

# All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness

Homelessness prevention for  
care leavers, prison leavers and  
survivors of domestic violence

July 2017: Report 1

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# FOREWORD



Neil Coyle, MP

**As newly elected Co-Chairs to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness, we are pleased to introduce its first report. Homelessness can affect anyone, yet it is often not seen as a problem for many groups and can be easily ignored. As Officers to the Group last year, we understand how great an issue homelessness is and how it is much more than just rough sleeping.**

We therefore chose to focus on homelessness prevention for three specific cohorts in our first year; care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. We chose these cohorts because too often there is an inevitability to their experiences of homelessness, and because we were all in agreement that this can be stopped. There is a commonality for these three groups: they should all be known to services and therefore their homelessness should be preventable as there are obvious intervention points. Evidence in this report demonstrates how many factors can contribute to the homelessness of these three cohorts. We know that homelessness is life shattering and creates further problems, from loss of confidence to physical and mental health breakdowns.

Care leavers ready to transition to adulthood are stopped in their tracks by being unable to access or maintain accommodation, a vital component to becoming independent. Survivors of domestic violence who need sanctuary and stability are being forced back into dangerous situations or into rough sleeping by a lack of housing support. Prison leavers often cannot immediately access housing and are forced onto the streets, left unable to rehabilitate themselves and are at high risk of re-offending by a lack of housing provision.

The APPGEH championed the recently passed Homelessness Reduction Act but more must be done and more resources made available. This report demonstrates that with focused and evidence-based interventions there is nothing inevitable about homelessness for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. It also gives government and other decision makers carefully thought through recommendations for action.

This report is the culmination of a year's research and consultation and the report helpfully shows that prevention here is key and, most importantly, achievable. As joint Co-Chairs, we welcome its findings and we look forward to acting upon the recommendations.

We would like to pay tribute to all the organisations and the people with lived experience who have contributed to this report and took time to meet with us, submit evidence or attend the APPGEH's inquiries in Parliament. Without them, this well evidenced report could not exist. Our thanks must also go to the Group's original Chair, David Mackintosh, for leading the Group's great work from the beginning.

Special thoughts go to the APPGEH's late Vice-Chair Jo Cox. Jo was instrumental in the setting up of the APPGEH and was committed to all forms of social inclusion. Her commitment to ending homelessness and compassion is an inspiration to us all.

We now look forward to working with our new Vice-Chairs; Ivan Lewis MP, Mark Prisk MP and Rachael Maskell MP and our Officers; Bob Blackman MP, Emma Hardy MP, Nick Herbert MP, Chris Matheson MP, Justin Madders MP and Colleen Fletcher MP to take forward the recommendations in this report.

Together, we are united in ending homelessness.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Great Britain, tens of thousands of households approach local authorities for support with homelessness. The number of cases of all forms of homelessness has risen in England, while remaining steady in Scotland, though the number of people in temporary accommodation has risen dramatically. In Wales due to legislative changes, more people are having their homelessness prevented than ever before.

Between 2014 and 2016 rough sleeping rose dramatically by over 50% in England.<sup>1</sup> The current safety net is clearly not working as efficiently as it could to prevent and resolve homelessness. The APPGEH was set up to tackle this issue and we believe it is vital that the Government recognises this growing emergency.

Homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurrent. In our first Parliamentary year we have developed strong cross-party support and provided a platform for homeless people to engage with Parliamentarians and inform the political dialogue surrounding homelessness. Alongside MPs and Peers, the APPGEH works with a wide range of homelessness organisations to enable the group to be fully informed on the debate and understand the diverse homeless population. Our goal from inception was to develop robust policy solutions to prevent and end homelessness.

Preventing homelessness has been the focus of our first year of activity, specifically looking at cohorts which are most at risk: care leavers, prison leavers, and survivors of domestic violence. We brought together people with lived experience and other experts at inquiry evidence sessions to develop policy recommendations which could benefit these groups.

These three cohorts have much in common in relation to the risk of homelessness, with all experiencing transitions in life that can be traumatic. These transitions all involve opportunities and duties for the Government to intervene in effective, timely and successful ways. The Government should be ensuring safety and security is provided for people, whether that is from the public, charities or private organisations. Critically, these interventions should respond to housing needs.

