

Finding a place to live





Introduction

This section is primarily for readers who will not be returning to their home and who are looking for a place to live.

You will find in this section a brief overview of:

- Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS)
- living in approved premises
- renting privately
- renting through the council/social housing
- information on the new temporary accommodation scheme CAS3
- living on the streets

Additionally, you will find:

- signposting to housing advice services and resources
- references to housing charities that may be able to help you depending on your personal circumstances

Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS)

CRS providers work with people who have been convicted of an offence and given a custodial or community sentence. They support people to maintain the accommodation they already have or to find new accommodation, avoiding homelessness. The service is available for people under probation supervision and for sentenced people in custody who will be under probation supervision on release.

CRS providers are awarded contracts by region and will have a presence in every prison in England and Wales. They receive referrals for their service from probation practitioners for people in custody or the community, and this can be at any point in someone's sentence, whenever a need arises.

They will arrange for the first appointment to be face-to-face wherever possible, and can meet people in custody and community locations. An action plan will be agreed to reach the accommodation outcomes needed and work with the individual to achieve their goals. When the case is closed, they will confirm what action has been taken and the next steps to continue on their journey.

CRS Accommodation services aim to ensure that people are supported to find or keep settled accommodation. This has been identified as a key factor in successful rehabilitation and a reduction in re-offending.

They achieve this by delivering a comprehensive and flexible service tailored to the individual, that:

- addresses and resolves identified housing needs
- builds on the strengths of the people we work with
- delivers improved outcomes for all groups of people
- is tailored to support the specific needs of key groups

To deliver a successful service, we establish, maintain and build relationships with social housing and private landlords, to sustain a network of organisations that can provide assistance to individuals in need of accommodation. We also work with local authorities to develop partnership arrangements to facilitate effective support plans under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and create links with rent deposit/bond schemes and credit unions.

Pre-release support

- CRS providers will work to maintain tenancies by liaising/advocating with landlords.
- If relinquishing a tenancy is the right option, they will work with housing providers to carry out due process.
- They will secure new tenancies on release by arranging for assessments to be completed in custody or over phone/videocall and completing applications/referrals.
- They will ensure legal rights are upheld by working with local authorities once Duty to Refer has been submitted.
- They will secure emergency accommodation if circumstances change at release.
- Where possible, they will arrange to meet people at the prison gate/ Departure Lounge/Resettlement Café.

Approved Premises (APs)

In England and Wales there are over a hundred Probation Approved Premises, or Hostels as they are commonly known. It may well be your first experience of the outside world for some time, so knowing what they can offer you is important. Rather than viewing APs as a negative experience or something to be endured before getting total freedom, try to see it as a positive experience where you get help and assistance to readjust to living outside of prison. You can use your time in a hostel to adjust to the changes that have taken place during your sentence, making the world less daunting by ensuring you are prepared for future eventualities.

More information on approved premises can be found at the National Approved Premises Association (NAPA) website, available at napa-uk.org which includes a list of available premises in the UK.

APs can help you with finding move-on accommodation and give you space and time to find something suitable, rather than having to rush and agree to the first available option. They also help facilitate calls to

claim any benefits you need, UC or JSA, ESA, PIP, pension credit, etc. Local organisations visit to inform you of what they can offer and they also have courses available.

LearnDirect can also offer help with updating your work skills to assist your return to the workplace. For more information on benefits, please see the appendix.

APs have rules and curfews, but these can help you with issues around substance misuse, timekeeping and adjusting to the outside world. There are 'buddies' who can show you around the local town and make sure you get to appointments, such as probation or benefit interviews, on time. On site you will be assigned a keyworker who will see you every week to discuss any issues that you may be having and discuss your future plans.

Setting up a bank account can be daunting if you haven't had the chance to do it in prison. Your keyworker should be able to guide you through this process. There are also fun and creative activities laid on and sometimes outings are planned. The weekly service charge for APs is usually £30 a week, including food – although if you require a special diet you may struggle to get exactly what you need.

