# Advice for prison or youth detention leavers

When someone is released from prison they need security and stability to get their lives back on track. In many cases when people are released from prison they have no accommodation to return to. People leaving prison are often at high risk of homelessness and may have been homeless before beginning their sentence.

The Council recognises that people being released from prison may have issues around:

* homelessness
* alcohol
* drug dependency
* risk of re-offending
* securing employment
* registering with services (e.g. GP surgeries)
* obtaining support to secure appropriate housing on release.

## Avoiding eviction whilst you are in prison

If you are handed a custodial sentence you may be able to sustain your tenancy until you are released. You should contact your landlord to explain that you are in prison and arrange for post to be sent to you. Alternatively, your family or friends may be willing to liaise with the landlord on your behalf. If possession proceedings are issued, you should be permitted to attend court to defend the proceedings.

For periods in jail of 13 weeks or less (often sentences of up to 26 weeks) it may be possible to claim Housing Benefit to cover the rent for the duration of the sentence. If you are on Remand Housing Benefit can be paid for up to 52 weeks. Universal Credit claimants are unlikely to be eligible for housing assistance if they are expected to spend more than 6 months in prison.

## Before leaving prison

Prior to being released from prison you can seek advice from a Resettlement Officer or a Housing Advisor. They can help with referrals to housing providers, dealing with rent arrears and applying for Housing Benefit. There may also be grants available that you can apply for. You can contact the housing advice team through the housing advice form.

[www.chichester.gov.uk/housingadviceform](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/housingadviceform)

## On release from prison

On release from prison you may be allocated a Probation Officer depending on the length of your sentence. Your Probation Officer will offer you practical advice and support, including housing advice. Depending on the length of your sentence you may be offered a place in a probation hostel or approved premises.

If you are being released from prison and will be homeless you should ask for help in contacting the Council to seek housing advice prior to your release.

The Council will not necessarily have a duty to provide you with accommodation if you are homeless on release. However you will probably be eligible for help in securing accommodation. The Council will also consider whether you:

* have a mental illness
* have a learning disability or physical disability
* have been in care
* have served in the regular armed forces
* are fleeing violence or threats of violence

The Council might have a duty to provide emergency accommodation if you are discharged from prison and eligible for assistance, homeless and have a priority need for accommodation.

## Priority need for those released from prison

If you are homeless the Council will consider whether you are vulnerable as a result of your time in prison. When considering assistance available the Council will look at:

* the length of time spent in prison
* if you receive any third-party support (e.g. probation service, Youth Offending Team, drug or alcohol rehabilitation)
* evidence provided about your homelessness
* the period of time passed since your release from prison and how successful you have been in securing and sustaining accommodation
* your support networks including professionals, friends and family
* evidence of any vulnerability including your mental health, drug and alcohol misuse or time in care
* any other factors that might impact your ability to find accommodation independently

## Accommodation options

Whether or not the Council has a duty to provide you with emergency accommodation it is likely you will be entitled to help to secure accommodation.

### Private renting

Private sector renting is likely to be the quickest and easiest way to secure alternative accommodation on release from prison. The Council can give advice on finding suitable private rented housing options. Many prison leavers will be entitled to claim Housing Benefit (or the Housing Component of Universal Credit) to help towards the rent. The Council can provide advice on finding a deposit and rent in advance, if required. For single people, renting a room in a shared house could be the most affordable option. Single people aged less than 35 years may only be eligible to receive Housing Benefit at the shared accommodation rate.

### Supported accommodation

Supported housing schemes are designed for people who need extra support in sustaining accommodation and are mainly for people with learning disabilities or mental health issues. There is a limited supply of supported housing in the Chichester district and they are usually reserved for people with a local connection to Chichester. You should discuss supported housing options with a Housing Advice Officer at the Council.

### Hostel accommodation

In Chichester the charity Stonepillow provides hostel accommodation for homeless people. The focus of the hostel is to give people the stability and skills to make positive choices towards getting back into the community. The hostel has 10 individual rooms. For information on availability visit the Stonepillow Chichester Hub at St Cyriacs, Chichester, PO19 1AJ. Stone Pillow operates a waiting list if they have no current vacancies.