Research tells us that one third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care<sup>2</sup> and 25% of all homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, housing and homelessness are key issues for survivors of domestic violence. In 2016, 90% of women in refuges were reported to have housing needs<sup>4</sup> and in 2015/16, 6,550 people became homeless because of a violent relationship breakdown, accounting for 11% of all homeless acceptances.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, 35% of female rough sleepers left their homes due to domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>

Twenty per cent of prisoners surveyed in 2014 said they had no accommodation to go to on release and there are many barriers which can make finding accommodation on release difficult.<sup>7</sup> Preventative interventions for this cohort should both prevent homelessness and reduce reoffending. Ministry of Justice (MoJ) research from 2012 found that 60% of prisoners believed that having a place to live was important in stopping them from reoffending in the future and reported that 79% of prisoners who were homeless prior to custody, were reconvicted in the first year after release, compared with 47% of those who were not.<sup>8</sup>

1. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Rough Sleeping homelessness statistics, Autumn 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2016>.
2. M. Stein and M. Morris, *Increasing the Number of Care Leavers in 'Settled, Safe Accommodation*, London, C4EO, 2010.
3. P. Mackie and I. Thomas, *Nations Apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain*, London, 2014, Crisis. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf).
4. Women's Aid, *Meeting the Needs of Women and Children, Annual Survey*, Bristol, Women's Aid Federation of England, 2016. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/annual-survey-2016/>.
5. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Live Tables on Homelessness, Table 774. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>.
6. K. Moss and P. Singh, *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe: Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse*, Policy Press, 2015. <https://policypress.co.uk/women-rough-sleepers-in-europe>.
7. I. Brunton-Smith and K. Hopkins, *Prisoners' experience of prison and outcomes on release: Waves 2 and 3 of SPCR*, London, 2014, Ministry of Justice.
8. K. Williams, J. Poyser and K. Hopkins, *Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey*, London, Ministry of Justice, 2012. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/278806/homelessness-reoffending-prisoners.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278806/homelessness-reoffending-prisoners.pdf).

## CARE LEAVERS

A local authority should know exactly when a care leaver or prison leaver is making the transition from institutional life to independence and should be ready and prepared to step in at that stage. Similarly, survivors of domestic violence should be given a crime reference number as soon as they make a domestic violence report to the police. However many survivors feel unable or too afraid to even report abuse to the police in the first place.<sup>9</sup> Time and again these people are getting lost despite, in many cases, receiving assistance from public bodies which should be a trigger to prevent their homelessness.

Between January and March 2017, 11% of rough sleepers in London were care leavers and 37% had experience of being in prison.<sup>10</sup> While there are clear points for intervention for these groups, they are often not acted upon by the appropriate services and there is no systematic oversight or enforcement from central government to make the systems work.

Homelessness prevention for these groups is an achievable goal. In order to design workable and robust policy recommendations we have gathered evidence from stakeholders from across the homelessness, children in care, criminal justice and women's rights sectors. In addition, we held three inquiry sessions in Parliament with people with lived and learnt experience and with Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum.

The APPGEH found that the problems arising from homelessness for these cohorts are vast and come at a great cost to society as well. There is currently a lack of joined up government policy and service delivery, both of which are essential to prevent homelessness.

We wholly support the Homelessness Reduction Act and championed its journey through Parliament. Significantly, the Act includes a 'Duty to Refer' which requires public bodies to make referrals to local authority homelessness teams if they are working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The public bodies subject to this duty will be listed in

secondary legislation and we would expect children's, domestic abuse, probation services and prisons to be included. This could reduce homelessness in these cohorts which may not typically come in to contact with local authority homelessness teams. The Government's support for the Act, and indeed its prevention agenda, is welcome and we believe this report aligns very closely to that programme. The Government is well placed to help these cohorts but homelessness prevention must firstly be embedded into every relevant government department and public service.

We therefore recommend national Government establishes a cross-government strategy, led by Number 10 to prevent and tackle homelessness. The recommendations presented in this report provide an important opportunity for Government to prevent homelessness for a significant proportion of the population within the next Parliament. With so many people already on the radar of the police, local authorities, prisons and social services, it is inexcusable that they should fall through the net. A strategy would also align with the Conservative manifesto which committed to establishing a 'Homelessness Reduction Taskforce' to focus on prevention.

**'I was always treated like a child, as though I couldn't stand on my own two feet. This is why people avoid going to the local authority.'**

**Nikki, care leaver**

A care leaver is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Care leavers, as children previously looked after by the local council, or 'corporate parent' as it is known, should have all aspects of their wellbeing taken care of, but too often their housing needs are overlooked.

