



Housing Benefit Reform – Supported Housing Consultation response from the Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust works to create a fair and decent prison system. We do this by looking at how prisons are working, giving information to prisoners, staff and people outside and by asking the government and officials to make changes. Our advice and information service responds to around 6,000 requests for help a year from prisoners and their families.

Many offenders, either upon release from prison, or because they are homeless or pursuing specific sentence related programmes such as substance misuse programmes, require supported housing, which is generally provided through conventional supported housing such as hostels.

Although generally looked forward to by prisoners, release from prison can be traumatic, especially for people with no home to return to. Many such prisoners will also have mental health problems or learning disabilities and temporary hostel accommodation is frequently arranged until more permanent arrangements can be made.

Stable accommodation can reduce reoffending by over 20%. Support for people during the weeks following release from prison is important. For example, help such as registering with a GP, ensuring continuity of medication and/or treatment, renewing and maintaining contact with family members and friends, securing appropriate permanent accommodation, job search, completing benefit claims, and budgeting (Question 3). For people who have served a prison sentence of 12 months or more, certain support will be provided through probation services. However, most prisoners on release – those who have served less than 12 months – will not receive such support.

Hostel accommodation for ex-offenders should recognise the need for higher housing costs to provide targeted support. In most instances, such support will be short term. However, for certain ex-offenders, such as elderly people, people with learning disabilities and those with more complex support needs, long term support will be necessary. Long term support could be provided through personalised budgets or through conventional supported or specialist individual housing.

There should be different geographical rates for each type of mainstream supported housing, such as hostels (Question 2) and clarity on the eligibility criteria for support, which should be applied on a national basis. For people leaving prison in need of conventional supported or specialist individual housing, accommodation and housing benefit should be secured prior to their release.

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