

# RR3 Special Interest Group on Accommodation 2023-24: Report 1

Breaking down the barriers – how to ensure access to accommodation for people leaving prison

## Introduction

The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) provides the key interface between the voluntary sector, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), in order to increase mutual understanding and build a strong and effective partnership. The group is made up of senior leaders from the voluntary sector and meets quarterly with civil servants to provide guidance and feedback on MoJ policy developments.

The RR3 convenes Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to advise on specific areas of policy and practice as the need arises. This SIG has convened to explore the barriers to accessing accommodation faced by people leaving prison or people with criminal records and builds on the learning and recommendations of the 2018 Special Interest Group on Accommodation.<sup>1</sup>

This includes repeating the previous report's call for a cross-departmental strategy on accommodation, specifically focused on people leaving prison. This is because the issue of homelessness amongst people leaving prison remains extremely prevalent. The Ministry of Justice's Accommodation Following Release from Custody statistics highlight that:

- Between April 2022 and March 2023, "the proportion of persons released from custody who were housed at the point of release decreased by 2.4 percentage points"
- In the year to March 2023, "the proportion of people known to be housed drops from 86.3% on the day of release to 75.5% three months later<sup>2</sup>".

Additionally, the Ministry of Justice has stated that "evidence shows that offenders in stable accommodation are 50% less likely to commit further crimes<sup>3</sup>".

The SIG held two evidence sessions comprised of twenty-one voluntary organisations and officials from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), alongside a call for evidence that received 30 submissions. The SIG considered legislative changes and Government initiatives designed, since 2018, to mitigate some of the issues raised, and explored proposed recommendations.

March 2024

**RR3**

Reducing Reoffending  
Third Sector Advisory Group

The evidence that follows has been divided into three papers, corresponding to the three core barriers listed below. This paper corresponds to barrier number one.

- 1) Problems accessing temporary accommodation or suitable settled accommodation via effective resettlement planning, homelessness legislation or Government provision
- 2) Problems accessing the private rented sector (PRS), including Local Housing Allowance (LHA), guarantors, upfront costs and discrimination
- 3) Problems accessing adequate housing-related support, including the level of support required and the limitations of current commissioned services.

## Structure

This report is divided into three sections.

- 1) Resettlement planning – the pre-release process
- 2) Accessing local authority housing
  - Explainer: the Homelessness Reduction Act, duty to refer, prevention duty and relief duty
  - Distinguishing between the main housing duty and the relief duty
  - Priority need
  - Intentionality
  - Local connection
- 3) Accessing temporary accommodation

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## **Section 1: Resettlement planning - pre-release process**

### **Summary**

Effective pre-release planning is fundamental to the successful resettlement of people leaving prison. Yet the Public Accounts Committee, in its November 2023 report looking at resettlement support for prison leavers, found that: “for the 30 inspections taking place in 2022–23, and for which details had been published by 12 April 2023, HMI Prisons rated no prisons as ‘good’ for their work on rehabilitation and release planning<sup>4</sup>”.

The failure to provide sufficient support for people ahead of release was also raised in the November 2022 joint inspection report, led by HM Inspectorate of Probation with HM Inspectorate of Prisons, which found that “resettlement planning was fragmented”. In particular, the report states that “there was confusion about the roles and responsibilities of POMs, keyworkers, COMs and pre-release teams, which led to some tensions between practitioners<sup>5</sup>”.

### **The issues**

#### **Delays to resettlement planning and a lack of coordinated service delivery**

The SIG recognised the joint inspection’s statement that “not enough plans were made to support resettlement, as a result of the late start of much pre-release work and a lack of coordinated service delivery.” Participants described challenges in coordinating their work with pre-release teams, though acknowledged that resettlement teams also continue to be stretched and under-staffed. These factors contribute to issues completing vital resettlement work in an acceptable period before release.

Additionally, the group felt that more work could be done in police custody suites and/or prison reception – when a person first enters prison – to support people with the maintenance of existing tenancies.

Switchback, who work with young men leaving prison between the ages of 18 and 30, told us that:

“Many of the men we work with do not have a conversation with probation until after they’ve been released. We have often observed very limited communication between local authority housing teams and probation staff, with the completion of Duty to Refer forms left until the last minute”.