In 2008, nearly half of all men under 21 who had been in contact with the criminal justice system had experience of being looked after and in 2014, nearly a quarter of female care leavers became teenage parents, and in 2012 care leavers were four to five times more likely to be self-harming adults.<sup>11</sup> The poor outcomes that care leavers face can have significant knock on effects in life and present significant costs to both the care leaver and to public services. Investing in more transformational services for care leavers and other young people with complex needs when they are starting out in their adult life, will have considerable cost benefits to health, criminal justice and other services in the future.

In order to create a successful transition to adulthood and independent living, steps must be taken early on to ensure a secure home is available. Crucially this must be part of a wider pathway or transition plan to deal with other issues, such as mental ill health or education, training and employment needs. We are concerned that if all accompanying issues a care leaver

may have are not addressed, they could be at serious risk of homelessness. One third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care<sup>12</sup> and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives,<sup>13</sup> yet the Government's Care Leavers' Charter states, 'we [the government] promise to find you a home.'

**North Yorkshire County Council** has developed a multi-agency 'No Wrong Door hub' which seeks to better engage the hardest to reach young people within the care system and better prepare them for their transition to adulthood. The hub connects their care leavers with a personal advisor or key worker which suits their specific needs and this person supports them, in most cases, to age 25. The personal advisor/key worker brings all local agencies together to support the care leaver and mitigate any risks.

We are concerned that despite 605 care leavers aged 18-20 being accepted as statutorily homeless in England in 2015/16, there is still no requirement to record the number of care leavers who are denied an offer of settled accommodation because they are deemed to have made themselves homeless.<sup>14</sup> In July 2015 only 8 out of 151 local authorities knew where all their care leavers were living.<sup>15</sup> We are concerned that the Department for Education (DfE) does not collect data on care leavers after 21, or the number of young people housed in B&B accommodation, therefore we do not know the numbers of care leavers living in unsuitable or unsafe accommodation.

9. The Crown Prosecution Service, *Violence against Women and Girls Crime Report*, London, CPA, 2014. [https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps\\_vawg\\_report\\_2014.pdf](https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf).

10. Mayor of London, *CHAIN Quarterly Report*, London, GLA, January-March 2017. [https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2017-04-28T16:53:42.89/Greater London January-March 17](https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2017-04-28T16:53:42.89/Greater%20London%20January-March%2017).

11. National Audit Office, *Care leavers' transition to adulthood*, London, Department for Education, 2015. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood-summary.pdf>.

12. M. Stein and M. Morris, *Increasing the Number of Care Leavers in 'Settled, Safe Accommodation'*, London, C4EO, 2010.

13. P. Mackie and I. Thomas, *Nations Apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain*, London, 2014, Crisis. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf).

14. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Statutory homelessness January to March 2016 and homelessness prevention and relief 2015 to 2016*, England, 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-january-to-march-2016-and-homelessness-prevention-and-relief-2015-to-2016-england>.

15. National Audit Office, *Care leavers' transition to adulthood*, London, Department for Education, 2015. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood-summary.pdf>.

Too often, care leavers who present at their local authority as homeless cannot access the support they need. Ofsted reported last year that 64% of local authorities were rated inadequate or requiring improvement in their services for care leavers.<sup>16</sup> Much of the Ofsted report argues that local authority problems are due to systematic errors rather than conscious ‘gatekeeping’ (where councils fail to effectively assess a homeless applicant’s situation and needs), yet we heard that intentionality is being used as a reason for preventing care leavers from accessing housing. Local authorities will deem some intentionally homeless if they find their homelessness was caused by something that they deliberately did or failed to do. Care leavers, if accepted as priority need, are often not given a choice of accommodation options and this can result in them living in unsafe and unsuitable housing. Research into outcomes for care leavers by Barnardo’s published in 2014 found bringing a care leaver into that decision making process was integral to moving into independence.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, leaving care grants are slow to be released. This can leave care leavers out of pocket, potentially pushing them into arrears or debt.

**The Money House** initiative delivered by MyBnk, is a financial education charity, that provides a five-day life skills course to young people in Greenwich. This includes cooking and money management. Since 2012 they have trained over 600 young people. Evaluation of the programme showed that in its four years of activity not one young person had been evicted and previous attendees are £300 lower in debt than other young people in Greenwich. The initiative has now been expanded to Newham. One of our care leaver witnesses had had similar training and felt it was integral to her managing her independence, ‘I may be homeless but I know how to look after myself and this takes away some of my worries’.

