

## This time round:

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exploring the effectiveness of current interventions in the housing of homeless prisoners released to Wales

Written by Peter Mackie



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# Introduction

It is widely recognised that prison leavers are a particularly vulnerable group who often face homelessness on release from prison. Research has shown that not providing suitable accommodation on release can result in recidivism. Moreover, the state of housing interventions has been described as 'patchy'.

*There is some good practice in prisons both in preserving accommodation and advising prisoners before release, but it is very patchy. After release, the Probation Service is only resourced to support those under compulsory supervision. In the past, across the criminal justice system housing issues have had insufficient priority and clarity about who is to do what.*<sup>1</sup>

The Welsh Assembly Government's introduction of the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001 is one intervention which seeks to ensure that homeless prisoners released to Wales are accommodated. It has successfully impacted on the housing outcomes of some prison leavers and many other interventions have subsequently been developed. However, little research has been conducted in recent years to establish the current state of interventions. Hence, it is timely that Shelter Cymru and Trothwy Cyf have conducted this study, investigating the effectiveness of current interventions in the housing of homeless prisoners released to Wales. The aims of the research are to:

- Compare the experiences of homeless prisoners who have been rehoused after leaving prison with those who have failed to find appropriate housing, identifying any common factors which either assist or obstruct the resettlement process.
- Explore the experiences of prison resettlement officers, local authority officers (homelessness, housing and supporting people), housing association officers & probation staff involved in the resettlement experience.
- Discern key stages within the process at which interventions are / would be appropriate and if these differ from current practice.
- Identify good practice proposals to assist the successful rehousing of released prisoners.

A qualitative approach was adopted, incorporating detailed interviews with prison leavers who had experienced a range of interventions and had diverse housing experiences. The second element of the method was small group interviews and semi-structured questionnaires conducted with key stakeholders. The research was completed in six local authorities, enabling sufficient depth of investigation in a project of this scale.

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<sup>1</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners

In broad terms the research finds that there has been improvement in housing interventions. Several good practice examples emerged from the evidence and are highlighted throughout the report, however these are certainly not exhaustive of all good practice in housing interventions with prison leavers. Ex-prisoners often suggested that *this time round* the housing support had improved. However, questions of continuity in Wales-wide support are raised and there remains a lack of suitable accommodation for prison leavers.

The findings from this study will compliment two further studies currently exploring housing concerns amongst prison leavers. The first of these studies is the Welsh Assembly Government review of Prison Link Cymru. It is anticipated that the Welsh Assembly will take into account the comments made in this research about the role played by Prison Link Cymru. The second study (funded by the Assembly) is a joint project between the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Community Housing Cymru (CHC) and the All Wales Chief Housing Officers Panel (AWCHOP) and is particularly looking at the housing issues faced by high risk offenders. The study will identify training needs and produce a suite of good practice guidance. The WLGA study will be able to draw on the findings of this study in order to support their research with high risk offenders.

# Method

In order to gather the relatively subjective information required to meet the aims of this study, a qualitative method was adopted. The project approach was inclusive and in broad terms consisted of two key stages: i) interviews with prison leavers and ii) consultation with a range of stakeholders. Each of these stages is expanded upon in this chapter.

## The study areas

The aim of the study is to explore the effectiveness of current interventions in the housing of homeless prisoners across all of Wales. However, the scale of the project required that local authorities were selected and findings can be extrapolated for the whole of Wales. Six local authorities were identified as study areas based on the following criteria:

- Geographical location: Local authorities were selected that represented three regions of Wales (the north, south and mid west, and south east), including rural and urban areas.
- Number of prison leavers: Using statistics on number of prison leavers in each local authority, where possible authorities were selected that had relatively high numbers of ex-prisoners.

The participating local authority areas were Wrexham, Conwy, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Bridgend and Newport. It should also be noted that Conwy and Neath Port Talbot local authorities have dedicated resources for addressing the housing needs of prison leavers.

## Prison leaver interviews

In total 27 detailed interviews were conducted with prison leavers. Interviewers followed a semi-structured interview script (Appendix A), with interviews taking approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in neutral locations, where prison leavers and interviewers felt comfortable (e.g. Offices of support agencies such as Shelter Cymru).

### **Characteristics of prison leavers**

The majority of interviewees were male (n=25), which broadly reflects the ratio of men to women in UK prisons<sup>2</sup>. The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 66 years, with most aged 25-44 years (Table 1), which is again in keeping with the UK prison average.

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<sup>2</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

**Table 1.** Age ranges of prison leaver interviewees

Age range (years)	Number of prison leavers interviewed
Less than 25 years	6
25 to 34	9
35 to 44	10
45 to 54	1
55 to 64	0
65 +	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

The study also targeted prison leavers in the six different local authority study areas. Table 2 summarises the local authorities of the interviewees. It shows that an approximately equal number of interviewees participated in the three identified regions of Wales.

**Table 2.** Local authorities of prison leaver interviewees

Area	Local Authority	Number of prison leavers interviewed (local authority)	Number of prison leavers interviewed (area)
North	Wrexham	5	10
	Conwy	5	
South, Mid West	Neath Port Talbot	3	9
	Pembrokeshire	6	
South East	Bridgend	3	8
	Newport	5	
<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>27</b>

### Offences, support needs and intervention experiences

The majority of interviewees had been in prison on more than five separate occasions (n=19), although seven had been in prison three times or fewer. Prison leavers who took part in the research had been convicted of an array of offences and had a spectrum of self-reported support needs (Table 3). Interviewees described how their offending and support needs had changed over time and it is clear that participants were at very different stages in their lives. Some prison leavers were offending more regularly or committing more serious crimes, whilst others' criminal activities remained constant or was decreasing in frequency and severity. For most interviewees they believed their support needs had decreased or they were receiving more support and were dealing with their needs more effectively. By contrast, a few interviewees thought that their substance misuse had worsened.

**Table 3.** Convicted offences and support needs of prison leaver interviewees

<b>Convicted Offences of Interviewees</b>	<b>Self-reported Support Needs of Interviewees</b>
Burglaries and theft	Substance and alcohol misuse
Assault, GBH, ABH	Mental health
Drugs offences	Physical disability
Criminal damage	Money management
Fraud / deception	Tenancy support / Life skills
Driving related	Anger management
Drunk and disorderly	Unemployment
Receiving stolen goods	Thinking skills
Arson	Literacy / numeracy
Public order offences	

Every effort was made to ensure that the prison leavers taking part in the research had experienced a range of interventions, with varied housing outcomes. In order to achieve this, key stakeholders were contacted and asked to identify potential interviewees. The stakeholders who provided a link to prison leavers predominantly included local authority officers, drugs intervention programmes and probation. The discussion in the themed chapters of this report shows that prison leavers did have a broad range of experiences and were in mixed housing situations.

## Stakeholder consultation

Two separate approaches were used to consult with a total of 27 stakeholders: i) small group interviews and ii) self-completion questionnaires. The small group interviews were conducted with 13 key local authority staff, including where possible homelessness, housing and supporting people managers. Table 4 shows the number of participating staff in each local authority area. It shows that for all areas a suitable level of response was received. In order to ensure the anonymity of respondents, the roles of local authority officers has not been reported.

Self-completion questionnaires (Appendix B) were conducted with 14 stakeholders. These stakeholders included housing association housing officers, prison resettlement officers and probation staff. Table 5 shows which housing associations returned questionnaires, whilst Table 6 illustrates the probation areas and prisons that returned questionnaires.



**Table 4.** Number of local authority staff in small group interviews

Area	Total no. of local authority staff interviewed
Wrexham	2
Conwy	3
Neath Port Talbot	1
Pembrokeshire	2
Bridgend	2
Newport	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

**Table 5.** Housing associations that returned questionnaires

Area	Housing association	Total no. of questionnaires returned
Wrexham	Clwyd Alyn	1
Conwy	-	-
Neath Port Talbot	-	-
Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire	1
Bridgend	Valleys to Coast	1
Newport	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>3</b>

**Table 6.** Probation and prison areas that returned questionnaires

Stakeholder Organisation	Questionnaire respondents	Total no. of questionnaires returned
Probation	South Wales, Gwent, Dyfed Powys	3
Prisons	Cardiff, Parc, Swansea, Prescoed (2), Altcourse, Styal, Stoke Heath	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>

# Literature Review

This literature review briefly sets the study in the context of relevant policy and legislation. The review then introduces a selection of key recent literature, outlining concerns about housing interventions and subsequent improvements.

## Policy and legal context

This section of the review summarises the key policies which have significant relevance for homeless prisoners released to Wales. In addition, a list of relevant legislation is incorporated.

### **One Wales: a progressive agenda for the Government of Wales 2007**

*One Wales* outlines the WAG's programme for government over its four-year term. The target for housing is to ensure that all households, in all communities and irrespective of their means, can afford a decent home. More specific plans are also outlined for offenders, particularly young offenders. The WAG will continue the prioritisation of preventative intervention and non-custodial solutions in relation to youth offending and youth justice matters.

### **National homelessness strategy for Wales 2006-2008**

The National Homelessness Strategy sets out how the Welsh Assembly Government intends to tackle homelessness in Wales. It acknowledges the improvements that have taken place over recent years, which include the extension of the Priority Need Order to include prison leavers. WAG reaffirms its commitments outlined in the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy and is currently reviewing the Prison Link scheme. The strategy is due to be superseded by a ten-year plan at the end of 2008.

### **Joining together in Wales: an adult and young people's strategy to reduce reoffending 2006**

*Joining Together in Wales* is a strategy jointly prepared by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the Home Office and reportedly provides the direction required to reduce crime and create stronger and safer communities. The strategy identifies accommodation as one of seven pathways. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Wales' vision under the accommodation pathway is to 'ensure that all Welsh offenders in the community and leaving custody can access suitable and sustainable accommodation with support where appropriate.' Significantly, the strategy also emphasises the importance of gathering and understanding information as a first step in planning and organising housing policy and strategy.

### **All Wales youth offending strategy 2004**

*The All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* is the result of the WAG, the Youth Justice Board and local agencies working together to develop a strategy that provides a national framework for preventing offending and re-offending among children and young people in Wales. With regard to accommodation, the strategy requires the WAG to assess the extent to which young offenders' needs are accounted for in local homelessness strategies and Supporting People Operational Plans.

Furthermore, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) must identify the housing needs of young offenders in their local authorities.