#### **A failure from local authorities to engage effectively with people ahead of their release**

The group heard that local authorities were not engaging with people in prison at an early enough stage and were, at times, only engaging on the day of release. As a caveat to this, it was accepted that local authorities, in many instances, do not have the resources to assess people pre-release and even when this resource is available, the prison regime can often mean a lack of suitable space, time or technology.

Housing assessments were also often “not addressed prior to release”, despite many voluntary organisations offering to facilitate the assessments on the wings in prisons, and referrals to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRSs) were delayed, with statutory duties not being completed in advance of release.

***“Why can’t more be done in the prison?”***

#### Lack of support for people on remand

People remanded in custody and then released without accommodation have limited or no access to statutory support. Homeless Link told the SIG that “prison leavers on remand are the biggest gap as there is currently no provision for them”. Additionally, people held on remand are not included in the data used by the MoJ on people “housed at the point of release”. We heard that “this cohort of immediate releases fuels homelessness rates”, particularly given their lack of statutory support. The SIG acknowledges that work is underway to explore expansion of CRS provision to people on remand.

#### SWITCHBACK CASE STUDY

“Cian was referred for local authority housing support two weeks before his release. Just before his release, the local authority told Cian that he did not qualify for support due to insufficient local connection. Cian was told that another local authority would call him at his probation meeting, but when this did not happen, he went to the council offices to ask for an assessment. No staff members were available, and he was told to phone, which he couldn’t do as he had no credit on his mobile phone. Faced with the prospect of rough sleeping, Cian stayed with people whose habits had contributed to previous arrests, including alcohol misuse. As a result of the chaos and being around alcohol, Cian stopped engaging with Switchback and with his probation officer, ultimately leading to his recall to prison”.

#### The importance of early engagement – the Ministry of Justice’s Offender Accommodation Pilot:

- Began in August 2019, enrolled participants until July 2020, and ran until July 2022
- Offered stable accommodation for adult males on sentences of less than 36 months released from three resettlement prisons (HMP Bristol, HMP Leeds and HMP Pentonville), alongside other tailored wraparound support.

The MoJ/Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioned impact evaluation found that; “discussions about the type of longer-term accommodation that an individual wanted sometimes began while the individual was still in custody”. Subsequently, “provider staff felt that this early engagement and an element of choice were key to maintaining prison leavers’ engagement in the pilot”<sup>6</sup>. The evaluation identified tailored, consistent and one-to-one support, beyond accommodation, as being essential components in its success. The evaluation also found that providers worked successfully with people leaving prison to find longer-term accommodation that met their needs. Also emphasised as critical to success was “the importance of having a trust network of landlords working with the pilot”. The second in this series of reports will go into greater detail on the importance of landlord engagement.

## Recommendations

### **Resettlement**

**1) Development of specific guidance governing release protocols for people on remand.**

**2) Development of a cross-departmental strategy, underpinned by a ministerial board, focused on mitigating the barriers to accommodation faced by people leaving prison.**

Such a strategy should be developed through a commitment to regular meetings of a cross-departmental ministerial board incorporating input from across all relevant governments and government departments (this work would build on, and not duplicate, the pre-existing work of the cross-government reducing reoffending board).

The production of this strategy should be guided by the following principles:

- The facilitation of cross-departmental work
- Co-production with people with lived experience of the justice system and voluntary organisations supporting them
- The promotion, recognition and facilitation of good practice at both a local and a national level
- Be based on an existing evidence base of what works
- Promote flexible funding models to encourage voluntary sector involvement
- Be responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics
- Be transparent and under regular review, to ensure that it work reflects changing circumstances.

**3) A more targeted approach to the work of Homelessness Prevention Teams, which are currently regional, by ensuring that there is HPT representation in every resettlement prison.**

This report notes the following recommendation from the Public Accounts Committee's November 2023 report – "resettlement support for prison leavers"<sup>7</sup> – "within six months, HMPPS should write to the Committee setting out an action plan for improved support for those who leave the prison system, including clear steps towards its approach of an adequate and consistent resettlement service for all prison leavers".

The government has subsequently agreed to the Committee's recommendation<sup>8</sup>, with a target implementation date of May 2024. Recommendation 3 supports this target in order to strengthen existing resettlement processes.