The staff, your keyworker or buddy can advise you on local charities and shops with discount furniture, if you are settling into the same area. Local charities and support workers may also visit the premises.

Chaplaincy is available for any faith-based support or even just for a private chat.

Private renting

Local Housing Allowance

When renting privately it is important to calculate first how much you can afford to spend on your rent. Local Housing Allowance (LHA), also referred to as Housing Benefit, has different rates depending on your age and living situation.

If you are under 35 and claiming LHA, you are only eligible for a single bedroom in a shared house or a bedsit. If you are looking to rent a one-bed flat or house then you should contact the council, or check their website, for a list of the allowances available.

Once you have calculated your monthly rental budget, including any personal payments, then the house hunt begins!

Make sure that where you will be living has mobile phone reception, check what bills are, or are not, included with the rent and also,

if possible, try to visit the area at different times of the day. By visiting at different times you can determine what the nightlife is like, what the neighbourhood is like and also how far local shops and transport links are.

For those under 35 you may find it difficult to rent privately if using LHA or if you have anti-social behaviour recorded. This is a complicated area and it is worth speaking to an advisor from CAB, Shelter or a local advice centre.

Rent deposit and fees

If you are looking to rent privately you will need to find:

- a deposit, maximum of 5 weeks rent in England and Wales and 2 months in Scotland
- your first month's rent, which will need to be paid in advance

It is important to bear in mind that from June 2019 letting agent fees for tenants have been banned throughout the UK.

References may also need to be collected. Letting agents normally run a credit check and are also likely to require a reference from previous landlord(s) and employers. You may also need to draw the letting agent or landlord's attention to the fact that you have just left or are leaving prison.



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If you require assistance with your deposit most councils run a Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) although there are likely to be conditions attached to the service. Some schemes are only open to priority-need council clients or former drug users. If your local council does not have an RDS or you are not eligible, it is worth asking them what support schemes are available. Local charities quite often offer help in this area, so speaking to your local CAB or advice centre may provide you with further assistance, as they will be aware of sources of funding and help.

Some agents run a 'nil deposit option' scheme where there is a lower deposit, equivalent to a week or two's rent and there is an increase to the rent, spreading the deposit cost. This is not refundable and will not be paid when you leave the tenancy.

Social/council housing

Duty to Refer and Local Authority support for prisoners

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local housing authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas, and to provide homelessness services to all those who are eligible.

The duty to refer helps ensure that services are working together effectively to prevent homelessness by ensuring that peoples' housing needs are considered when they come into contact with public authorities.

The duty to refer requires specified public authorities to identify and refer a service user who is homeless or may be threatened with homelessness, to a local housing authority of the service user's choice.

Prior to a person's release from prison, their probation practitioner will complete a duty to refer to the local authority the prisoner is returning to, up to 56 days before release (certain local authorities accept duty to refers earlier).

A Housing Assessment will then be arranged by the Community Rehabilitation Service provider prior to release either in person or via a phone call/video call, and the local authority will make a decision on if that person is deemed to be in 'priority need' or not and if there is a local connection to the area.



Should a person be deemed to be in priority need, the local authority will have a duty to place the person in temporary accommodation on release while further options are explored.

For those homeless people who are not found to be in priority need the local authority must advise and assist them with housing advice via their Housing Options Team. Everyone is entitled to a written decision, known as a Section 184 letter, from the local authority explaining why they were turned down and did not meet their criteria for housing. A common rejection is a result of the applicant making him or herself intentionally homeless due to losing their accommodation by going to prison.

For people found not in priority need, the local authority will have no duty to accommodate immediately on release but will support with further referrals to various accommodation providers and may also be able to support with a deposit for private rent (see private rented section).

Priority need – important information

If you feel that the local authority's decision was wrong, it is advisable to request a decision letter and then immediately approach a housing solicitor, Law Centre or CAB to challenge the decision. You will only have 21 days in which to appeal against the decision! CRS providers can support with this and usually contact Shelter's legal team for advice and guidance.