### **Key legislation**

In addition to the policy documents described above, there are several key legislations that are relevant to homeless prison leavers<sup>3</sup>. These include:

- The Housing Act 1996, Part vii as amended under Homelessness Act 2002
- The Homelessness Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001
- Homelessness Act 2002
- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000
- The Criminal Justice Act 2003
- The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990
- The Children Act 1989
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003
- The Housing Act 2004
- Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006
- The Offender Management Act 2007
- Mental Health Act 2007

The implications of some of the more recent policy and legislation is currently undetermined. For instance, changes to reduce the use of B&Bs in accommodating homeless prison leavers (set out in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2006) are due to be enforced from April 2008. Similarly, the introduction of the Offender Management Act 2007 and changes in the provision of Supporting People funding will impact on the way services for prison leavers are commissioned and provided.

## **Concerns about housing interventions**

Several recent reports have highlighted the important role accommodation can play in reducing recidivism by prison leavers. For instance, a report by the Social Exclusion Unit<sup>4</sup> claimed that being in stable accommodation reduces the risk of reoffending by one fifth. Moreover, being homeless can exacerbate a prisoner's problems. They are likely to have limited access to employment (three times as many with a home will have a job) and it may be difficult to register with a GP. Despite the recognition that suitable accommodation is required, recent literature has demonstrated a lack of appropriate housing interventions.

Allender *et al* (2005)<sup>5</sup> have described how housing interventions do not currently start early enough within the prison sentence. Reportedly, one third of prisoners are not in permanent accommodation prior to imprisonment and consequently require support before they go into prison<sup>6</sup>. For many other prisoners, who hold tenancy agreements or own properties when starting a period in custody, significant problems are faced on reception into prison. They are often not supported to maintain their

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<sup>3</sup> WAG (2006) *Housing and ex-offenders risk management: the Link Protocol Wales*

<sup>4</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners*

<sup>5</sup> Allender, P., Brown, G., Bailey, N. Colombo, T., Poole, H. and Saldana, A. (2005) *Report on the prisoner resettlement and housing provision research project*

<sup>6</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners*

tenancies, or where appropriate end the tenancy. As a result, up to a third of prisoners lose their housing during custody<sup>7</sup> and many others face rent arrears. Without support, prisoners have difficulty in dealing with outstanding debts or housing issues because even simple actions such as making a phone call or writing a letter are subject to restrictions<sup>8</sup>.

Problems are compounded for sentenced prisoners who are expected to be in prison for more than 13 weeks<sup>9</sup>. Housing benefit stops at the point of sentence for these prisoners. So, unless a prisoner has family who can take over the housing benefit claim, a prisoner in prison for just 14 weeks must find new accommodation. In the large majority of cases, in order to qualify under the 13 week rule a new claim must be made within four weeks of entering prison. The prisoner must obtain and complete the forms, which often require original documents which the prisoner might not have access to. Different forms are used by each local authority so prisons must keep a large number. Taking this into account, interventions at induction could prevent prisoners on remand or serving short sentences from losing their home, and for those serving longer sentences it would minimise rent arrears.

The most frequently cited concern regarding housing interventions is the lack of consistency in support. A recent report by the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)<sup>10</sup> describes how all prisons have reception and induction procedures that address accommodation issues. However, the report found that in reality the induction provision and quality might vary depending on the time of the day when prisoners arrive and the staff members on duty. Evidence from the CAB report and others<sup>11 12</sup> show that support services during custody are also 'patchy', often leaving prisoners without the skills to manage their situations and reducing their chances of being successfully rehoused. A 2005 report produced by the Centre for Justice at Coventry University<sup>13</sup> concluded that less than 33% of prisoners had someone to discuss their housing needs with while in prison, and less than 20% actually received help in finding accommodation.

Several reports indicate that prisoners continue to leave custody into homelessness due to a lack of support and advice services in prison<sup>14 15</sup>. According to Shelter<sup>16</sup> one other reason why prisoners are leaving prison without suitable accommodation is because many accommodation providers are unwilling or unable to accept homelessness or housing applications from prisoners before release. Furthermore, intentionality legislation is impacting on their accommodation options.

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<sup>7</sup> Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison*

<sup>8</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>9</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners*

<sup>10</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>11</sup> Shelter (2006) *Barred from housing: a discussion of the barriers faced by prisoners in accessing accommodation on release*

<sup>12</sup> Allender, P., Brown, G., Bailey, N. Colombo, T., Poole, H. and Saldana, A. (2005) *Report on the prisoner resettlement and housing provision research project*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>15</sup> Shelter (2006) *Barred from housing: a discussion of the barriers faced by prisoners in accessing accommodation on release*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

It has been reported that prisoners on remand face particular difficulties. According to the CAB, 'in January 2006, 20% of the 76,400 members of the prison population were on remand. Given the uncertainties and disruption that remand prisoners face, it is one of the most disturbing trends in criminal justice practice that the size of this group is growing fastest. There is no requirement to prepare or begin thinking about a sentence plan for a remand prisoner.'<sup>17</sup>

## Improvements to housing Interventions

There are clearly a number of concerns about the effectiveness of housing interventions, however there have been recent changes to the model of intervention for prisoners released to Wales. This subsection outlines some of the most prominent improvements. In 2006 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG – now CLG) published a guide to good practice on homelessness prevention<sup>18</sup>. The chapter in these guidelines that particularly addresses offender needs establishes that there are three broad stages of intervention with offenders. The first stage is early action to address housing issues on entering custody, the second is for accommodation to be secured on release, and finally there must be post-release support. In line with these stages of intervention, the WAG has produced the Link Protocol Wales<sup>19</sup>.

The Link Protocol Wales has been agreed by all the key organisations working with offenders in Wales, including WAG, the Welsh prisons, Probation, Youth Justice Board, Youth Offending Teams, WLGA, and NOMS Wales. The protocol seeks to ensure that a common approach is taken to the accommodation, risk management and support of ex-offenders. Where possible the protocol seeks to prevent loss of accommodation on entry to prison, or alternatively properly terminate accommodation. The protocol requires the housing and support needs of homeless prisoners to be established, assessing and managing any risk. Furthermore, access to housing services should be facilitated and resettlement into appropriate housing should be planned. A copy of the Link Protocol can be accessed on the Welsh Assembly's website, however a brief summary of the interventions outlined in the protocol is given below:

### **Before custody**

- Establish accommodation status and needs within pre-sentence report.
- Provide information about housing options and support to: provisionally give notice of tenancy, take action in securing tenancy, seek reference from housing provider.
- Occupant may nominate a family or friend to look after their property and interests, should they be sentenced or remanded into custody.
- Where accommodation is terminated, arrangements to be considered for the removal and storage of property and possessions where possible.

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<sup>17</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>18</sup> DCLG (2006) *Homelessness prevention: a guide to good practice*

<sup>19</sup> WAG (2006) *Housing and ex-offenders risk management: the Link Protocol Wales*

## **Reception**

- Accurate and timely communication of accommodation status to the receiving prison.
- Accommodation status identified on reception in prison and immediate intervention to maintain accommodation or closed to prevent debts incurring as appropriate. Housing needs assessment completed at initial contact (Prisoner Passport/OASys/NME).
- Housing provider informed of prisoner's status. Clarification of rent/debt if any.
- Prisoner's status and intervention regarding property actioned, including Housing Benefit advice.
- Where accommodation is terminated there should be negotiations with housing provider regarding rent notice period/future offers of accommodation.
- Where accommodation is terminated, removal and storage of property and possessions arranged (where possible).

## **During custody**

- Accommodation needs identified early and linkage to relevant agencies.
- Should accommodation be maintained, arrangement made for security of property and Housing Benefit/rent to be continued/paid.
- Action undertaken to explore housing options/determine the NFA/homelessness status. To include referral to Prison Link Cymru (PLC) where risk of homelessness.
- The Prison Service, assisted by PLC, to assess housing and support needs of all referrals: to provide homelessness and prevention advice; and to assist prisoner to connect with relevant agencies and services.
- Where the prisoner is threatened with homelessness and has a local connection, the relevant Homelessness Department should be notified at least 28 days prior to release.
- The Housing Department will undertake homelessness enquiries prior to release in liaison with Criminal Justice and specialist agency partners.
- Prisoner to be notified prior to release of the decision/temporary accommodation they will be placed in when leaving prison. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the Housing Department will notify the prisoner and relevant agencies in writing, a time and date of appointment on release.

## **Post custody**

- Assessment/ review of housing needs/risk.
- Support and advice for ex-offenders with accommodation problems in the licence period/community sentence.
- Practical assistance in crisis situations (accommodation referral/support).
- Develop supported accommodation provision through local Supporting People arrangements, Homelessness Strategies and Probation 'Approved Premises' Strategy.

The Link Protocol Wales provides an overarching model for the key agencies working with offenders. More specific interventions fit into this general model and a selection are briefly described in the remainder of this subsection. In April 2005 Prison Service Order (PSO) 2350 was introduced. This order requires a housing needs assessment to be carried out 'as soon as possible on all new receptions and no later than four days after initial reception'. This PSO applies to all local prisons. The Prison Service also introduced a shadow Key Performance Target to measure the number of Housing Needs Initial Assessments completed.

The Transitional Support Scheme (TSS) aims to provide 'through the gate' mentoring support for short sentence prisoners up to 12 weeks following their release from custody. Specifically, TSS is designed to address the practical resettlement needs of short-sentence prisoners who are returning to Wales, and who are experiencing on-going substance misuse problems. The scheme has been running since January 2004 across the four Welsh prisons and HMPs Altcourse, Eastwood Park and Styal. A recent review of TSS<sup>20</sup> found that 'the principle of support through the prison gate' was clearly demonstrated and adhered to' with mentors visiting clients at least twice prior to their release from prison. The review established that whilst 37% of participants were homeless on entry to prison, only 12% remained so on release. However, this fall in homelessness was accompanied by a corresponding rise in the number going into transient accommodation. With regard to scheme improvements, both mentors and prisoners commented that there was a need for more time to be spent offering support prior to release and in fact more mentors were needed.

The final intervention to be described here is particularly recent. In June 2007 NOMS introduced a new Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS) to enable the courts and prisons to make greater use of bail and early release on a strict curfew<sup>21</sup>. The service is provided by ClearSprings Ltd, who provide housing and support in dispersed community settings across Wales. Support is provided by trained staff giving three one-hour contact sessions in the first three weeks of occupancy and at least one hour per week during the person's time in the bail accommodation. Help in finding more stable accommodation will also be given. The impact of this intervention is obviously still to be evaluated.

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<sup>20</sup> Maguire, M., Clancy, A., Lane, J. and Morgan, B. (2006) *Moving forward with mentoring: an evaluation of the Transitional Support Scheme in Wales*

<sup>21</sup> NOMS (2007) *Bail Accommodation and Support Service*

# Housing histories

In order to fully understand the factors which assist and obstruct the resettlement process for prison leavers, their housing histories should be considered. Hence, this study investigated the housing histories of 27 ex-prisoners, exploring their frequent moves, experiences of homelessness, common factors that assisted or obstructed them from feeling settled in the past, concerns about their accommodation prior to their most recent custodial sentence, the relationship between accommodation and their offending behaviour, and finally the relationship between accommodation and their support needs.