## **Recommendations (cont.)**

### **4) Embedding multi-agency resettlement support panels (drawing on best practice from the Youth Estate) in each resettlement prison incorporating all relevant support agencies.**

This should include people with lived experience working alongside probation to offer holistic and continued support following release.

Allowing for local flexibility, these support panels would be a reformulation of existing resettlement boards. They would be tasked with creating a longer timeframe in which resettlement work would be completed, alongside aligning all housing-related work, including the duty to refer (DTR) and Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) referrals in preparation for release from prison.

To support the panels' work, we recommend the following key principles:

- Early identification of post-release accommodation need – including through an initial trigger via the Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST) process
- Constitution of support panels to meet six months pre-release – supported by initial Community Offender Manager (COM)-Pre-release team (PRT) pre-release assessment and involving all relevant support services and staff
- Convening of panel and relevant staff, when required, in juncture between the initial six months support panel meeting and the next staging post of the twelve week pre-release board (which would be re-constituted as the proposed resettlement support panel)
- Immediately followed by engaging with the individual due to be released.

### **5) Linking the rollout of resettlement passports with resettlement support panels.**

The panels should be structured around the information contained within the resettlement passport.

### **6) The development of plans to ensure consistent mental health support is available through-the-gate.**

### **7) A basic essentials commitment – so that every person leaving prison has access to a phone, photo ID and a bank account.**

### **8) Exploring the viability of commissioning additional multi-agency wellbeing hubs in the community, co-locating services and ensuring effective multi-agency support for people on release from prison.**

We recommend the current model of CoLab based in Exeter<sup>9</sup>.

## **Recommendations (cont.)**

### **9) Exploring the viability of embedding a cross-government resettlement framework.**

This should be coordinated by central government, and bring together relevant departments, local authorities and the voluntary sector to work on a localised basis.

This framework should incorporate:

- One-to-one support for every person leaving prison
- Minimum standards of support
- A localised approach centred on local partnership working across statutory and non-statutory bodies, and tailored to the local community to which a person is returning
- Access to benefits on the day of release.

### **10) Embedding, and extending the current provision of Departure Lounges into CRS contracts, allowing for local flexibility.**

### **11) Including homelessness prevention as a key criteria within Regional Reducing Reoffending Plans.**

## Section 2: Accessing local authority housing

### Summary

The problems in accessing local authority accommodation (interchangeably referred to as social housing) remain significant. These problems include:

- A subjective, and often inappropriate, interpretation of existing homelessness legislation by statutory authorities
- A general shortage of social housing which is far exceeding demand.

### Accessing local authority housing – explainer

#### The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) – duty to refer, prevention duty and relief duty:

The process by which a person leaving prison can access local authority housing has been shaped by the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017.<sup>10</sup>

Under regulation 10 of the HRA<sup>11</sup>, the duty to refer was introduced, requiring statutory organisations, including prisons and probation, to notify local housing authorities of people who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within a timeframe of 56 days. This includes people in prison due to be released within 56 days and likely to be homeless on release, as well as people in short-term accommodation – such as Approved Premises – with no move-on provision. Within this duty sits a “prevention duty” and then a “relief duty”. If the applicant is threatened with homelessness, the local authority will owe the prevention duty. This requires the local authority to take “reasonable steps” to help the person secure accommodation to prevent them from becoming homeless.

If the applicant becomes homeless or is already homeless, the local authority will owe the relief duty. This requires the local authority to “take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that accommodation becomes available for at least six months”<sup>12</sup>. This is the legal duty to help secure accommodation and relieve the applicant’s homelessness. Neither duty requires the local authority to actually provide accommodation, but there is a power (not a legal duty) for the authority to provide accommodation as one of the steps that they can take.

The relief duty is available to all of those who are already homeless and eligible, irrespective of whether they have priority need (we provide more detail on priority need below). This work will take place, for example, when a person is already homeless or if previous homeless prevention work has proved unsuccessful, at which point they will be owed the relief duty.



## **Distinguishing between the main housing duty and the relief duty**

There are different levels of support that a person can receive from the local authority.