Most local authorities will not view a prison leaver as being in priority need simply because they have been released from prison, unless they are deemed vulnerable. The key question which may be asked to decide if the person should be deemed vulnerable in this context is: 'Is the applicant more vulnerable than an ordinary person if made homeless?'. This means that an applicant must be less able to look after themselves when homeless, or less able to fend for him or herself in finding accommodation, and more vulnerable than the average homeless person on the street.

The Code of Guidance (a policy document which local authorities should refer to for guidance), sets out relevant factors regarding institutional background, such as the length of time a person was in care, or in prison or in the armed forces and whether the applicant has been able to obtain and/or maintain accommodation during that period. Unless institutionalisation can be proved, most prisoners will not be housed by the local authority unless they have an additional priority need. What housing advisors find is that most local authorities will look at whether the client has made themselves 'intentionally homeless' and whether they have a local connection to that borough at the first point of contact. Intentionally homeless in this context refers to someone who previously had a tenancy and who either abandoned their property or were evicted for non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour. Prisoners often fall into

the category of 'making themselves intentionally homeless' for being absent from their home and usually unable to pay their rent, or being evicted for breach of their tenancy conditions.

According to section 195A of the Localism Act, if a suitable offer of accommodation by the local authority is offered and refused, then the homelessness duty ceases. Under the term 'suitable', the council can now place people into Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation.

In Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, to be in 'priority need' refers to a person who has dependent children they normally reside with or to someone who is vulnerable due to old age, mental illness or a physical disability. A life-threatening illness such as HIV, sickle cell or hepatitis C could also count as a physical disability. Evidence of a physical disability or mental illness will be required by providing a medical report from a GP or similar.

Eligibility

To be 'eligible for assistance' means that you must be a British citizen, or not be subject to any asylum/immigration controls, therefore you must have been granted permanent leave to remain in the UK. Proof of your identity, such as a birth certificate or passport, will be needed. You will also need a National Insurance number to be eligible to apply for public funds, such as Universal Credit or JSA, ESA, etc.

Waiting lists and Bidding

Anyone can apply to be on his or her council's housing list, but the wait can be very long – over 2 years is a common wait time! Once you have a decision from the council with your band/point/score you are then able to 'bid' on available properties. As bidding is usually done online, if you don't have anyone to bid on your behalf whilst in prison, you usually cannot start bidding until your release.

When you find a property that you like, you then indicate your interest and all those who indicate their interest are prioritised in order of their rating. Bidders are invited to view the property in descending rated order and are also at this stage interviewed by a local housing association or social housing provider (normally the landlord) to ensure that the housing on offer is suitable.

If your bid is successful, you will be offered a tenancy, usually a 12-month probationary lease. Most councils have rules on how many suitable properties can be rejected before they remove you from the waiting list, usually it is only two or three!

Some councils will refuse to put you on their list if you are a prisoner, or suspend the account if already on the list until you have been released from prison.

As with a local authority's priority need decisions, if you feel the band you have been placed in doesn't reflect the situation you find yourself in, you can appeal. The council will usually provide details for how to do that in their decision letter, but otherwise their website should detail how to appeal their decision.

If you need assistance with the application process, whether it be completing forms and paperwork, producing evidence or appealing a decision, it is always worth speaking to the housing team based in your prison as they will be able to offer support and guidance.

Temporary accommodation on release – CAS3

The Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and those moving on from Approved Premises (CAS1) or the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (CAS2), and assistance to help them move into settled accommodation.

From July 2021 CAS3 has been available in five 'vanguard' regions providing temporary accommodation for approximately 3,000 offenders who are subject to probation supervision and at risk of homelessness on release. From December 2022 CAS3 will roll out nationally, available in 12 regions, providing temporary accommodation for approximately 12,000 offenders at risk of homelessness per annum.

To be eligible for CAS3, you are required to be under Probation Licence on release from prison, including Post Sentence Supervision (PSS).

All CAS3 referrals must come from your probation practitioner. If you believe you are eligible, please speak with your probation practitioner and they will explain the criteria.

No Fixed Abode (NFA) and living on the streets

Homeless Link advertise the London-wide Winter Night Shelters list every November and fortunately some of these shelters do allow for self-referrals. Quite a few of the shelters remain open until the end of March.