## Frequent moves

Childhood housing experiences varied considerably amongst prison leavers. Many ex-prisoners had been fairly settled in one location, living with their parents, whilst some had very unsettled childhood housing experiences, characterised by frequent moves and periods in state care.

*Until I was 16 I lived at home with my parents. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*When I was growing up I lived with my family in a five bedroom house. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

*I lived happily with my grandparents until I was 13, it was the best life I could have had. When I was 13 I moved in with my mum but she couldn't cope so I went into foster care. In one year I moved to five different foster homes and then when I was 15 I was in a secure unit and then back to mum. When I was 16 I got my own council flat. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*I lived at home with my parents until I was six and then I went into care. For the next ten years I spent most of my time in secure units and children's homes. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

For the vast majority of ex-prisoners much of their housing experiences during adulthood involved frequent moves between flats, rough sleeping and periods in prison.

*I was brought up on Queens Park and lived with my mum and then my girlfriend. I had a flat on Pentre Gwyn but I lost that. Since then I've been in and out of prison over the last fifteen years or so but now I've got a council flat. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*I went to prison in Yorkshire and had no support so I was homeless on release. From there I was sleeping rough until I managed to rent a flat in Rhyl. The block of flats were closed down because they weren't fit so I ended up back on the streets and then ended up in Altcourse. I left Altcourse and was still homeless until now, and I'm back in Altcourse again. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Many of the ex-prisoners interviewed in this study commented that their accommodation was often provided by friends, family, or partners.

*At 14 I started to get into trouble and stayed anywhere I could with friends. I've always stayed with friends and partners. I've had a lot of trouble with*



*council workers because if you've been in trouble with the police they won't give you a chance. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

*At 16 I moved to a friend's house, then I moved in with my mum in Baeslegg and started to get into trouble. I moved back to gran's then to my brother's who gave me drugs. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

It is clear that childhood experiences varied amongst interviewees, however adulthood was predominated by frequent moves between flats, homelessness and prison. Furthermore, when they were in accommodation it was rarely their own tenancy. In contrast to this general situation, some ex-prisoners had fairly settled housing histories. Examples of sustained tenancies in the private and social rented sectors were provided and one ex-prisoner had been a home owner for three years.

*At 18 I had my own council flat and I had it for about six years. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*I purchased my own property and had it for approximately three years. I was self-employed at the time and I was still living in privately owned accommodation when I was sent to prison. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

## Homelessness

The subsection above has shown that many prison leavers have experienced homelessness. Consequently, the issue of homelessness was explored in more depth. Almost all of the interviewees could recount homeless experiences, many had been homeless on several occasions.

*I have been homeless a few times. I've slept rough but also sleeping on friend's sofas and stuff. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*I've been homeless on numerous occasions. Sometimes I had temporary accommodation but mostly I was street homeless. I also had one instance where the council eviction led to me being homeless. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

It is significant that at least seven ex-prisoners commented that their experiences of homelessness usually resulted from prison release. However, some of the experiences referred to were prior to the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001, when prison leavers were named as a group in priority need for accommodation.

*Yes I've been homeless for a few months after leaving the Port Talbot flat and also after leaving prison. It was a bad experience. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

*I've been in and out of prison 2-3 times a year, and always end up staying with friends. Only once have I had accommodation as a prison leaver for 28 days. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

## Feeling settled

Having established that the housing histories of prison leavers are characterised by frequent moves and homelessness, their experiences of feeling settled in an area and in a particular property are likely to be limited. In fact, Table 7 illustrates that few prison leavers interviewed as part of this study had lived in the same property for more than two years, with many managing less than a year.

Prison leavers were asked to recount periods when they felt particularly settled or unsettled in a property. In total, 18 prisoners felt settled at some point and similarly 19 prisoners could recount feeling unsettled<sup>22</sup>. By exploring reasons for feeling settled and unsettled it is possible to draw out some of the factors that have assisted and obstructed prison leavers from staying in a property in the past.

**Table 7.** Longest period of time prison leaver interviewees managed to stay in a property

Longest period of time spent in a property	Number of prison leavers
0 to 1 year	11
>1 to 2 years	5
>2 to 4 years	4
> 4 years	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

Living in a suitable location assists prison leavers in feeling settled. The term 'suitable location' is subjective and can only be determined through discussion with the prison leaver. For instance, important aspects might include being close to employment, proximity to a good school and being away from areas of high crime and people with a negative influence.

*I felt comfortable in the council flat in Hightown. The location, it was a familiar area filled with people I knew. It was ideal for work when I was working as a self-employed taxi driver because it was near to town. The inside of the flat I took a lot of pride in and had it really nice. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*I didn't want my current flat but there was no other option. It's in the worst area for trouble. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

Several prison leavers commented that in the past they struggled to feel settled because their neighbours complained about their drug taking and antisocial behaviour. Prison leavers claimed that without support, for issues such as substance misuse, it is difficult for some prison leavers to feel settled.

Many prison leavers reported that they felt comfortable when they were living near family and friends, who act as an informal support network.

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<sup>22</sup> Two prison leavers did not state if they could recount feeling settled and four prison leavers did not state if they could remember feeling unsettled.

*Having family nearby is very important. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

*I was living far away from Colwyn Bay. You couldn't get any peace. There was people there all the time. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

One of the key factors that helped prison leavers to feel comfortable was having their own accommodation and independence, enabling them to take pride in their accommodation. This is contrary to the situation faced by many prison leavers who are required to stay in shared accommodation or sofa surf.

*I felt comfortable when I had my own things, my own home and my own possessions. Having that security. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*When I'm staying at friends I always feel in the way, especially when mates are having rows with their girlfriends, then it's not as though I can go to my own room and give them privacy. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

The standard of accommodation is also important. When accommodation is clean and well maintained prison leavers are more likely to want to stay in a property.

*I felt settled when the accommodation was clean. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

*I went in just after Christmas and there were repairs needed. It's still in disrepair (August). (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

Finally, several ex-prisoners felt most settled when they were in employment. This finding was echoed during interviews with stakeholders.

*Being in a job for the first time made me feel settled. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

*Rehabilitation studies have indicated that securing a home is the first step, but this is only the start. Offenders need to feel that they are benefiting from a change in behaviour and employment is the next and main step towards rehabilitation. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

## Accommodation concerns on prison entry

This study investigated the accommodation situation of ex-prisoners at the time of prison entry. Concerns regarding their accommodation were discussed, revealing the issues frequently faced at this particular point in their housing histories. The majority of prison leavers were living with friends, family or their partners before entering prison, which echoes earlier findings and the findings of other research<sup>23</sup>. This caused concern because it is temporary and 'unstable'. Prison leavers often talked of being unwanted when staying at their friend's accommodation.

*I was on the sofa, I didn't like it. I had no private space. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

*I had no concerns except that I knew at my mum's I wasn't wanted. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

For those who did have more settled accommodation before entering prison, the type of tenure varied. For example, interviewees lived in local authority accommodation, housing association properties and the private rented sector. Other

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<sup>23</sup> Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners*

prison leavers were in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation or rough sleeping, whilst one was an owner occupier.

There were several concerns shared amongst prison leavers regarding their accommodation at the point of prison entry. Firstly, the accommodation was often near people who influenced them negatively.

*It was a nice house but I was near people who had the wrong effect on me, so I was fighting and getting involved in family feuds and so on. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*There were some people in the area who caused trouble but I tried to ignore them. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

Another key concern was that support needs were not being addressed. In particular, prison leavers felt that drug habits were out of control prior to prison entry. Other support needs mentioned include tenancy support and benefits advice.

*I couldn't get help with the drugs so I kept getting drawn into crime to fund my drug habit. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Finally, a small minority of prisoners stated that they had no concerns regarding their accommodation prior to prison entry.

## The relationship between accommodation and offending

This subsection describes the clear relationship that exists between an ex-prisoner's accommodation and their offending behaviour. There are two elements to this discussion. Firstly, the impact of offending on a person's accommodation is considered and secondly, the impact of accommodation on a person's offending behaviour is discussed.

### **The impact of offending on accommodation**

There is overwhelming evidence from ex-prisoners that offending results in lost tenancies. Most frequently, interviewees remarked that custodial sentences led to tenancies being ended, mostly unplanned.

*When I went into prison I lost my accommodation, making it even more difficult to find accommodation in the future. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

Furthermore, offences not resulting in custodial sentences can also impact on accommodation. For example, actions such as drug taking, that contravene a tenancy agreement, may result in the tenancy being ended. Equally, these actions could result in a person losing their accommodation with family or friends.

*I was asked to leave my parents because of my drug habit and offending. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

Offending not only results in the loss of tenancies, according to some prison leavers and stakeholders it can prevent them from securing accommodation. This can be because landlords are reluctant to take on offenders or because local authorities find them to be intentionally homeless. This issue is discussed in more detail later in the report.

*I don't know why I didn't get the flat the last time. Maybe because... of my reputation. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Finally, a small number of prison leavers believe that their persistent offending leads to difficulties in ever settling and sustaining a tenancy. It was claimed that there has been limited support to address their offending behaviour and so they continue to feel unsettled.

### **The impact of accommodation on offending**

Concerns regarding accommodation related to the location and the people living in particular areas. It was stated that living in areas where there is a lot of crime will increase the likelihood of offending. Moreover, living near people who will exert a negative influence will also lead to offending.

*Where I live now has affected my offending. There are gangs of lads and people you need to avoid. I'm at risk of custody again because of living in this area. I offended due to necessity. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*Going back to Queens Park meant that I was targeted and mixing with the wrong people. I had no support. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

Having no accommodation or unsuitable accommodation also results in offending. This may be because a person must then stay with friends, who are perhaps offending.

*If I hadn't lost my flat I wouldn't have had such problems. I hung around with the wrong people because I didn't have a place to stay. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*Bad accommodation has meant I offend more often. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Only two prison leavers commented that their accommodation had not affected their offending.

## **The relationship between accommodation and support needs**

This subsection of the report describes the clear relationship that exists between an ex-prisoner's accommodation and their support needs. There are two elements to this discussion. Firstly, the impacts of support needs on a person's accommodation are considered and secondly, the impacts of accommodation on a person's support needs are discussed.

### **The impact of support needs on accommodation**

The key issue emerging from the prison leaver interviews is that a lack of support in the community results in lost tenancies. There appear to be two key support deficits, namely substance misuse support and tenancy support. With regard to the first of these support needs, prison leavers explained that without support for drug and alcohol issues they committed crimes to provide for their habits and they were abusing substances in their accommodation. The consequence of these actions was often lost tenancies.