### **Eligibility for the main housing duty:**

- The main housing (or homelessness) duty will be provided by the local authority when a person is both deemed as having priority need and is not deemed as having made themselves intentionally homeless
- Following the end of the relief duty (after the 56-day period), the local authority then provides the main housing duty – to someone with priority need and who is not deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless - which requires the provision of suitable, temporary accommodation for as long as is appropriate and until the authority has found the person suitable, settled accommodation

The local authority is able to end the main duty if a person is evicted from their accommodation for certain reasons, including for anti-social behaviour.

### **Ineligibility for the main housing duty:**

- If a person does not meet these tests (does not have priority need and/or is deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless), then they will still receive the lesser, relief duty, but not the main housing duty
- This means that the local authority is obligated to provide assistance in securing accommodation, but is not obligated to source or secure accommodation
- Their obligation is to “help to secure” which only requires a local authority to take reasonable steps to assist the person (for at least six months), as opposed to support securing accommodation.

### **Ending the relief duty:**

There are a number of ways in which the relief duty can be ended.

After 56 days:

- If the main duty is owed (i.e. if the authority is satisfied the applicant is in priority need and not intentionally homeless) the relief duty will automatically end
- If the main duty is not owed, the authority can serve notice to end the relief duty if it has been complied with (whether the applicant has found alternative accommodation or not)
- If the main duty is not owed, in some circumstances the local authority can choose to extend the relief duty beyond 56 days.

Before the 56 days:

- If the applicant has “deliberately and unreasonably refused to cooperate”
- If the applicant has successfully secured suitable accommodation for at least six months
- If the applicant has refused certain offers of accommodation from the local authority.

### **Other duties:**

- In addition to the relief duty, the LA will also put together a personalised housing plan (PHP) informed by an assessment of need – the PHP and relief duty go hand in hand.

## Priority need

When assessing a person's application for support, the local authority will need to decide whether that person is deemed as having a priority need. The Homelessness guide for local authorities states that: "a person who is vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence or remanded in custody has a priority need for accommodation"<sup>13</sup>, with the relevant provisions contained within part VII of the Housing Act 1996<sup>14</sup> and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002<sup>15</sup>. This vulnerability test, as set out in the homelessness guide, should consider "all relevant factors that might contribute to a person being significantly more vulnerable if homeless than an ordinary person would be if homeless"<sup>16</sup>.

It is important to note that deeming someone leaving prison as having priority need is not an automatic duty, and that each person needs to demonstrate that they are vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence.

- 1) Reaching the vulnerability threshold** - we were repeatedly told by the SIG participants that people leaving prison being are increasingly being told that they do not reach that threshold for vulnerability. This is due to not successfully demonstrating that they were more vulnerable as a result of their custodial sentence than an ordinary person would be if homeless.
- 2) Rejected as having priority need** – accordingly, voluntary organisations supporting people coming out of prison are reporting an increasing number of instances in which their service users are rejected as having priority need and/or being deemed as having made themselves intentionally homeless. In both instances, we have heard evidence of the legislation governing these processes – namely the Homelessness Reduction Act – not being applied appropriately, creating significant barriers for people leaving prison when attempting to access local authority accommodation, including receiving the lesser duty under the clauses contained within the Housing Act 1996.
- 3) Inconsistent decision-making and a postcode lottery** – participants agreed that the process through which services users are being denied by local authorities as having priority need "is really not consistent in terms of decision-making", with many describing the process as a "postcode lottery." One participant told us that: "we work across four local authorities in the southwest. Some will be able to push for priority need and others will just say absolutely not." In Wales, we were told that: "we're not really seeing anyone get priority need in Wales. There is an assumption that a person is not priority need because they are a prison leaver". It is important to acknowledge that the Welsh Government is currently consulting on proposals to end the priority need and intentionality tests.
- 4) Ineffective discharging of statutory obligations** - the session also heard that local authorities are not always effectively discharging their statutory obligations to secure accommodation. One participant explained that: "local authorities are sending referrals to us for accommodation where the individual does have priority need and should be housed by them." Another went on to say that: "there seems to be an overreliance on voluntary organisations to fill the gaps in the jobs that statutory organisations should be doing". We also heard of "local authorities not attending housing assessments" as well as voluntary providers "having to chase DTR (duty to refer) duties following referrals being

**5) Exacerbated by a shortage of housing** - even when people are being deemed as having priority need, the general shortage of accommodation often means that “there’s not a lot that statutory organisations can do because they don’t have appropriate housing.”

