

Homeless prevention

Housing options for prisoners

Housing authorities have a duty ([section 179](#)) to provide advisory services free of charge to people in their district. The service must be designed to meet the needs of certain groups, which include *Housing options for Prisoners*

Keeping your home: Housing Benefit

Housing benefit (HB) You can only get HB to pay your rent if you intend to return home when you are released from prison. How long you can get HB for depends on your circumstances:

On bail: you can get HB on your normal home for up to 52 weeks if your bail conditions mean that you have to live away from home, in a bail or probation hostel or anywhere else.

On remand: you can get HB for up to 52 weeks while you are in prison on remand waiting for your trial or sentence.

Sentenced: if you are sentenced and are in prison you can get HB for up to 13 weeks. But you must expect to return home within 13 weeks of the date you first went into custody, including time you were on remand. You will not be entitled to HB for any of the time you are serving a prison sentence if the length of your sentence means you will not be returning home within 13 weeks of the date you went into custody.

Temporary release: the time you spend at home on temporary release is treated as time in prison.

Keeping your home: Universal Credit

Universal credit (UC) If you were getting UC to help pay your rent or a mortgage before you went into prison, you can continue to get UC housing cost payments for up to 6 months. This applies if you are on remand, on bail or sentenced. But if you receive a custodial sentence you won't get UC if you expect to be in prison (including time on remand) for more than 6 months.

You should try to set up a direct debit to pay your UC directly to your landlord. You cannot make a new claim for UC if you are in prison. However, if you were entitled to UC immediately before you went into prison but were not getting it, you might qualify for backdated payments. You could then get UC for up to 6 months in prison.

Duty to refer

There are specific criminal justice services which are subject to the duty to refer, meaning they are required to refer service users in England they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days to a local housing authority, with the service user's consent. Once we receive a referral we will contact the applicant to arrange an initial assessment.

Most prisons have a housing advice and resettlement service called Through the Gate. The service is delivered by charities including Shelter, St Giles Trust and Catch22. A resettlement worker in prison can help you with things like referrals to suitable accommodation if you'll be homeless on release.

Applying as homeless

Once we receive a referral or if you approach on release we will assess your needs and devise a personalised housing plan (PHP) containing the steps you and the council will take to find somewhere suitable for you to live.

Supported accommodation – Supported housing can help you address issues to assist you to live independently and adjust back into the community. Varying levels of support are provided, depending on the type of accommodation and your needs. You 'll live with other people and have a support worker. They'll support you to develop skills like money management, cooking, doing your laundry, shopping and accessing benefits. They'll also help you with your education, employment and training goals. You will need to be referred by someone supporting or by a homeless prevention officer. Most projects have waiting list

Private rented accommodation – We have a deposit bond scheme and a dedicated lettings team who search for suitable and affordable housing. We can negotiate with landlords and agents on your behalf and support you with a move into independent living.

Homechoice – North Somerset have a choice-based lettings scheme and you can register via www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk However there is a very long wait for social housing and this route would not be a quick solution to an immediate homeless situation. There are exclusions for perpetrators of ASB, Hate-crime and/or domestic violence.

Vulnerability

The council only has to give you somewhere to live while it looks into your homelessness application if it believes you may be homeless eligible (some people from abroad aren't eligible) in 'priority need'. Some people, such as pregnant women and those with dependent children, are in priority need automatically. Others have to be 'vulnerable'.

The council will only decide you are vulnerable if it agrees you are significantly more at risk when homeless than an 'ordinary person' would be.

Contact us

Phone 01934 426330 or email Housing.advice@n-somerset.gov.uk

 You can also send the team a message through your Homechoice account and receive replies.

Still need help?

You can get further advice from Shelter's free* housing advice helpline (**0808 800 4444**)

 www.England.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/your_situation/ex-prisoners_get_help_if_youre_homeless