

If you think you need a referral and are unsure if this has happened, ask to speak to healthcare staff.

Prisoners Advice Service (PAS) have a useful information sheet on the *Care Act and Resettlement*. Please contact PAS or our Advice and Information Service if you would like a copy of this.

Referral to substance misuse service in the community

If you have been receiving support for drug or alcohol problems in prison and need community support on release this should be arranged by staff at the prison, usually someone from drug and alcohol services or from healthcare.

Before you are released, they will make a referral to support services in the community. They should let them know when you will be released from prison. This is so that your treatment continues when you are released.

You will often be given an appointment to see the service in the community on the day of your release, or soon after if this is not possible. It is important that you go to this appointment, especially if you need medication to help you manage in the community.

Social care in the community

If you have a disability or need support, you might be able to get help from social services when you return to live in the community.

It is important that the social services where you are going to live know about you before you leave prison. The local council where you are in prison should tell the council in the area you will be living about your needs. They should then look at what help you will need when you live in the community.

Further information

Useful PSIs and PSOs (these should be available in the library):

The Homelessness Reduction Act: Duty to Refer Policy Framework

PSI 04/2015 Rehabilitation Services Specification - Custody

Release on Temporary Licence Policy Framework

Online resources:

- <https://www.shelter.org.uk/>
- www.homeless.org.uk
- https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/homelessness_applications/duty_of_public_authority_to_refer
- <https://www.hardmantrust.org.uk/directory/>
- <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Your-Situation/A-prisoner>
- <https://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/what-we-do/work-with-prison-leavers/>
- <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-prison-leavers/supporting-prison-leavers-a-guide-to-universal-credit>

Other:

Prisoners' Advice Service Information Sheet – *Care Act and Resettlement*

Advice services

Service	Telephone number	Address	Website
Shelter Run an advice and support service, offering one-to-one, personalised help with housing issues and homelessness.	0808 800 4444	Shelter Head Office, 88 Old Street, London, EC1V 9HU	https://www.shelter.org.uk/
Crisis Work directly with thousands of homeless people every year, providing vital help so that people can rebuild their lives.	0300 636 1967	66 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT	www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/
NACRO Resettlement Advice Work with people in the run up to release to ensure they are practically and emotionally	0300 123 1999	46 Loman Street, London, SE1 0EH	www.nacro.org.uk/

prepared for life on the outside. They signpost and support service users in trying to find places in education, training or employment and to try and obtain accommodation			
Unlock Run a helpline which provides information and advice to people with convictions. Its focus is on helping people to overcome the problems and difficulties that are caused by criminal convictions	01634 247 350	The Helpline, Unlock, Maidstone Community Support Centre, 39-48 Marsham Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1HH	https://unlock.org.uk/
Money Helper Provide free impartial help on financial matters	0800 138 7777	N/A	https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en
Turn 2 Us A national charity that helps individuals to gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services that they may be entitled to	0808 802 2000	200 Shepherds Bush Road, Hammersmith, W6 7NL	www.turn2us.org.uk/