**6) Priority need for women** - we heard from a number of organisations supporting women on release from prison, who reinforced areas of difficulty around the application of the priority need classification:

- Domestic abuse considerations - there is a statutory obligation for women to receive priority need status as a result of having suffered from domestic abuse. Yet often, this “gets overlooked” by housing officers which can result in women returning to abusive relationships to avoid homelessness.
- Sexual exploitation - we also heard about the issue of sexual exploitation. One participant explained: “women who are exploited, experiencing adult sexual exploitation, are not identified as having priority need. What tends to happen is that women in these situations will have exhausted the accommodation options open to them, apart from local authorities giving them a tent”.

**“...some local authorities are saying that, by committing a crime, you’ve chosen to make yourself intentionally homeless. Which is not what the law says.”**

## Intentionality

A local authority can deem a person as having made themselves intentionally homeless if they:

- Deliberately did something (a deliberate act) to cause them to lose their home
- Or failed to do something (a deliberate omission) which causes them to lose their home.<sup>17</sup>

The burden of proof for identifying the deliberate action or omission, in this instance, falls on the local authority. It is the local authority’s responsibility to evidence the fact that an applicant did or did not do something that caused them to lose their accommodation, while factoring in individual circumstances.

### **Statutory support for people deemed as having made themselves intentionally homeless:**

Once a person has been deemed as having made themselves intentionally homeless, a local authority is still obligated to provide accommodation assistance. As the homelessness code of guidance for local authorities<sup>18</sup> states, “the prevention and relief duties owed to applicants who are eligible for assistance and homeless, or threatened with homelessness, apply irrespective of whether they may be considered homeless intentionally”.

### **Classified as having priority need but deemed as intentionally homeless:**

Support remains available when a local authority is satisfied that an application has a priority need, but that same applicant has been deemed as having made themselves intentionally homeless. The relevant legislation states that the “authority must secure that accommodation is available for such period as they consider will give him a reasonable opportunity for his occupation” and “provide him with advice and assistance in any attempts he may make to secure that accommodation becomes available for his occupation”<sup>19</sup>.

## **Inappropriate application of existing legislation**

We heard throughout the sessions that the legislation governing these processes is not being applied correctly and is too subjective in its interpretation. In particular, many service users of the organisations involved in the SIG are being classified as intentionally homeless, simply as a result of having served a custodial sentence and, therefore, having lost their home. This is an incorrect interpretation and application of existing legislation and has a significant impact on a person's ability to access accommodation.

One participant told us: "there are local authorities who aren't going to the full housing assessment, but are saying that a person is likely to be deemed as being intentionally homeless because they committed a crime when they were last on the property. Saying you chose to commit a crime and then went to prison is not in the spirit of the legislation".

## **Failure of local authorities to effectively discharge their obligations**

We also heard that local authorities are too quick to deem people as having made themselves intentionally homeless. As one participant told us: "councils need to have evidence that someone has lost their tenancy by virtue of having offended and gone into prison. That's not always the case". Another told us that: "local authorities are quick to say that someone is intentionally homeless so that they then don't have to follow through on further enquiries".

As set out above, the burden of proof – identifying the deliberate act or omission leading to that person's homelessness – is meant to fall on the local authority. The local authority must, therefore, be able to clearly illustrate that the applicant has made themselves intentionally homeless and look closely at the individual circumstances of each case. Instead, as participants clearly highlighted, there are extensive instances of local authorities informing people leaving prison that they "must be intentionally homeless" as a result of having served a custodial sentence.

## **Barriers for women with children**

Women wanting to stay close to their children is also not accounted for. Refusing a property that is not close to their children leads to women being perceived as having made themselves intentionally homeless.

## **Local connection**

A council is obliged to provide support to people with a "local connection", which means that you have links to that council area because:

- You lived or have lived in the area recently
- Work in the area
- Have close family living there
- Get care leavers support in the area
- Lived in asylum support housing in the area.<sup>20</sup>

Local authorities are responsible for an individual if they have a connection to that local authority. In cases where an applicant has no local connection, the local authority into which a person has been released has to keep the duty.