We heard evidence from two care leavers who experienced homelessness, both of whom expressed that they had not been given a choice of where they could live once they left care and they felt that their opinions were not considered. Care leavers often have multiple disadvantages and should be placed in accommodation which is suitable for their specific needs, but are often placed in accommodation which can be detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing. We recognise that care leavers have usually had very traumatic upbringings and this must be taken into consideration when choosing accommodation options. Transformational services are needed to ensure care leavers can access and retain appropriate accommodation with good conditions. The Government’s Children and Social Work Act 2017 will go some way to support this. The Act obligates local authorities in England to publish the ‘Local Offer’ for care leavers and to provide the care leaver with a personal advisor up to the age of 25. The personal advisor will work with the care leaver to produce a Pathway Plan to ease their transition to adulthood. However, the Act could have gone further to stress the importance of housing in a care leaver’s journey and the instances in which they could be at risk of homelessness.

**The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework** created by St Basils and Barnardo’s is a practical tool for reviewing and improving housing and support for young people preparing for and leaving care. The framework is informed by what young people say is important to them, and on what has been proven to work on the ground for 600 young people. It is intended to be used flexibly to suit local circumstances and needs, and can be used both to help young people find the best accommodation locally for them, but also by commissioners to inform housing strategies.

The Care Leaver Strategy 2013 made clear that bed and breakfasts are not suitable forms of accommodation for care leavers and in 2008, care leavers were given the opportunity to ‘Stay Put’ in their foster home until the age of 21 if there was a mutual agreement to do so.<sup>18</sup> This was made statutory in the Children and Families Act 2014.<sup>19</sup> Staying Put arrangements mirror the support that a young person would receive from their parents and can reduce the risk of homelessness. In July 2016, the Government published the Keep on Caring Strategy which introduced a new ‘Staying Close’ provision for young people leaving residential care.<sup>20</sup> The strategy also commits to supporting the implementation of the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework (CLASF) and will exempt care leavers from changes to eligibility for housing support for 18-21 year olds in Universal Credit. We welcome the Government’s support to the CLASF, which we recognise as best practice, and its commitment to exempt care leavers from changes to Universal Credit.

**‘I was in and out of care from the age of two and I never really knew whether I was coming or going. I managed to live with my mum for a while after leaving care but needed to leave again at 17. It was a scary experience but I managed to get myself into an all-girls homeless hostel. I also had a floating support worker and she opened me up to the world of budgeting my money and the help I was entitled to whilst being in a hostel and eventually living alone. I felt my social workers were only one call away, whether they helped or not. I got my own flat after 9 months in a hostel**

**and this has been my biggest achievement to date and I am so proud of myself.’**

Cartelea, care leaver

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. National Government should exempt all care leavers from the Shared Accommodation Rate up to the age of 25.

In 2012 the government extended the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) to all people under 35.<sup>21</sup> The SAR is the maximum an individual can claim in Housing Benefit for a private rented property and this is based on the cost of a room in a shared property, rather than self-contained accommodation. The current market, especially in high cost areas such as London, makes it extremely difficult for under 35s to rent even a room in a cheap shared house. This is further complicated in parts of the country where there is a lack of shared accommodation provision. Furthermore, from April 2019 the SAR will apply in the social sector as well. Care leavers are currently exempt from the SAR until their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

The Government’s rationale for this was to ‘ensure that Housing Benefit rules reflect the housing expectations of people of a similar age not on benefits.’<sup>22</sup> However, care leavers have often had very challenging upbringings and suffered traumas people their own age may never experience. It is therefore wrong to put the same expectations on both groups.

Most young people have the option to stay at home, but care leavers often do not have this choice. They should be offered the same support from their corporate parent as their peers do from

16. Ofsted, *Re-inspection of inadequate local authorities*, London, 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/re-inspection-of-inadequate-local-authorities>.

17. Barnardo’s, *On my own: The accommodation needs of young people leaving care in England*, Essex, 2014, Barnardo’s. [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/on\\_my\\_own\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/on_my_own_report_final.pdf).

18. HM Government, *Care Leaver Strategy, a cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care*, London, 2013. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>.

19. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>.

20. HM Government, *Keep On Caring, supporting Young People from Care to Independence*, London, 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf).

21. Department for Work and Pension (DWP), *The Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2011*, London, Statutory Instruments, (No. 1736), 2011. [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1736/pdfs/uksi\\_20111736\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1736/pdfs/uksi_20111736_en.pdf).

22. L. Isaacson to G. Saunders, Letter, Department of Work and Pension, 2011. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131002112547/http://ssac.independent.gov.uk/pdf/20-04-2011-consultation.pdf>.

their families. It also is unfair to expect a care leaver to compete for the same accommodation as their peers in an overcrowded and unaffordable market. We heard from care leavers in our inquiry that they would feel unsafe in a shared home, and that having the space and security of their own home up to the age of 25 would ease a care leavers' transition to adulthood.