*My parents asked me to leave because of my drug habit. I also lost a place to stay when I split up with my partner, this was due to drugs. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

*Due to drinking heavily and taking drugs I had to steal. I was caught, convicted and lost my flat. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

It has already been determined that most prison leavers have failed to sustain tenancies for a significant period of time so it is to be expected that support with maintaining a tenancy is needed. There seems to be a significant lack of tenancy support for prison leavers and this inevitably has an impact on accommodation. Interviewees believe that support with money management, making benefit claims and advice on rent arrears would improve their accommodation outcomes.

*If I'd had some tenancy support I might have been able to stick at it. Maybe I could have kept the flat. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*I'm at risk of losing my flat because of rent arrears. I need help with housing benefit. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

### **The impact of accommodation on support needs**

Living in accommodation in areas of high crime reportedly increases the need for support of prison leavers. This echoes the finding that the location of the accommodation can increase offending behaviour. It was suggested that when an ex-prisoner lives in an area of high crime, near people who are likely to have a negative influence, the prison leaver resorts to increased drug use and reverts to 'old habits'.

*I have problems sleeping and my depression has been getting worse. On the Mount Estate I was surrounded by people who were bad influences. It made me take different drugs and do stupid things. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*Living there will mean I'll carry on drinking. That's the reason why I don't want to go back, otherwise it's never going to change. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

A lack of accommodation also has a significant impact on the support needs of the prison leaver. For example, accessing support services is very difficult without a fixed address. Moreover, without accommodation prison leavers sometimes turn to substance misuse as a coping strategy.

*Being settled is massively important because support is impossible if you're not living anywhere... Being settled is vital for sorting yourself out. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

# Resettlement support: current interventions

A range of resettlement interventions are currently offered to prisoners. This chapter explores what support is currently available and how it is perceived. The chapter predominantly focuses on support provided during the prison sentence, although it also considers support experiences pre-custody and immediately post-release. The evidence to support this discussion is drawn from prisoner interviews and stakeholder questionnaires. A later chapter provides a more specific focus on the accommodation and support currently available in the community.

## Pre-custody support

Pre-custody is the period of time before a prisoner begins a custodial sentence, this might be time spent on remand or on bail in the community. During detailed interviews nearly all prison leavers commented that they received little if any housing related support and advice pre-custody.

*Whilst on bail I was looking for somewhere to stay because I was sleeping on the sofa at my grandfather's. The council were no help but right at the end they offered me a flat in an awful block full of junkies. I didn't have a chance to accept or refuse it because I was sentenced. I looked for help but I got no useful advice. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

People are often in housing difficulty prior to entering prison but it seems that when advice is sought the only advice given is to wait until sentencing. Despite this, one stakeholder explained that there is an assessment of housing need as part of the pre sentence report and some support with managing housing issues is available. Finally, a small number of ex-prisoners were directed to advice on drug and alcohol addiction but none chose to engage with this support.

## Support at reception into prison

Reception is the point at which a person enters prison and begins a custodial sentence. Many prisoners commented that at this stage an initial housing needs assessment is conducted and some signposting takes place. These interviews must take place within four days of prison entry. During this assessment housing issues were often raised and actions and referrals were made. One stakeholder explained that there is an automatic intervention with housing benefits, a voluntary surrender scheme which prevents eviction proceedings and a scheme for addressing rent arrears.

*I had a general prison introduction and I was told of housing advice available and benefits advice. I didn't take these up. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*Once a criminal is received into Stoke Heath they are interviewed by a resettlement officer within 24 hours (or as soon as practicable). If the trainee has accommodation prior to custody, attempts will be made to try to secure it for release. If this isn't possible a referral is sent to the housing*

*worker making them aware of a possible NFA. They are then interviewed by the housing worker and applications are sent to supported housing projects who are known to have lengthy waiting lists. These are then chased up at a later date. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

In Parc prison the Passport scheme is operated. This system flags up areas that require intervention, including housing issues, drug use and educational needs amongst others. The system aims at reducing duplication and time wasting with all significant information being recorded on the system.

In addition to the housing support offered at reception, several prisoners explained that the Counselling, Advice, Referral, Assessment and Throughcare (CARAT) team had offered significant support with drug misuse. In contrast to the positive comments made by some prisoners, many feel there is limited advice and support offered during reception. There are two key concerns, the first is that no housing support is given and the second is that housing issues are deferred until later in the sentence, resulting in uncertainty for the prisoner.

*I did fill in the forms and such but I didn't actually understand what they were for. You just signed where you were told. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*I was advised to complete an application to see the Housing Officer. When interviewed by the prison Housing Officer I was told to get in contact again closer to my release date. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

### **Good Practice 1 - Initial Housing Needs Assessment**

In order to ensure that all prisoners have their housing position assessed during induction, a Housing Needs Assessment is used in all local prisons. Issues requiring immediate intervention are highlighted and future housing interventions are identified. This allows induction staff/housing advice workers to assist prisoners at an early stage of their sentence to minimise the risk of loss of accommodation, the accrual of rent arrears and difficulty in re-opening housing benefit claims. The Housing Needs Assessment can be accessed using the following link:

[http://pso.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSO\\_2350\\_housing\\_needs\\_assessment.doc](http://pso.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/PSO_2350_housing_needs_assessment.doc)

## **Support during main part of sentence**

The main part of the custodial sentence refers to the majority of the sentence following reception into prison and up to the brief period prior to release. Typically this would account for up to 80% of the entire sentence. It is during the main part of the sentence that the majority of support seems to be available. Interviewees commented on support relating to housing, drugs and alcohol, training, employment and mental health.

### **Housing support**

The support provided by Prison Housing Officers is referred to positively by some prison leavers. Prisoners explained that they had seen their housing officer several times during the main part of their sentence. It was felt that housing officers tend to



provide a signposting tool (mostly to Prison Link Cymru) and often delay any action until the pre-release stage.

*The prison housing officer was helpful...although I got frustrated as I didn't hear any more and was told to turn up at the council on release. I didn't have anything in writing and wasn't told what accommodation was available. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

Drop-in services and resettlement fairs operate in Parc prison, with many support services available, including housing advice clinics delivered by PLC. Prisoners normally only attend the resettlement fairs one month prior to release. Several prisoners felt that the advice provided by PLC was invaluable because it set out their legal entitlements. Prior to any discussion with PLC workers some offenders were unaware that they could apply to the local authority as homeless. Despite a homeless application being made, one prisoner commented that she was still anxious about the outcome which had not been determined.

*Before speaking with PLC I only knew that I could put my name on the waiting list but I didn't know that I could apply to the council as homeless. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

The support provided by resettlement officers is perceived very positively. Some of the support offered includes addressing rent arrears, closing tenancies and arranging rent payments where appropriate. Furthermore, resettlement staff work with homeless prisoners throughout their sentence in order to find suitable accommodation. The resettlement team in Parc prison were referred to very positively. One of their particular schemes is a 12 week course which addresses housing, employment and training needs.

*Resettlement staff casework homeless prisoners throughout their time in custody to attempt to attain suitable accommodation. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

A key role of resettlement staff is to work closely with accommodation providers. During the main part of the sentence resettlement staff reportedly encourage housing providers to come into the prison and conduct interviews, leading to offers of accommodation where possible. Above any other intervention it seems that a range of housing providers going into prison to interview prisoners is regarded most highly. There are examples of this type of support in Parc prison.

*Appointments were made by the resettlement officer for Wallich Clifford (The Wallich) to interview while I was in custody. I was offered accommodation and that's where I am now. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*Coming in to interview the prisoner prior to release and accepting them works best. They can explain the accommodation set-up and any rules etc. This is then followed up by an excellent support package and work is done to secure a permanent tenancy with the council when the client is ready. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

Whilst there is clearly a range of effective housing support available during the main part of the sentence, several prison leavers commented that they had received insufficient housing support at this stage, particularly prisoners who were on remand or in custody 'out of their area'. Similarly, a recent Shelter report found that prisoners in England often leave prison without accommodation to go to because

accommodation providers are unwilling or unable to accept housing and homelessness applications before release from prison<sup>24</sup>.

*I think that being a prisoner out of your area is crucial to why I didn't get any housing support. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

### **Good Practice 2 – Resettlement Fairs**

The Resettlement Fair in Parc prison runs on a monthly basis. Prisoners are invited to attend the Resettlement Fair one month prior to release. External support agencies, housing agencies, drug and alcohol agencies, employers and recruitment agencies all attend and are able to offer advice on employment opportunities, conduct informal interviews and arrange appointments for release. The Resettlement Fair provides prisoners with the opportunity to make realistic and achievable release plans.

### **Good Practice 3 – A range of accommodation providers going into prisons**

When accommodation providers are able to go into prisons, conduct an interview and offer accommodation, many uncertainties are addressed for the prison leaver and other support organisations. This process is also likely to result in cost benefits. One project which has taken this approach is The Wallich Riverside Project which provides accommodation for homeless people who are committed to taking part in training, education or voluntary work. The scheme is not solely for the use of prison leavers. A range of accommodation providers going into prisons and offering suitable accommodation would improve the current system.

### **Other support issues addressed**

Drug and alcohol abuse are key support needs for many prison leavers. Interviewees were able to access support during the main part of their prison sentence through CARAT workers. Support included methadone, withdrawal programmes and drugs awareness schemes. Only one interviewee was unable to access drug and alcohol support, stating that it was because he was not recognised as an addict.

*Courses like drugs awareness are made available... I'm really pleased with the drugs support provided. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

Several employment and training support schemes were mentioned. For example, reference was made to a jobs fair which was effective for many but the event did not highlight the jobs available across all of Wales. Other schemes include the Peer Plus scheme and life skills courses. Notably, the training and employment opportunities are far more diverse than the limited number of schemes mentioned.

*During this time I completed courses on anger management and thinking skills. I'm finding out about things like the Peer Plus project so that I can start with the Prince's Trust on release from prison. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

Several prison leavers had accessed mental health support. Again, the support received in Parc prison was highlighted by several prison leavers. However, there

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<sup>24</sup> Shelter (2006) *Barred from housing: a discussion of the barriers faced by prisoners in accessing accommodation on release*

remains some concern that there is a stigma attached to accessing mental health services. For instance, one person was fearful of losing his job as a cleaner in the prison if he was identified as unfit for his job. More generally, there are concerns that accessing any form of support in prison can result in vulnerability.

*I was afraid to admit to being in need and thought I'd be penalised for it.  
(Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

#### **Good Practice 4 - CARAT team**

CARAT is a National Prison Service initiative designed to give those prisoners who use drugs and wish to change such a habit, an opportunity to do so whilst in prison. The multi-disciplinary CARAT team's job is to establish the prisoner's interest in receiving help to address any drug problems and the best means of going about it both in prison and on release. Any member of staff can refer to the CARAT team or prisoners can refer themselves at any time during their sentence.