Yet, we heard of a number of instances in which the local connection criteria has not been applied appropriately.

- 1) People being resettled out of area** – we heard of people leaving prison being allocated probation officers in areas where they have no local connection and therefore no housing eligibility
- 2) Local connection having a detrimental impact on resettlement** – we also heard of issues with the local connection test being applied in cases where a location can be damaging to a person’s rehabilitation – due to past associations that have contributed to that person ending up in prison, for example.

## Recommendations

### Accessing local authority accommodation

- 1) Allow the duty to refer to be completed by CRS providers, or other relevant stakeholders, to expedite the process through which a person is able to receive support.**
- 2) Ensure more efficient access to prisons for relevant local authority representatives to complete housing assessments in a timely manner.**
- 3) Implement guidance for local authorities on the categorisation of institutionalisation as a factor in the classification of priority need, as well as additional training for local authority stakeholders on the application of existing homelessness legislation.**
- 4) Amend existing homelessness legislation to increase the current 56-day duty to a six month duty, as is currently being explored by the Welsh government in its White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales<sup>21</sup>.**

This should be done in conjunction with an alignment of the timeframe of other housing-related activities including CRS referrals (currently triggered twelve weeks, pre-release) to ensure that both processes can be triggered six-months, pre release.

- 5) Implement a standardisation of the application of existing homelessness legislation.**

This would avoid the subjective interpretation of existing statutory duties, including with regards to priority need and intentionality.

This should include exploring the possibility of moving the responsibility for placing people into accommodation away from local authority housing teams.

## **Section 3: Accessing temporary accommodation - Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3)**

***“CAS3 is there to avoid a cliff edge, but simply kicks the cliff edge down the road”***

### **Summary**

The government has provided investment to mitigate against some of the barriers to accessing accommodation faced by people leaving prison. This has predominantly come through its Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3) provision, which provides accommodation for up to 84 nights for people leaving prison at risk homelessness.<sup>22</sup> CAS3 was mobilised nationally from May 2023, when its roll out was started in the final six probation regions.

### **The issues**

- 1) Insufficient capacity** - though welcome, the service is not yet providing the required additional capacity needed due to the slower than anticipated roll out in the national roll out regions.
- 2) Regional disparity** - we were told of the “general regional disparity in provision”, along with an “acute shortage” of CAS1 (approved premises) and CAS2 accommodation (housing for people without a suitable address for the term of their licence or Bail Order), in the southwest. In Wales, we were told that: “there seems to be a flaw in identifying properties. In some local authorities, it hasn’t enhanced provision and hasn’t added much in way of capacity”.
- 3) Flaws in communication** - there remain issues around the communication from government on the availability of new sources of funding and housing provision, with several delivery organisations highlighting a lack of communication on the availability of CAS2 properties.

### **Building on success - Manchester and Bolton CAS3**

Manchester and Bolton CAS3 was highlighted as a regional example of successful CAS3 provision. On the Out<sup>23</sup> - the area’s support provider for CAS3 accommodation - deliver a service that:

- Hires people who have recently been in prison to provide practical and emotional support to CAS3 service users
- Works alongside probation staff to offer holistic support, which includes tangible, one-to-one support in accessing move-on accommodation in either local authority or private housing.

Additionally, we were told of the positive impact of resettlement panels that have been formed as part of this CAS3 delivery work. The feedback provided was that: “the resettlement panels work really well and are having a really positive impact, with staffing attending and reporting that having local authority representation and other agencies in the room, and the ability to plan together, is really supportive”. Key elements of these panels include:

- Multi-agency panels including CAS3 providers, local councils and probation
- Work beginning as soon as someone moves into a CAS3 property.

**“CAS3 spaces are few and far between for women”**

A focus on effective multi-agency delivery, assessing and identifying each person’s needs, is a common theme in seeking solutions to improving resettlement processes for people leaving prison. As discussed in the separate resettlement section in this series of reports, the SIG has developed additional models for resettlement panels, based in prisons, that acts as the starting point of this multi-agency work, which can then be built on in the community, including within CAS3 service provision.