### Housing register

Chichester District Council operates a Housing Register called ‘Homemove’. You can make an online application to Homemove through the Council’s website at [www.chichester.gov.uk](http://www.chichester.gov.uk). This is the waiting list for Housing Association properties. There is no council housing in Chichester.

To be eligible for the housing register you will need to prove your local connection by residence, former residence, employment or because you are providing primary care to a district resident. You may be considered ineligible for the housing register if you have a history of crime, antisocial behaviour or housing related debt.

Once you have applied Homemove will assess your application and confirm whether you meet the criteria to be accepted. If you are accepted onto the register you will be placed under one of the four bands (A, B, C and D). The band is determined by the details you provide on your application regarding your need to move. Band A represents the highest need to move while Band D, the least priority. You should provide Homemove with as much information regarding your offences and custodial sentences.

If you are on the register, you can choose from the range of vacancies and bid if you are interested in being put forward for the property. You will need to log on to the Homemove website to do this with the details that are sent to you. You can bid on a maximum of three properties each fortnight. Bids can be made either through the website, by text message, post, telephone or by visiting the Council’s offices in East Pallant, Chichester.

The housing register will only usually be a long-term housing option and is unlikely to be a short-term solution to your housing needs.

### Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

If you are homeless and eligible and seeking housing assistance from the Council we will make a full assessment of your housing needs which will usually involve a telephone interview with a Housing Advice Officer with a Housing Advice Officer. However, you will also be able to do this over the phone if required. The Council will agree a Personalised Housing Plan for those who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. The Personalised Housing Plan will contain a number of agreed steps to help homeless applicants search for and secure suitable accommodation.

### Mental Health and Substance Misuse

The Council recognises that some prison leavers may have issues around mental health and/or substance misuse problems. We will support people with mental health issues by liaising with the Community Mental Health Service. People with issues around alcohol or drug misuse will be supported in accessing specialist services at Change Grow Live (CGL). We appreciate that female prison leavers and young people released from prison may also have specific support needs.

## Who else can help you?

There is a range of third party services available to help prison leavers from legal advice to assistance with housing:

**Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** – if you are not sure how to seek help the CAB can provide you with a direction on who to speak with. The CAB in Chichester is based in the Chichester DC offices.

Address: East Pallant House, Chichester PO19 1TY

Phone: 0344 477 1171.

**Nacro** – a social justice charity working with ex-offenders and prison leavers.

Website: [www.nacro.org.uk/](http://www.nacro.org.uk/)

Phone: 0300 123 1889

**Prison Reform Trust** – provides information to prisoners and ex-offenders

Website: [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/)

Phone: 020 7251 5070

**The Hardman Trust** – Helping prisoners to make a positive contribution to society

Website: [www.prisonerfunder.org.uk/](http://www.prisonerfunder.org.uk/)

**Shelter** – provides advisory services for those in housing need.

Website: [england.shelter.org.uk/](http://england.shelter.org.uk/)

Phone: 0808 800 4444

**Unlock** – a charity providing advice and support to people with convictions.

Website: [www.unlock.org.uk/](http://www.unlock.org.uk/)

Phone: 01643 247 350

**Stonepillow** – a Chichester charity providing day centre and night shelter services to single homeless people.

Website: [stonepillow.org.uk/](http://stonepillow.org.uk/)

Phone: 01243 775 925

**Women in Prison** – support for women to avoid and exit the criminal justice system.

Website: [www.womeninprison.org.uk/](http://www.womeninprison.org.uk/)

Phone: 0207 359 6674

**Centre Point** – support for homeless young people with multiple needs.

Website: [centrepoint.org.uk/](https://centrepoint.org.uk/)

Phone: 0845 4663400

**Change, Grow, Live** – support for drug and alcohol rehabilitation in West Sussex.

Website: [www.changegrowlive.org/](http://www.changegrowlive.org/)

Phone: 01243 528162.

**MIND** – support and advocacy for people suffering with mental health issues.

Website: [www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)

Phone: 0300 123 3393