## Support prior to release

This subsection describes what support prison leavers experienced in the period immediately prior to release. It appears that four key support providers at this stage are Prison Link Cymru, Transitional Support Schemes (TSS), Drugs Intervention Programmes (DIP) and resettlement workers. Comments about the role of PLC were generally positive. The service is providing useful information and making attempts to ensure suitable accommodation is offered. Furthermore, the respect given by staff is perceived to be excellent. However, there is concern that PLC cannot guarantee that accommodation is available.

*I think Prison Link is fighting to get me somewhere... I'm glad I had help from PLC, they were on my side. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*It wasn't just about giving you stuff but giving proper explanations and asking you what you think. Because it's face to face you can ask questions you want answered... On the letter she gave me she underlined numbers that I needed and explained what I need to do when I'm released. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Some prison leavers received support from TSS and DIP workers prior to release. For instance, arrangements might be made for gate pickups, or support workers might try to arrange accommodation.

*The DIP worker said he'd pick me up on release. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*The DIP worker was good but they also have difficulties in liaising with the council. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Resettlement workers provide a range of practical support at this stage in the prison sentence. For some prisoners this includes making benefits claims, arranging homelessness interviews for release and liaising with drug intervention projects. This practical support is perceived very positively.

*A resettlement worker arranged a Job Seeker's Allowance Claim and arranged appointments with the local authority for a homelessness interview on release. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*Arrangements were made by the resettlement worker for methadone to be carried on through the GP and local counselling. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

Additional support provided pre-release includes a pre-release course which addresses registration with a doctor and accessing benefits and discharge grants. Furthermore, probation also play a role at this stage, sometimes making referrals to the Homelessness section in local authorities. Whilst for many there is clearly effective support provided prior to release, some prison leavers were concerned that they had received very little support at this stage. Limited support appears to be provided when the end of the sentence is not planned sufficiently.

*I was released at short notice (2 days notice) and there were no provisions in place. I had no benefits advice. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

### **Good Practice 5 – Resettlement/TSS workers**

Resettlement and TSS workers offer continuity of support between prison and the community. They are able to deal with housing issues in prison and manage arrangements for accommodation on release. In the community resettlement/TSS workers provide tenancy support and manage the transition to other community based support over a period of up to six months.

## **Support post-release**

The support provided immediately following release from prison is the subject of this subsection. There are several key support providers at this stage, including TSS, Drugs Intervention Programmes, local authorities, resettlement workers and probation. Overwhelmingly, comments about post-release support related to TSS and DIP support. Prison leavers were sometimes met at the prison gates, or they visited centres such as the Dawn Centre in order to access support. In addition to addressing drug problems, TSS and DIP teams explored housing options and accessed financial support in the form of rent deposits. The project workers are perceived to be very accessible and extremely supportive. This demonstrates, like the recent review of TSS in Wales<sup>25</sup>, that some prisoners are receiving continuity of support 'through the prison gate'.

*I knew the support worker from NACRO so I came straight to them. I got into the Clarence Hotel. I also have a DIP worker who took me to see Agorfa which may lead to a private flat... I've been able to talk through housing options and had housing advice. Since coming out of prison support from NACRO and DIP has been brilliant, really good. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

*They (DIP/TSS) are able to relate to you, it's more like a friendship and they are accessible. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

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<sup>25</sup> Maguire, M., Clancy, A., Lane, J. and Morgan, B. (2006) *Moving forward with mentoring: an evaluation of the Transitional Support Scheme in Wales*

Several prison leavers explained that they had received effective support from their local authority post-release. This is in addition to any accommodation provided. Tenancy support workers appear to offer very effective support with benefits applications, accessing crisis loans and budgeting help. This support is not consistently available across Wales.

*All my housing benefits applications were completed by the tenancy support worker and housing association applications. It's helped me keep my tenancy and given me something worth staying out of prison for – a home. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

Resettlement workers play a significant role in supporting prison leavers post-release. They offer continuity of support through the prison gate. However, very few prison leavers appeared to be offered this form of support. The range of support provided by resettlement workers includes claiming grants for furnishing properties, helping with benefits and accessing drug support. Other areas of support include life skills and accessing housing providers. As with DIP workers, resettlement workers were praised for their accessibility and attitude.

*This time round the support has been structured and organised and has given me the want to succeed. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*I kept the same resettlement worker from Parc. She arranged an interview with The Wallich who provides my house at the moment. She also helped with a JSA claim because I'd had problems with claiming benefit. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

It has been established that some prisoners are supported by organisations such as The Wallich to find accommodation on release. Some local authorities ensure that they maintain their duty to these prison leavers whilst they are in this supported accommodation. By maintaining a duty to the prison leaver there is a greater opportunity for successful move-on from the supported accommodation and prison leavers are not deterred from moving into supported accommodation after release from prison.

It must also be acknowledged that some prison leavers received support from probation, the JobCentre and their families.

### **Good Practice 6 – DIP/TSS**

Drugs Intervention Programmes and Transitional Support Schemes are available across Wales and not only address drug problems but they also offer much wider support. For instance, they can explore housing options and access financial support in the form of rent deposits. Currently, the project workers are perceived to be very accessible and extremely supportive. Furthermore the teams provide continuity between the prison and the community.

## Good Practice 7 – Maintaining a duty whilst in supported accommodation

Some local authorities ensure that they maintain any duty owed to prison leavers if they are housed in supported accommodation that is provided by an alternative accommodation provider. The prison leavers are therefore more likely to find move-on accommodation and will not be deterred from accepting supported accommodation offered to them whilst in prison.

## Dealing with the local authority

In total, 20 interviewees presented as homeless at their local authority when they were released from prison, whilst two did not. The remaining five prison leavers did not state whether they made a presentation or not. This subsection explores the mixed perceptions homeless prison leavers have of their contact with their local authority. Significantly, positive comments were made about all of the local authorities involved in the research. In many instances prison leavers received a prompt response by the local authority, from a well-informed homelessness officer who had a positive attitude.

*They knew what they were doing... Having someone tell you and help you know what your rights are and where to go for help. The current homelessness officer is brilliant really... attitude is pretty good. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

*I was happy with the service at the time. The homelessness officer visited me at the NACRO office. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Despite some very efficient support, many prison leavers found that their local authority was unable to provide suitable accommodation. This impacted on their perception of the support provided. For example, several prison leavers were offered B&B accommodation outside of their local area, whilst others were found to be intentionally homeless and not offered accommodation.

For some prison leavers their experiences in dealing with their local authority were poor. It was suggested that the attitude of some homelessness officers was sometimes negative and unsympathetic. Furthermore, there are concerns that all possible housing options are not always explored.

*I got conflicting advice from them... the homelessness officer had a poor attitude and now I can't speak with them. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*They asked me to be homeless at home. They phoned my mother and said I'd be on the streets if she didn't agree. (Ex-prisoner, Newport)*

## Barriers to making homeless presentations

Despite the fact that most interviewees in this study presented as homeless to the local authority, many prisoners have concerns about making a presentation and sometimes fail to present. This issue was explored and many reasons were suggested why prison leavers are perhaps deterred from making a presentation. The most frequently suggested reason is that homeless prison leavers have low expectations regarding housing outcomes. According to stakeholders, many prisoners do not want to be accommodated in B&Bs because they put them in

greater risk of reoffending and returning to drug and alcohol habits. In addition, prison leavers often believe that no accommodation will be offered because they will be found intentionally homeless. These low expectations arise from a combination of poor previous experiences and a lack of information prior to release.

*Whilst the obvious route for a homeless prisoner is to present their need to the relevant local authority many do not bother because they have low expectations that their need will be met. They make poor choices because the homelessness process is slow and arduous and the relative attractions and ease of returning to previous offending related lifestyles appears to be a favourable choice. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

*Sometimes offenders are aware that if they come out of prison rehabilitated and are subsequently placed in B&Bs they might take a backward turn due to surroundings. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

Gate pickups were commonly suggested as a method for ensuring homeless prison leavers present to their local authority. One stakeholder recommended that voluntary organisations could perhaps provide a gate pickup service.

*The attrition rate between leaving the prison gate homeless and presenting to local authorities is well documented. Once the gate is closed most services disappear. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

A third barrier to making a homeless presentation is the attitude of the prison leaver. Stakeholders claimed that prison leavers often ‘*can’t be bothered*’ or they do not wish to be faced with an institutional or controlled environment having just left prison. In this instance prison leavers will make alternative arrangements and may stay with family or friends. Equally, some prison leavers will not present because they have secured alternative suitable accommodation.

*After a period within a controlled environment some (prisoners) may perceive social housing as another form of institution and therefore a vast number of released prisoners find temporary accommodation with family and friends. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

This study also sought to explore prison leavers’ experiences with other housing providers, however only seven interviewees approached another housing provider. Very positive comments were made about The Wallich and CAIS accommodation. For instance, The Wallich offered accommodation prior to release for one interviewee, therefore addressing any uncertainties. Some prison leavers also applied to other housing associations but no response or accommodation was provided. One criticism of the accommodation available through housing providers other than the local authority, was that it was expensive and prohibited the prison leaver from coming off benefits and finding employment.

# Improving current resettlement interventions

During detailed interviews, prison leavers identified what housing needs are not being met through current interventions. In addition stakeholders commented on potential service improvements. Hence, this chapter summarises the outcomes of this discussion, focussing predominantly on support during the prison sentence but also exploring support improvements pre-custody and immediately post-release.

## Pre-custody support

A significant proportion of prison leavers would like additional housing support pre-custody. This support must first address tenancy issues. For instance, it might be necessary to end a tenancy in order to prevent rent arrears accruing. In addition, several interviewees were homeless prior to prison entry and were concerned that this resulted in them going into prison early. It was suggested that perhaps alternative accommodation is required. More specifically, prisoners on remand or on short-term sentences (less than 12 months) require much greater support at this stage, potentially through resettlement workers. In general, prison leavers would like to be introduced to housing support workers at this stage in order to ensure that any housing issues are dealt with and to maintain continuity into the prison sentence.

*More signposting is needed to tenancy advice providers such as the resettlement officer. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

Several interviewees wanted no additional housing support or advice pre-custody because they were aware that they had long sentences and believed that housing would only be a concern towards the end of their sentence.

*I don't really care, it doesn't matter when your getting out is a long, long way away. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Two further support improvements were identified at this stage. Firstly, drug and alcohol support would be beneficial, perhaps through DIP workers. Secondly, family mediation would perhaps address many issues that prevent families from assisting prison leavers during custody and on release.