Many hostels and supported accommodation providers now only accept referrals from preferred agencies rather than self-referrals or 'any agency' referrals. These agencies vary, for example, in London they can be the Street Outreach Teams, Social Services and the Probation Service. Other hostels' referral criteria may prioritise homeless day centres or the local authority.

The Street Outreach Teams are the people working for charities such as Thames Reach who go around various streets of London looking for

rough sleepers to encourage them to move into hostels. However, the reason many people continue to be homeless is that they may be barred from hostels they once stayed at. Reasons for the exclusions can vary from non-payment of service charge, rent arrears, non-engagement with keyworkers, assaults on staff, etc. Another common factor is some economic migrants/refugees who may not be entitled to any benefits are thus unable to claim LHA, which is essential for staying in hostels/ supported accommodation. In addition, not all homeless people sleep in high-visibility areas due to fear of attack so they prefer car parks, cemeteries, public parks, etc. – places where some outreach teams may not go.

Streetlink, www.streetlink.org.uk is a service that allows both members of the public and those sleeping rough to make a report. The information is passed to a local homelessness team. The teams are commissioned by the local council to provide specialist support and other options available to help those sleeping rough.

In London a number of boroughs have adopted the Pathway approach for making accommodation referrals. Prison housing/resettlement teams can complete Pathway's referral forms and send these over, then the respective Pathway team should forward them to suitable accommodation providers in their boroughs. Many boroughs require applicants to demonstrate a 'local connection'. A local connection means the applicant has to prove that they have lived in the borough they are applying to for at least 6 months previously or have a family connection to that borough.

Day centres and prison housing teams use a very helpful website, run by **Homeless Link**, to access information about hostels/support accommodation across the country. The website – www.homeless.org.uk – is a very good resource for information on accommodation and also to find out about day centres, CABs and Law Centres. The website provides you with information about what is available in each borough/county, how to make referrals, the criteria of the hostels and which type of offences will exclude people from applying for various accommodation, etc. You can type the borough into the search bar on their website and it will give you what is available; some boroughs have more service provisions available than others.

There are several charities, such as St Giles, Shelter, St Mungo's, Nacro and Depaul UK, providing housing advice and assistance in prisons. It may be assumed that prison housing workers from charities like St Mungo's should be able to refer directly into their own hostels, however, this is not always the case.

The Pavement Magazine has a section for prison leavers that can be viewed at www.thepavement.org.uk

Housing advice services

For further advice on housing, please visit these pages, provided by **Shelter** and **Housing Advice NI**:

England

england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

Scotland

scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/finding_a_place_to_live

Northern Ireland

housingadviceni.org/advice-prisoners

Alternatively, you could contact **St Giles Trust**, your local **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**, **Law Centre** or another local advice centre (e.g. Southwark's Advising London or Tower Hamlets' Cambridge House). Local advice centres can easily be found by using a search engine, such as Google, or by asking the council if they have a list available.

Housing/homelessness charities

For information on housing/homeless charities see the next few pages describing, by way of example, the help that **Crisis**, **Emmaus**, **Glass Door**, **St Giles Trust** and **St Martin in the Field's Vicar's Relief Fund** can offer.

Also,

St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) provides supported housing in the North East. There are further details on SVP in the *Other places to look* section of the Directory.

The Forward Trust (see *Getting into employment* section) additionally offers housing and resettlement support through programmes they run in Surrey and Kent. www.forwardtrust.org.uk/support-type/housing-resettlement-support

We are very grateful to **St Giles Trust** for reviewing and updating the *Finding a place to live* section in this Directory.



Stories of hope - Lisa

Whilst serving 4½ years in prison all I could wait for was my release date. When that date finally arrived, all that excitement and build-up had gone. I walked out of the gates and felt absolutely nothing, it felt like such an anti-climax, maybe because it didn't feel real.