### Temporary accommodation provision for women

The barriers for women leaving prison can be particularly significant, highlighted by data shared with the group by Nelson Trust. In their 2020 feasibility study, of the women they interviewed, 0% were confident that they understood all their housing options; 64% did not know where they would sleep on the day of their release or knew that they would be homeless; and 50% did not (in a previous release) or felt they would not receive support into accommodation on their first day of release. One woman interviewed said: “I have never had my own place and this was partly the cause of me reoffending”.

As a result, access to CAS3 is a vital component of support that needs to be put in place for women leaving prison. Yet, provision in this area has created a number of obstacles.

### Restricted access to CAS3 properties

Despite 10% of CAS3 accommodation, nationally, being made available for women leaving prison, we heard that accessing the service has been particularly challenging for women and that there continues to be a “lack of temporary accommodation options for women leaving prison.” One organisation supporting women in the north east explained that: “there are many women we cannot offer anything to. And this can lead to high levels of sexual exploitation, with women finding landlords and using sex for rent”.

PACT, in reference to their work with women in the southeast, told us: “the number of women currently accessing CAS3 in the southeast is very low. Recent data shared with us indicates that, in the last quarter, 6 women were released into CAS3 from 4 women’s prisons that typically, collectively, release 180-200 women per quarter”, clearly evidencing an insufficient provision of CAS-properties for women.

### Lack of move-on options

For those that are able to access CAS3 accommodation, the issue of securing longer-term housing remains difficult given that move-on considerations were not built into the original CAS3 model. Subsequently, temporary provision risks simply “delaying the cliff edge” by the twelve week period in which a person is able to stay in CAS3 accommodation. For women, the data available is stark. With patchy access to temporary provision, settled accommodation paints an even bleaker picture. In 2021-22, more than half of women left prison (53%) without settled accommodation.<sup>2425</sup>

### Unsuitable location of bedspaces

We heard that of the accommodation that is available, with regards to the general availability of temporary accommodation, it is “not always safe for women as they are close to the city centres and full of substance misuse. This is not suitable for women who have experienced trauma and abuse”. One participant, working in a resettlement team within a women’s prison shared that many of the women released into temporary accommodation from this prison ended up being recalled as they “did not feel safe in the temporary accommodation and so they refused to stay there”.

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### **Additional barriers:**

Voluntary organisations supporting women in accessing CAS3 accommodation also highlighted the following issues (which also apply, in certain instances, to men leaving prison):

- A lack of familiarity amongst prison and probation staff with regards to the scheme – this was highlighted as particular area of concern in Kent, which was one of the CAS3 pilot regions
- An onerous referral process
- Gaps in wraparound support provision, particularly for the most vulnerable women.

## **Recommendations**

### **Temporary accommodation**

**1) Enhanced education and training, of the range of statutory organisations responsible for supporting people leaving prison.**

This should focus on ensuring knowledge of CAS3 provision, with an additional emphasis on the availability of 10% of bedspace for women.

**2) Increased provision of additional women-only temporary accommodation.**

**3) A commitment to the continuity of CAS3 provision beyond the existing spending review.**

**4) A commitment to ensuring that CAS3 provision reaches its original target for bedspace, before savings were factored into the service following the 2023 Efficiencies and Savings Review.**

**5) Developing a segmentation of existing CAS3 provision to ensure tailored support is available for specific cohorts.**

This should include (but not limited to) women, young adults, and older people (aged 50+) leaving prison.



## **Recommendations (cont.)**

### **7) Replicating existing best practice within CAS3 provision, with Bolton and Manchester CAS3 highlighted as a model to replicate.**

This should incorporate:

- Effective multi-agency working – through the establishment of resettlement panels, formed as part of CAS3 delivery work and involving probation, local authorities and CAS3 provider, and meeting as soon as an individual has moved into a CAS3 property
- Holistic, one-to-one support, both practical and emotional, to support people through CAS3 and into suitable, move-on accommodation
- Lived experience – Bolton and Manchester CAS3, with On the Out as the support providers for CAS3 accommodation, involve people recently released from prison in their service delivery to support people in CAS3 accommodation.

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## End notes

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## RR3 Special Interest Group on Accommodation 2023-24: Report 1

Breaking down the barriers – how to ensure access to accommodation for people leaving prison

March 2024

### End notes (cont.)

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