*I would have liked family mediation. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

## Support at reception into prison

Prison leavers and stakeholders identified similar support needs at reception into prison as they did for the pre-custody period. Some prisoners do access excellent housing support at this stage but this is not widespread. For instance, tenancy issues must be addressed for everyone on reception into prison in order to prevent rent arrears developing. This may involve ending a tenancy or maintaining a tenancy where appropriate. Previous studies have also found that prisoners are often not supported to maintain or end their tenancies and as a result they lose their housing



during custody or they build up rent arrears<sup>26 27</sup>. Furthermore, interviewees would like to begin to address their homelessness and remove uncertainties by clearly identifying housing options for release.

*I think there should be housing support when you go in. They need to protect any housing you might have... to keep it for you. (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*Some people needlessly lose their tenancy when they serve a short sentence because they have no knowledge of housing benefit. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

Similar to the pre-custody stage, several prison leavers wanted no additional support at reception into prison because they were more concerned with adjusting to prison life.

*When you first get into prison you just want to get your head around everything. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

Prison leavers also discussed their need for further drug and alcohol support at reception, particularly for those who are not registered users. Equally, two prison leavers wanted help with their offending behaviour and direction on how to cope with prison life.

## Support during main part of sentence

During the main part of the sentence a lot of housing support is available but this again appears to be inconsistent across Wales. Similarly, recent CAB<sup>28</sup> and Shelter<sup>29</sup> studies of prisons in England found that housing support is 'patchy' during the main part of the sentence. Prison leavers and stakeholders identified improvements to current interventions. The first improvement is for accommodation to be arranged at this stage in the sentence. Currently there is uncertainty throughout the sentence with regard to where the prison leaver will be accommodated on release. Several methods for securing accommodation were suggested. Firstly, a dedicated officer within the local authority should deal with prison leavers, addressing any accommodation queries. The hours served in this post would depend on the number of prisoners resettling in the local authority. Secondly, a range of housing providers should go into prisons in order to interview prisoners and present accommodation options.

*I need to know what's happening next. The support has been brilliant but I still don't know what's going to happen when I get out (in one month). (Ex-prisoner, Wrexham)*

*We desperately need more housing providers to come in and interview clients prior to release... If a housing provider comes in to interview this gives a link to the community. The trainee has met the provider and is not*

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<sup>26</sup> Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) *Resettlement outcomes on release from prison*

<sup>27</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>28</sup> Hopwood Road, F., Maynard, K., Sandbach, J. (2007) *Locked out: CAB evidence on prisoners and ex-offenders*

<sup>29</sup> Shelter (2006) *Barred from housing: a discussion of the barriers faced by prisoners in accessing accommodation on release*

*going out to meet a stranger which can be quite daunting. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

Whilst it would be beneficial for a range of accommodation providers to go into prisons and present suitable accommodation options to homeless prison leavers, all local authorities would need to ensure that they maintained their duty to the prisoner whilst they were in supported accommodation. If this is not the case, prison leavers are less likely to be accommodated in this way and will probably be housed in less suitable B&Bs and temporary accommodation.

Another improvement would be greater transparency and openness of the housing process. Despite the work of teams like PLC, many prison leavers still feel that they need more information on what support is available and what the local authority can achieve. For instance, prison leavers need to be told the realistic amount of time they might have to stay in temporary accommodation on release (the suitability of current temporary accommodation is discussed in the following chapter). More simply, accommodation providers should acknowledge any correspondence they receive from homeless prisoners.

*The council should be more clear and realistic and not give promises they can't keep. They should be more honest. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*Good to have more information about what is available and how to access the support. You're not told about the services that are available. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Some prison leavers also require better mental health support, training and employment opportunities.

## Support prior to release

There is generally adequate support prior to release according to prison leavers and stakeholders. However, the key improvement identified was for housing to be secured and agreed before leaving prison in order to address uncertainties. One stakeholder also claimed that the early release scheme must be used more effectively. It was anticipated that prisoners are being released to unstable addresses in order to gain early release. Suitable accommodation must be planned and can be provided if accommodation is secured earlier in the prison sentence.

*I think they need more guidance on how it (the Early Release Scheme) works before they come out. A lot get their hopes up... A lot are released to insecure addresses... A lot aren't staying at the address given until their official release date. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

Other support improvements at this stage include arranging work places, ensuring drug and alcohol support will continue into the community, addressing offending behaviour and helping people back into society. Arguably, this wide range of suggested interventions should begin earlier in the prison sentence.

## Support post-release

Post-release support improvements predominantly relate to issues of continuity. There are some very effective schemes currently operating that provide resettlement support in prison and continue into the community. This type of mentoring or

resettlement intervention appears to be very effective. One prison leaver explained that he was due to continue receiving support from the same worker until six months after release, following which the Wallich would then take over support responsibilities. Prison leavers would like this support to be more widely available.

*More workers like the Parc resettlement officer should be available. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

*Needs to be more mentoring services to pick prisoners up, take them to housing and other agencies and support them through the first few weeks. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

At the most basic level, this support should include gate pickups. One prison leaver observed that gate pickups are not universally available, particularly for those living a significant distance from the Welsh and English prisons. Gate pickups should include support during homelessness interviews at the local authority and should also address housing benefit issues.

*Parc prison will arrange a support worker to meet you at the gate if you're from south Wales but there's nothing for west Wales. If you're from west Wales you have to make your own way. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Continuity of support is particularly needed for drug and alcohol issues. Many prison leavers need greater access in the community to the type of support offered by CARAT teams in prison. DIP workers reportedly offer this type of support but referrals are not always made. The recent review of TSS in Wales also found that the service needs to be made more widely available<sup>30</sup>.

*Need some continuity of support. CARAT worker involvement comes to an end so DIP contact after release is a good thing. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

*I could have done with more help with the drugs situation. In there I had methadone but there was nobody when I got out at first but then I had the DIP worker who was very helpful. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*

## Additional improvements

Further to the improvements outlined above, several comments were made that are not confined to a particular point in the prison sentence. The first additional issue is that some prison leavers reportedly offend partly in order to secure accommodation. Consequently, several stakeholders and prison leavers remarked that not all prison leavers should be given priority need status. Intentional homelessness legislation partly redresses this perceived issue, however there are also worries that the same legislation currently excludes many prison leavers from accessing suitable local authority accommodation. This reiterates findings of a recent Shelter report on prisons in England<sup>31</sup>. Stakeholders explained that local authorities tend to interpret the legislation differently and consequently support provision is inconsistent across Wales.

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<sup>30</sup> Maguire, M., Clancy, A., Lane, J. and Morgan, B. (2006) *Moving forward with mentoring: an evaluation of the Transitional Support Scheme in Wales*

<sup>31</sup> Shelter (2006) *Barred from housing: a discussion of the barriers faced by prisoners in accessing accommodation on release*

*We object to prisoners having priority need status when they serve short sentences and do not like to see offenders get a property whilst their victim has to stand in line. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

*Intentionality should be considered within a wider community safety perspective. A first move should be to remove the consideration of intentionality as a duty of the local authority. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

# Accommodation and support in the community

Previous chapters, which predominantly focus on prison-based interventions, have briefly mentioned that prison leavers require suitable accommodation in the community. It is this community based support that is the focus of this chapter. The chapter describes some of the interventions that are currently available, perceptions of their effectiveness and suitability, and finally summarises what would constitute suitable accommodation for prison leavers. The examples quoted in this chapter were referred to during prison leaver and stakeholder interviews; they do not constitute a definitive list of community based interventions

## Current accommodation and support in the community

This detailed subsection describes a selection of accommodation and support available in the community to homeless prison leavers. In broad terms the discussion focuses on accommodation, floating support, and information and advice provision.

### **Accommodation**

Doorstop projects provide prison leavers with their own accommodation on release and ensure that support is provided. These projects are described as successful supported housing projects by local authorities in north Wales and whilst they are typically directed at people with substance misuse issues, prison leavers are frequently accommodated. One stakeholder described how prison leavers are able to maintain the tenancy but there are worries about move-on from the accommodation.

*We have a doorstopper property in Rhyl and the tenancy has been maintained in an appropriate manner, but there is no opportunity for the client to move to a more suitable property. (Stakeholder, Housing Association)*

There are many housing providers who are offering accommodation and support to vulnerable groups such as prison leavers. One of the most recent developments by the Wallich is the VESTA project. The accommodation is not solely for prison leavers but it tackles substance misuse, provides tenancy support and life skills training. The project is new but has already accommodated 3-4 prison leavers. The Wallich operates several other accommodation schemes, predominantly in south and mid Wales.

United Welsh and Wales and West Housing Associations offers accommodation to offenders and people at risk of offending in Cardiff in Janner House and Janner House 2 respectively. Trothwy Cyf provides support to the tenants of these schemes. The support includes education, training, employment and life skills. This schemes provides 20 bed spaces in total. Similarly, Tai Cantref offers supported housing to prison leavers in Ceredigion. The project not only provides accommodation countywide but also addresses self-motivation, education and employment needs. The project is limited because Dyfed Powys probation service has sole referral rights

to the project. It should be noted that this scheme is not within the local authorities focussed on in this study but was referred to by one stakeholder.

Projects addressing drugs misuse sometimes provide supported accommodation in Wales. For instance, NACRO have several units of supported accommodation in Llandudno Junction, Conwy. This accommodation is often accessed by homeless prison leavers who frequently have substance misuse problems.

In addition to various supported accommodation schemes, one stakeholder believes the private rented sector plays a role in accommodating prison leavers.

### **Good Practice 8 - Doorstop**

Doorstop is a supported accommodation service for ex-offenders with drug misuse issues. The accommodation is provided in several North Wales local authorities. The scheme has been successful in enabling prison leavers to maintain their tenancies and address their substance misuse issues.

### **Good Practice 9 - The VESTA project**

The Vesta Project is a partnership between The Wallich, Bridgend County Borough Council, Bridgend Local Health Board, and United Welsh Housing Association. It provides accommodation and support to homeless and potentially homeless men and women who are ex-drug users and who may have a history of offending. Clients have their own self contained flat but also share a communal living space. In addition to accommodation, the project assists clients towards independent living.

### **Floating support**

A selection of support schemes are outlined here but it is acknowledged that there are many more than this. Trothwy Cyf offer floating tenancy support to prison leavers in many parts of Wales. Similarly, Tai Hafan offers floating support to vulnerable young women, many of whom are young offenders. Several housing associations also offer floating support which prison leavers can access. Equally, the Pembrokeshire Care Society offers low level housing related support for prison leavers (amongst other client groups), whilst waiting for vacancies to become available through the Tai Trothwy scheme.

Local authorities provide varying degrees of floating support. For prison leavers where a *'full duty is owed'* the general support includes helping to secure a tenancy and employment support. Many local authorities provide a tenancy support scheme that prison leavers can access, irrespective of the tenure they are in. However, in some local authorities tenancy support can only be offered if the prison leaver is in local authority temporary accommodation. Floating support is also often provided by DIP and NACRO teams.