I've survived and the way I look at it is that being in jail was way worse. I thought my first day would be kind of relaxing, but it wasn't. I had to attend my probation appointment then return home and make a claim to universal credit. I had to contact, for example, the bank, car insurance, child maintenance, etc. all of which had extremely long wait times. Before I had time to finish unpacking, it was time for me to do the school run. I came home with the children, cooked food, did the reading and homework with them, bathed them, got them ready for bed and read them a story.

The plan was to stay at my mum's for approximately 10 months to give me chance to re-integrate back into society with some support, but I lasted 6 weeks there due to having problems with my neighbours as they somehow found out I was in prison. The neighbours had started calling the police on me and ringing social services making false allegations. The landlord then told me I had to move out because of the amount of times the police have visited. My mental health was at rock bottom.

From the day I stepped out of those gates everything was so full on I barely had time to breathe. On top of that, lockdown was put in place 2 months after my release, so I'd come from one lockdown to another. Initially I thought it was going to be a walk in the park but after a few weeks of self-isolating it started taking its toll. The children and I were in an apartment and therefore had no garden to sit out in when we wanted a bit of fresh air.

I have now managed to find a nice three-bedroom house with a beautiful garden. I believe everything happens for a reason and you shouldn't rush into things. Although life has been difficult after getting out, I think maybe I set my expectations a little too high as to what it was going to be like. So, the advice I would give to anyone reading this who is due to be released or has been released, is try not to put too much pressure on yourself and try not to set your expectations too high. Just go with the flow and what is meant to be will be, you've got this and you are stronger than you realise.

I'd like to finish off with a few inspirational quotes:

- Don't tell everyone your plans, instead show them your results.
- If you don't get out of the box you've been raised in, you won't understand how much bigger the world is.
- You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.



Organisation

Crisis Skylights

Website

www.crisis.org.uk

Specific geographical area

Birmingham, Coventry, Edinburgh, London, Brent, Croydon, Merseyside, Newcastle, Oxford, South Wales or South Yorkshire.

Who can apply

We can support any person who is homeless after being released into the community. We can work with those who are at risk of being homeless and have access to ROTL with permission to do paid employment.

How the scheme can assist you

Every year we work side by side with thousands of people, to help them rebuild their lives and leave homelessness behind for good.

We offer one-to-one support, advice, and courses for homeless people in 11 areas across England, Scotland and Wales.

You will get a lead worker who will make a plan with you to end your homelessness. As well as support around your housing, we also offer courses and holistic support around employment, benefits and wellbeing.

How to apply

You'll need to contact a Crisis Skylight centre to enrol as a member to get support. For more information, please visit www.crisis.org.uk/get-help

Apply to

www.crisis.org.uk/get-help



They sit with you one-to-one, and find a house that works for you."



Organisation

Emmaus Communities

Website

www.emmaus.org.uk

Who can apply

Men and women over the age of 18.

How the scheme can assist you

Emmaus supports people who have experienced homelessness and social exclusion, by offering a home and meaningful work.

In an Emmaus community everyone has their own room, with communal areas for eating and socialising. During the day, companions, as our residents are known, work in our social enterprises, which are mainly charity shops. The work could include working in the shop, sorting items in the warehouse, going out to make deliveries in our vans, or working in the community home.

If you choose to join an Emmaus community, Emmaus will provide:

- a home for as long as you need it
- clothing, food and a small weekly allowance
- support to overcome any problems you may be experiencing
- work experience, training and support to help you to realise your aspirations and potential

You will be expected to:

- sign off all benefits, with the exception of housing benefit
- work in the charity's social enterprise for up to 40 hours per week, to the best of your ability
- engage with the support on offer
- take part in community life and support the Emmaus ethos

How to apply

Complete the online form or contact the Emmaus community you would like to join directly.

