

Homeless when released from prison

If you were recently released from prison, find out about services that could provide practical support and help you find accommodation. You could also apply to the council for housing assistance as a homeless person.

Practical steps to take:

- Register for the housing allocation scheme www.home-link.gov.uk.
- Get help with housing or apply as homeless before you're released.
- Find out what help you are entitled to from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more.

Help from West Suffolk council if you are single and homeless

- If you apply to West Suffolk council for housing assistance because you are homeless, we might not necessarily be legally obliged to provide you with accommodation. Our duty to you might be limited to it providing you with advice and assistance and not actual accommodation. For the council to be legally obliged to provide you with accommodation it will have to be satisfied that you are eligible, homeless, in priority need and that you have not made yourself intentionally homeless.

West Suffolk councils will take into account if you have spent time in prison when deciding how to treat you, even if it has been some time since you were released. We will also look at whether you:

- have a mental illness
 - have a learning disability or physical disability
 - are under 21 and have been in care and are under 21
 - were in the armed forces
 - are fleeing violence or threats of violence.
- The council could decide not to provide you with permanent accommodation if it considers that you made yourself intentionally homeless.

Priority need for prisoners and ex-offenders

- In some circumstances, West Suffolk council might decide you are in priority need because you have spent time in prison or on remand.
- The council will consider whether you should be regarded as being vulnerable by virtue of the fact that you are homeless. This has a particular meaning for

homelessness applications and is not the same as being labelled vulnerable in prison.

- When considering your homelessness application, the council will look at:
 - the length of time you spent in prison
 - if any third party support is being provided to you either by the probation service, a youth offending team, or drug and alcohol team
 - evidence provided by any third party (including any housing needs assessment) about your homelessness vulnerability
 - the period of time since your release from prison and how successful you have been in finding your own accommodation and in keeping that accommodation
 - any third party support networks such as family, friends or a probation officer
 - evidence of any other vulnerability such as mental health problems, drug or alcohol misuse, or a history of having been in care
 - any other factors that might have an impact on your ability to find accommodation yourself
- The fact that you have been in prison does not in itself mean that the Council has to treat you as being vulnerable and in priority need for accommodation. The council will need to assess the evidence before it and be satisfied that you will find it difficult to seek out and maintain accommodation for yourself compared to other people who are rendered homeless.

Contact us to find out more about how the council decides if you're in priority need.

Prisoners and ex-offenders treated as intentionally homeless

- The councils' Housing Options team may decide that you are intentionally homeless if you were evicted from your previous home because of criminal or antisocial behaviour or because of rent arrears resulting from your time in prison.
- If the council decides you are intentionally homeless, it will only offer you limited help with finding housing. If you are in priority need, you may be offered temporary accommodation for a short period of time so as to assist you to find your own accommodation in the private sector.
- The council may take the view that you should have known that your criminal activity could have resulted in you being sent to prison, and that this could lead to the loss of your home.
- The council is less likely to decide this if the loss of your home didn't directly follow on from you being sent to prison, for example, if you made an arrangement for another person to pay the rent while you were away but that arrangement broke down.
- The council could also decide that you are intentionally homeless if you gave up your tenancy because your entitlement to housing benefit ended during a period in prison. It is very important to seek advice from a housing adviser, particularly in cases where it could be argued you were sent to prison for a crime that was not premeditated, or was not deliberate because you were not able to understand the consequences of your own actions.

This could be the case because of:

- having limited mental capacity
- mental illness
- frailty
- an assessed substance abuse problem

What area can you be housed in if you are homeless?

- When you apply to the council as homeless, the Housing Options Team will check to see if you have a local connection with its area. You can establish a local connection, for example, by living, working, or having immediate family (usually a parent or brother or sister) in the area.
- Time spent in prison in a specific area does not give you a local connection with the area where the prison is located. However, if you have no local connection with any area or if you are fleeing domestic violence, you can apply to any council in any area. The council you apply to has to help you.
- There may be restrictions placed on where you can live. For example, if an antisocial behaviour order (ASBO) says you can't go to a particular area, you may need to seek help from a different council. (Find out more from Gov.uk web site about ASBOs).
- High risk prisoners managed by a multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) may be required to live in certain areas.

Emergency accommodation if you have no housing

- You may need to use emergency accommodation such as a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast accommodation if you have nowhere to go following your release. Hostels provide temporary accommodation. Some are direct access, which means you don't need a referral from an agency to use them.
- Bury St Edmunds has a drop in, twice weekly, that can provide hot meals, clothing and other practical help for people who need somewhere to go during the day. There is also access to support services who may be able to help you find housing. Please contact the Housing Options Team for advice on locating the support services in West Suffolk.
- Search the Homeless England directory to find hostels, emergency and longer term accommodation and day centres in the area. This information can be found at www.homeless.org.uk.
- Use [Shelter's directory](#) or call Shelter's free [housing advice helpline](#) on 0808 301 7829 to find services near you. The Shelter directory can be located at www.shelter.org.uk

Help finding housing in the private rented sector

- You could try to find housing in the private rented sector. West Suffolk council will be able to advise you how to find out what housing is available locally and how to apply for Universal Credit to help you with your housing costs.
- You might be able to get help with a deposit through:
 - a private rented sector rent deposit or bond scheme

Apply for a housing association home

- As a longer term alternative option, you could also consider applying for a council home or a housing association home. Please complete the on line housing application at www.home-link.org.uk

Help finding housing from probation services

- Offenders serving sentences of 12 months or more are released on licence and live in the community supervised by the probation service until the end of their sentence. If you are released on licence, your probation officer can help you find accommodation, as long as you have spent a continuous period of at least twelve months in custody.

Help with money before you are released from prison

- All prisoners are given a discharge grant paid for by the prison when they leave. This is money to help with your costs until your benefits are sorted out.
- If a prison housing adviser has found you accommodation for your first night, you may be given a higher discharge grant (about an extra £50), which is paid directly to the accommodation provider.
- You may be able to prepare for your release when you are in prison by saving some of your prison wages. You could consider opening a credit union account when you are in prison.
- Ask at the prison for details.

Homelessness help when on bail or Home Detention Curfew

- If you are a low risk adult prisoner and eligible for release on bail or home detention curfew, but don't have suitable accommodation to go to, you may be able to get help with supported accommodation through the bail accommodation and support scheme.
- Accommodation is provided for up to four people in shared houses in residential areas, with support from a visiting support officer. (Accommodation can be provided for families too.)
- For more information on the council's work in this area please access information on the West Suffolk web site at www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/housing