### **Good Practice 10 - Project Pearl floating support service**

Tai Hafan offers two bed spaces of floating support to young women probation clients in Pembrokeshire. Project Pearl is an example of one of the many floating support services operated by Tai Hafan.

## **Additional information, assistance and advice**

Prison leavers are also able to access mainstream housing advice. For instance, the Shelter Cymru advice service is accessed by many prison leavers across Wales. Locally based services, such as Pembrokeshire Action for the Homeless are also available. In addition to accommodation, floating support and information/advice, prison leavers are able to access various grants. Stakeholders mentioned furniture grants, bond schemes for accessing private rented accommodation, and local authority discretionary grants.

## **Limitations of current accommodation and support**

Having established that there are some effective community-based housing interventions for prison leavers, this subsection summarises the stakeholder and prison leaver perceptions of the limitations of current provision. Most interviewees believe that there is a general lack of suitable temporary accommodation.

*There's a lack of temporary accommodation for all offenders. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

There is overwhelming opinion that as a consequence of a lack of temporary accommodation, B&Bs continue to be used too widely in Wales. Moreover, they are perceived to be inappropriate for housing homeless prison leavers. According to one stakeholder, *'it is rare that a hostel will hold a place for an ex-prisoner when they are leaving custody'*. Hence, prison leavers only learn where they will be accommodated on the day of release and once accommodated in B&Bs it was remarked that prison leavers are not able to move on quickly enough. In April 2008 restrictions on the use of B&Bs will apply to all priority need groups, which includes prison leavers. Hence, local authorities will be required to reduce the use of B&Bs.

*Lack of available accommodation often results in the use of B&B type establishments as temporary accommodation for all presenting homeless cases including prison leavers, which is often not the most suitable accommodation for this client group. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

*If they are placed in interim accommodation e.g. hostels they are of very poor standard and are full of drug users. It seems as if they are set up to fail before they have even been given a chance. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

A lack of move-on accommodation and long-term accommodation is a further issue. This issue is not limited to prison leavers as the shortage of affordable single person accommodation is well documented in Wales and across the UK. Stakeholders explained that prison leavers are often excluded from accessing long-term local authority accommodation soon after release due to their housing histories. There are also difficulties in accessing the private rented sector. One stakeholder described how a significant increase in the migrant worker population in Wrexham has increased competition for private rented accommodation. Furthermore, when some prison leavers do access private rented accommodation it can be of a poor standard.

*In Wrexham we have a large migrant worker population who are occupying the majority of the private rented sector. We are finding it difficult to locate accommodation. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

*There's a lack of permanent accommodation. Perhaps the biggest problem, not only for offenders, is the lack of affordable, decent, social housing in Wales... There is an urgent need for single person housing. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

According to some stakeholders, difficulties in finding suitable temporary, move-on and long-term accommodation have been exacerbated by stock transfer.

*Bridgend local authority has a legal duty to offenders but has no stock so they must work with RSLs who are often reluctant to house ex-prisoners. (Stakeholder, Housing Association)*

Stakeholders and prison leavers also perceive that there is not enough support through the prison gate. Essentially there is not enough tenancy support for prison leavers in whatever accommodation they are in. This support needs to be more flexible as it often precludes prison leavers from support if they are housed in private sector accommodation. Tenancy support should also involve finding move-on and long-term accommodation. One stakeholder believes that there is a particular lack of mental health support in the community.

## Accommodation requirements

There is clearly a shortage of suitable accommodation for prison leavers in Wales. Consequently, prison leavers were asked to explain what the important factors are in any future accommodation provision. The majority of prison leavers need their accommodation to be in a suitable location. This means that it should be away from areas of high crime and drug abuse. Being allocated accommodation in 'ghettos' of crime leads prison leavers back in to crime and substance misuse and inevitably results in imprisonment and loss of accommodation.

*It took me from when I was released to get a property more than four months. The property was back on the Mount Estate which is the worse place to be. They stuck me back in that society of drink and drugs and crime so I got straight back in that cycle. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Future accommodation provision needs to make more secure accommodation available. Secure accommodation provides stability and encourages responsibility which is lacking in B&Bs and hostels where prison leavers feel there is nothing to lose. More secure tenancies also move away from the institutional setting of B&Bs that prison leavers understandably wish to escape.

*I'd be more likely to stay if I had somewhere to stay of my own. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Accommodation also needs to be affordable and of a decent standard. Providing more secure accommodation must not result in difficulties with rent payments. The affordability of the private rented sector must particularly be addressed. With regard to accommodation standards, it is a reasonable expectation that any accommodation provided should meet minimum standards, which is often not the case in B&Bs.

*Tenure isn't an issue. I've got no preference if I live in social or private rented accommodation as long as it's affordable. (Ex-prisoner, Conwy)*



Prison leavers must also have access to support if required. Firstly, tenancy support is required because prison leavers often find it difficult to settle in the community as they are not used to independent living. Tenancy support should address issues such as budgeting, accessing benefits and filling in forms.

*I never had support until now. Support's critical... If I'd had it before I would have changed my life a long time ago. (Ex-prisoner, Pembrokeshire)*

Support should also address drug and alcohol issues. In addition, family and friends of prison leavers can play a key role in the resettlement process. This means that any future accommodation must take into consideration the location of family and friends. In particular, prison leavers who have children are likely to want to live in close proximity.

*It has to be two beds for my son. I need permanent accommodation that's affordable and close to my family. (Ex-prisoner, Neath Port Talbot)*

The final requirement of accommodation provision is that employment support is also available. Reportedly, without employment prison leavers will often resort to crime and re-enter the cycle of imprisonment and homelessness.

*As many cannot get jobs they again resort to crime, leading to imprisonment and then loss of tenancy. (Ex-prisoner, Bridgend)*

# Joint working

*I would say the relationship between organisations is excellent. They all interact and people are familiar with one another, therefore information flows. We are all singing from the same hymn sheet. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

Previous chapters have shown that a range of organisations are involved in providing housing interventions for homeless prisoners in Wales. Therefore, effective joint working is required. This brief chapter summarises stakeholder perceptions of current joint working arrangements. Evidence is presented to show that joint working is taking place, highlighting some particularly good examples. However, some stakeholders believe joint working must be improved.

## Good practice

The Gwent criminal justice and supporting people forum is one example of effective joint working that brings together probation, the homeless team and supporting people. One stakeholder explained that this forum is ensuring the needs of offenders are 'flagged up'. Its effectiveness is strengthened because some probation teams are now represented on supporting people planning groups in Gwent. Similarly, in north Wales resettlement managers, PLC and homelessness teams attend the regional Homelessness Forum, providing an excellent stage for organisations to discuss support issues.

Several stakeholders explained how effective some homelessness departments are in their approach to joint working. For example, one homeless department visits the Youth Offending Team in order to provide information on what can and cannot be achieved. Moreover, case conferences are held where other agencies discuss access to help and support for particular prison leavers. In Swansea, housing options officers attend the prison regularly, taking applications, ending tenancies and providing advice.

Pembrokeshire Care Society provides low level support to prison leavers whilst waiting for vacancies to become available through the Tai Trothwy scheme. The Society has a joint working protocol with the probation service and offers advice in the local probation office.

Stakeholders were particularly positive about joint working arrangements that bring service providers together in one location. For instance, the proposed SMART drop in centre in Wrexham will ensure that agencies communicate as they will be in one building. Similarly, Altcourse prison offers housing, drug, alcohol and other support services in one cabin. This ensures that all prisoners know where to access support. One of the roles of PLC should be to provide a key link between prisons and the local authority. However, there are mixed perceptions regarding the service's effectiveness.

*Prison Link are not achieving what they could. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

*HMP Cardiff housing staff and Prison Link Cymru work well as partners. Prison Link Cymru and the local authorities work well within certain boundaries. (Stakeholder, Prison)*

### **Good Practice 11 – Gwent criminal justice and supporting people forum**

The Gwent criminal justice and supporting people forum brings together probation, homelessness and supporting people. This encourages information sharing and provides an opportunity to discuss housing issues of prison leavers.

## **Joint working concerns**

At least seven stakeholders commented on areas where joint working was not effective. Some local authorities felt that referrals were made to their homelessness department with an unrealistic expectation that accommodation will be found immediately. Reportedly, organisations must work together earlier in the housing process to redress this issue.

An additional concern is that service providers sometimes duplicate support for prison leavers. This requires better communication at the earliest stage and more clearly defined support roles. Finally, it was suggested that nomination agreements between prisons and accommodation providers would provide greater certainty of housing outcomes for prison leavers.

*There have been issues where two or three agencies are providing similar types of support at the same time. (Stakeholder, Local Authority)*

*It would help if we had tighter agreements with providers... even a nomination process. (Stakeholder, Probation)*

# Conclusions & Recommendations

Over recent years prison leavers in Wales have experienced an improvement in the housing interventions they receive. For instance, initial housing assessments are conducted for many prisoners and subsequent actions are taken to meet their needs. Furthermore, some prisoners are being met in prison by housing providers in order to arrange accommodation prior to release. Equally, some prisoners are receiving continuity of support through the prison gate into the community. This study has highlighted eleven examples of current good practice at various stages of the prison sentence and in the community, although it is notable that this is not a definitive list of good practice. These improvements are partly a result of the prioritisation of housing issues facing prisoners with a local connection to Wales who are returning as homeless. This prioritisation is evidenced in the introduction of the Homelessness Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001, the creation of NOMS Wales, the development of the WAG strategy to reduce reoffending, and the development of the Link Protocol Wales. Despite the clear improvements, this study has also highlighted inconsistencies in service provision and areas of concern. For example, the housing needs of many prisoners are being met late in the prison sentence, if at all, and there is a significant lack of suitable accommodation. This final chapter draws together the key findings and makes relevant recommendations.

## Learning from housing histories

The housing histories of prison leavers are generally unsettled and are characterised by periods of homelessness and periods in prison. Consequently, prison leavers have limited experience of feeling settled in a property. However, factors have been identified that have assisted prison leavers to feel settled in the past. These factors are: i) a suitable location, ii) long-term affordable and decent accommodation, iii) support with maintaining tenancies and substance misuse (by support agencies and family where appropriate), and iv) employment support. Based on these conclusions, four key recommendations are made:

## Recommendation 1

All accommodation providers (statutory, voluntary and private) should ensure that accommodation provided for prison leavers is in a **suitable location**. The suitability of a location can only be determined in discussion with prison leavers. Important aspects of location include but are not limited to; being close to employment and being away from people who are likely to have a negative influence in '*ghettos*' of crime.