Apply to

www.emmaus.org.uk/get-help/apply/

GLASSDOOR

Organisation	Glass Door Homeless Charity
Website	www.glassdoor.org.uk
Specific geographical area	Greater London area, with day centres being based in West/South-West London.
Who can apply	Anyone aged 18+ (we are happy to accept referrals from NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) individuals).
How the scheme can assist you	<p>All Winter Shelter services are free of charge. We may provide funding for the following, subject to budget and caseworker discretion: housing deposits, first month's rent, travel expenses (including reconnection to country of origin/PCR tests), education and training courses, food and clothing vouchers, sleeping bags, official documentation (e.g. passport applications), short-term third-party hotel bookings.</p> <p>Applicants to the Night Shelter service will be placed on a waiting list immediately but during busy periods may need to wait around 1 week until a place becomes available.</p>
How to apply	<p>Either approach any of the following day centres in person: www.glassdoor.org.uk/daytimesupport or call 0207 351 4948 or 0208 016 6838 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.</p>
Key dates	<p>Winter Shelter Season start date (around early November). Winter Shelter Season end date (around early April). Casework/daytime services available all year round.</p>
Notes	<p>Free lunches, showers and laundry facilities may also be accessed at some of our partner day centres, although these particular services are managed by the venue staff rather than Glass Door.</p> <p>Guests are welcome to receive post at our head offices (155a Kings Road, SW3 5TX) which can be collected on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings (or during general office hours by arrangement). If you require documentation confirming this as a valid postal address (i.e. for opening a bank account), please speak to a caseworker.</p>
Apply to	<p>See How to apply above</p> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>“ <i>You've helped give me a more positive outlook for the future, and it keeps me going.</i> ”</p> </div>



Organisation	St Giles Trust
Name of programme	HMPPS Commissioned Resettlement Service – accommodation in Yorkshire and Humber
Website	www.stgilestrust.org.uk
Group helped	Between July 2021 and March 2022 over 500 people on probation and/or people in prison supported with their housing need.
Specific geographical area	Yorkshire
Who can apply	Anyone currently on licence with the Probation Service including those in prison who are at least 7 months from release.
How the scheme can assist you	The service aims to assist you with your housing needs whether that is helping to stabilise or secure your existing home, find you somewhere to live or provide you with the resources and skills needed to find and maintain a tenancy.
How to apply	You will need to be referred by your probation practitioner which will usually happen as part of a needs assessment carried out either prior to, or after your release from prison.

Apply to **Your probation worker**



St Giles were brilliant while helping me find accommodation. Without them I wouldn't be where I am today."
AG



<i>Organisation</i>	St Martin in the Fields Vicar’s Relief Fund
<i>Name of programme</i>	Vicar’s Relief Fund (VRF)
<i>Website</i>	smitf.flexigrant.com
<i>Maximum decision time</i>	We aim to respond to applications within 5 working days.
<i>Who can apply</i>	<p>Probation officers, social workers, support workers, CAB advisors, etc. on behalf of people, including prisoners and prison leavers, who are at risk of being made homeless, are homeless or vulnerable or have experience of being homeless and are trying to establish or maintain a tenancy.</p> <p>We cannot accept applications directly from you. If you are personally seeking funding support, you should not write on your own behalf as your letters will not be responded to.</p>
<i>What can be funded</i>	<p>Up to £500 for deposit, rent in advance, admin fees, ID, or temporary B&B accommodation – where it will help someone access accommodation. When we have awarded a grant to access accommodation we can also fund moving costs.</p> <p>Up to £350 for rent arrears (including a debt relief order and bankruptcy fees), service charge arrears, or money to pay for a hoarding clean up – where it will prevent eviction.</p>
<i>What is NOT funded</i>	Anything other than the above, e.g. household goods, utility bills, travel costs.
<i>How to apply</i>	Online at smitf.flexigrant.com
<i>Key dates</i>	Grants are allocated on an ongoing basis.
<i>Notes</i>	As a crisis fund, we expect applications to the VRF to be a last resort. We want to avoid situations where we make a grant quickly but the money is not used immediately, so please don’t apply to us first simply because we normally act quickly. Where support workers have been able to demonstrate that they have received or been promised funds from other sources, we have usually been sympathetic to requests to make a grant as part of a package.
<i>Apply to</i>	<p>Grants Co-ordinator using the online application form</p> <p>vrf@stmartinscharity.org.uk</p>