## Recommendation 2

For ex-offenders to feel settled, they should have the opportunity to **secure their own affordable and decent accommodation**. For many prison leavers, having accommodation which is their own responsibility contributes significantly towards making them feel settled. However, this accommodation should also be affordable and should be of a decent standard.

## Recommendation 3

Many ex-offenders require significant **support in the community** from a range of support providers (statutory and voluntary), in order to maintain accommodation and avoid recidivism. Issues such as tenancy support and drug and alcohol misuse should be addressed. Where possible, support should also be encouraged by family and friends.

## Recommendation 4

In order to aid prison leavers to feel settled in the community they should be **supported to find suitable employment**. Prison services should make employment support available during custody, whilst probation should ensure it continues into the community.

## Resettlement support

There is currently a broad range of support for prisoners from the pre-custody stage through to the period immediately post release. Eleven examples of good practice have been identified, amongst other effective interventions. Early interventions include the initial housing needs assessment and subsequent action to address housing benefit and rent arrears issues. In addition there are schemes where tenancies are ended or sustained if possible. There is also currently a lot of support during the main part of the sentence, including Prison Link Cymru, resettlement support, housing providers conducting interviews in prison, CARAT teams and some employment and mental health support. Furthermore, in some areas there is continuity of support through the prison gate, mostly provided by resettlement workers, TSS and DIP teams. However, the study has clearly shown that support is not consistent across Wales and prisoners held in England particularly feel that there is limited housing support whilst in prison. Furthermore, there are concerns that the early release scheme is not being used appropriately and that prisoners are leaving to enter unsuitable accommodation in order to gain early release.

The support provided by local authorities has generally been perceived positively, although there are examples of poor treatment by individual officers. As a result of previous experiences with the local authority prison leavers often have low expectations of the services they could access. Furthermore, many do not make homeless presentations because there is limited mentoring support between prisons and the community. The local authority support that is available is inconsistent across Wales.

## Recommendation 5

Generally, housing interventions are required earlier in the prison sentence and should be consistently available across Wales and in English prisons where prisoners due to be released to Wales are held. WAG should amend the Link Protocol Wales to ensure that housing is arranged earlier in the prison sentence.

## Recommendation 6

Pre-custody, probation services should give offenders initial housing information and support them to end or maintain tenancies where necessary. Where appropriate, referrals should also be made to local authority family mediation services. On reception, the housing needs of all prisoners should be assessed and appropriate action should be taken. Action should include dealing with housing benefit and rent arrears issues. Furthermore, prisoners should be supported to end or maintain tenancies where appropriate. Initial assessments should be the responsibility of the prison service but other agencies (statutory, voluntary or private) may need to action some of the interventions identified.

## Recommendation 7

Accommodation should be secured earlier for prison leavers by learning from innovative schemes. Having a dedicated local authority officer who deals with the housing needs of prison leavers has been highlighted as good practice. Equally, inviting a range of housing providers (statutory and voluntary) to go into prisons to discuss housing options with prisoners is perceived as good practice (Resettlement Fairs). Prison Link Cymru should ensure that prisoners are aware of their entitlements, liaising with housing providers and arranging interviews with accommodation providers prior to release. Where accommodation is provided by an organisation other than the local authority, local authorities should retain any duty owed to the prison leaver. Moreover, all accommodation providers should acknowledge receipt of any applications for housing.

## Recommendation 8

Continuity of support is essential pre and post release, necessitating wider availability of resettlement, TSS and DIP support. This support should include gate pickups. WAG should emphasise the importance of transitional support to a greater degree in the Link Protocol Wales. Moreover, early release schemes should be used more appropriately. The implementation and effectiveness of the early release scheme in Wales should be explored through further research as there is evidence to suggest that its inappropriate use may result in prisoners leaving to unsuitable accommodation. This has implications for the new Bail Accommodation Support Service.

## Recommendation 9

Housing interventions should not be perceived as separate from interventions in other aspects of prisoner resettlement. Consequently, the prison service should arrange greater mental health and employment support throughout the prison sentence.

### Accommodation and support in the community

A range of supported accommodation is available to prison leavers and is provided by various local authorities, housing associations and other organisations. Supported accommodation appears to be successful in not only helping homeless prison leavers to find accommodation but also to maintain their tenancies and address issues such as substance misuse. It is notable that very few supported housing schemes are targeted solely at prison leavers. The most effective supported housing schemes seem to have good links with prisons, where the accommodation provider will visit the prison in order to present housing options to the homeless prisoners. Reportedly, the private rented sector can also play a role in accommodating homeless prison leavers but there would certainly need to be support provided whilst living at this accommodation. The study found that there is a range of floating support for prison leavers, which is increasingly available in the private rented sector. Prison leavers also have access to wider information, advice and grants. Despite the quality of accommodation and support in the community, prison leavers are far too frequently placed in B&Bs due to the general lack of alternative accommodation. Moreover, they are spending too long in this accommodation because there is insufficient move-on and long-term accommodation. However, in April 2008 the restrictions on use of B&Bs will be extended to all priority need groups. This should reduce the amount of time prison leavers might spend in B&Bs.

There are some excellent examples of joint working in providing housing interventions for prison leavers. For instance, the Criminal Justice and Supporting People Forum and the homelessness forums are bringing together key agencies. Also, some housing providers (statutory and voluntary) have been effective in creating links with prisons by going into the prison to talk with prisoners about their housing options. Prison Link Cymru is also facilitating these links to some extent. However, joint working is not consistent across Wales and often organisations are not sharing information early enough in the housing process.

## Recommendation 10

Local authorities and other supported accommodation providers should provide homeless prison leavers with more housing options, including temporary, move-on and long-term accommodation. In particular, more supported accommodation is required for prison leavers. All accommodation providers should consider establishing nomination agreements with the prison service.

## Recommendation 11

Probation and local authorities should make floating support more widely available, particularly in the private rented sector in order to increase the availability of this accommodation.

## Recommendation 12

With regard to partnership working, current forums should continue to consider prison leaver issues. In addition, efforts should be made to develop joint working relationships with the private sector in order to increase the viability of this sector as a housing option for prison leavers. Furthermore, WAG should consider evaluating the effectiveness of recent one-stop shop approaches to partnership working in the community (e.g. SMART in Wrexham) and in prisons (e.g. Altcourse support services located in one cabin).

Housing interventions in prisons and in the community have improved over recent years, with many examples of good practice emerging. Improvement is apparent in the comments of prison leavers who often stated that *this time round* the housing support was better. However, questions of continuity in Wales-wide accommodation and support are clear. It is anticipated that the conclusions and recommendations of this study will inform the current WLGA/CHC and AWCHOP study of the housing needs of high risk offenders and will also inform the forthcoming review of Prison Link Cymru. The findings of these three studies should be considered carefully by all organisations working with homeless prison leavers. Moreover, there are significant implications for current and forthcoming strategic documents, including *Joining Together in Wales*, *the Link Protocol Wales* and *the Homelessness Strategy for Wales 10 Year Plan*. Acting upon this growing evidence base will result in the housing needs of prison leavers in Wales being met more effectively.



# Appendix A.

## Prison leaver interview questions

### A Your housing

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- A1. Throughout your life, where have you lived?
- A2. In particular, have you ever been homeless?
- A3. What is the longest amount of time that you have lived in one flat or house? (Excluding childhood)
- A4. In what type of accommodation was this?
- A5. Have you ever felt comfortable and wanted to stay in your accommodation?
- A6. What helped you to feel comfortable and made you want to stay?
- A7. Have you ever felt uncomfortable and wanted to leave your accommodation?
- A8. What made you feel uncomfortable and made you want to leave?
- A9. What are the most important things about the accommodation you move to after being released from prison?
- A10. Why do you think many prisoners stay in their accommodation for only a small amount of time when they leave prison?

### B Your lifestyle

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- B1. What types of offences have you committed?
  - B2. How have these offences changed as you have got older?
  - B3. How has your offending affected your accommodation?
  - B4. How has your accommodation affected your offending?
  - B5. What support needs have you had?
  - B6. How have these support needs changed as you have got older?
  - B7. How have your support needs affected your accommodation?
  - B8. How has your accommodation affected your support needs?
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## C Periods spent in prison and the housing support you received

C1. On how many separate occasions have you been in prison? Please include times spent in prison on remand.

*Thinking about your most recent time in prison...*

C2. How long did you spend in prison on remand?

C3. How long did you spend in prison under sentence?

C4. Where were you living before entering prison?

C5. What were your main concerns about where you were living before entering prison?

C6. What support/advice did you receive PRE-CUSTODY?

C7. What support/advice did you receive on RECEPTION/INDUCTION INTO prison?

C8. What support/advice did you receive DURING CUSTODY?

C9. What support/advice did you receive PRE-RELEASE?

C10. What support/advice did you receive POST-RELEASE?

C11. Did you go to the Local Authority to present as homeless on release?

C12. How did the Local Authority deal with you? (then go to C14)

C13. Why did you not go to the Local Authority to present as homeless on release?

C14. Did you go to any other housing provider on release?

C15. How did the housing provider deal with you?

## D Your opinions on housing support for prisoners

D1. How has the support/advice you have received helped you?

D2. What was good about the way the support and advice was given?

D3. What improvements could be made to the way the support is given?

- D4. At the following times what further support/help would you have liked?
- PRE-CUSTODY?
- RECEPTION/INDUCTION INTO PRISON?
- DURING CUSTODY?
- PRE-RELEASE?
- POST-RELEASE?
- D5. Are there any problems moving from receiving support in prison to receiving support on release?
- D6. What are the most important things about your future accommodation and support?
- D7. Do you have any other comments about what helps and hinders prisoners from finding suitable accommodation on release?

## E Your profile

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- E1. Gender
- E2. What age are you?
- E3. What is your ethnic group?

# Appendix B.

## Stakeholder questions

### A Housing Issues

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- A1. What are the key housing issues facing homeless prisoners/ex-prisoners in your local area? Please explain.
- A2. What deters homeless prisoners from presenting as homeless on release?
- A3. Do you think the accommodation prisoners are currently being released to in your area is suitable for their needs?

### B Interventions

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- B1. What support/interventions are currently available in your area to help prisoners find and maintain suitable accommodation?
- B2. Please identify interventions that have worked particularly well.
- B3. Please describe any additional support/interventions that you believe are required in your area to help prisoners find and maintain suitable accommodation?

### C Service Providers

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- C1. To what extent are service providers working well together in your area to supply housing and related support/advice services for prisoners/ex-prisoners?
- C2. Do you believe housing and related support/advice given to prisoners/ex-prisoners is consistent across Wales? Please explain.

### D Additional Comments

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- D1. Please make any additional comments that might help Shelter Cymru to meet the objectives of this research.