The Government has already expressed that it would be open to this change in the 2016 Keep on Caring strategy, stating it would be, 'reviewing the case to extend the exemption to the Shared Accommodation Rate of housing support within Universal Credit, for care leavers to age 25.'<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Local authorities should use their existing powers to exempt care leavers from council tax until the age of 25.

Many local authorities have already made this change so that their care leavers have to make fewer difficult choices about how to prioritise their money, but this creates a postcode lottery for care leavers. We believe this recommendation creates a level playing field for care leavers, mirroring support other young people could receive either from their parents, or the state if at university. As a responsible corporate parent, a local authority should provide this stability which would help care leavers to manage their money better and help them maintain a tenancy. This would also align with the Government's Keep on Caring Strategy, which extends the support of personal advisors up to age 25 for all care leavers.

## 3. The DfE should make homelessness prevention one of the criteria for achievement of the Staying Close pilots.

The APPGEH recognises the success of Staying Put and the initiative was discussed positively during our inquiry. However, we want to ensure that any roll out of Staying Close, which aims to replicate Staying Put for care leavers in residential accommodation, are fully supported. We therefore

would like to see DfE monitor the outcomes of the Staying Close pilot projects, with a direct focus on homelessness prevention. Having homelessness prevention as a criterion for achievement should drive up standards and ensure no care leaver utilising this initiative is at future risk and has a smooth transition to independent accommodation.

## 4. National Government should abolish intentionality for care leavers aged 18-25.

Care leavers form a relatively small group yet the risk of them becoming homeless after being found intentionally homeless is high. Care leavers have often lived very fragmented and sometimes chaotic lives before leaving care, therefore transitioning to adulthood can be challenging. We believe Housing Options teams are not properly investigating why a care leaver may have lost their accommodation or taking steps to resolve the issue, perhaps through mediation. Abolishing intentionality is one small measure which could drastically cut down on the amount of care leavers who are made homeless.

## 5. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) should conduct a review of the 2013 allocation guidance.

Guidance to local authorities on social housing allocations could better prevent care leavers from becoming homeless by ensuring that provisions enabling a local authority to restrict access to those with a residency or local connection are not used to prevent a care leaver brought up in a different area from being re-housed. We would also expect government to ensure that allocations guidance is consistent with the soon to be revised Homelessness Code of Guidance in relation to care leavers, and that government monitors council performance in this area more closely, with key performance indicators for local authorities.

23. HM Government, *Keep On Caring, supporting Young People from Care to Independence*, London, 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535899/Care-Leaver-Strategy.pdf).

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**'I heard from a survivor recently who was eight months pregnant and sleeping in a 24 hour McDonald's as she was turned away from her local refuge. There was just no space for her.'**

**Polly Neate, Women's Aid**

Domestic violence is a devastating crime and survivors often suffer both physical and psychological trauma. They are also at significant risk of isolation, homelessness, and financial deprivation or exclusion. Domestic violence is now formally recognised as a crime resulting from the inequality between men and women in society.<sup>24</sup>

It is estimated 1.2 million women and 650,000 men experienced domestic abuse in the last year.<sup>25</sup> Between January 2016 and December 2016, 11% of all offences (excluding fraud) in England and Wales were domestic abuse related, this equates to almost half a million domestic abuse cases per year.<sup>26</sup> Of the cases recorded, 45% were sexual violence or violence against a person. Women are much more likely than men to be the victims of high risk or severe domestic abuse; 73% of victims of domestic homicide are women.<sup>27</sup> Female survivors are also more likely to experience repeated incidents of domestic abuse, more likely to fear for their lives and more likely to experience abuse as part of a coercive and controlling relationship.

Homelessness as a result of domestic violence is far too common. In 2015/16, official statistics show that 6,550 people were accepted as homeless by their local authority because of a violent relationship breakdown, this accounts for 11% of all homeless acceptances.<sup>28</sup> Internal statistics from Crisis' database shows that between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2016 1,841 clients had reported having either current, or historic experience of domestic abuse. This accounts for nearly one-fifth of all Crisis' active service users in 2016. Crisis' Nations Apart research from 2014 found that 61% of homeless females and 16% of homeless males had experienced violence and or abuse from a partner.<sup>29</sup> Half of St Mungo's female clients have experienced domestic violence and one third state that domestic violence contributed to their homelessness.<sup>30</sup>

At our inquiry, all attendees agreed that domestic violence should be viewed equally as a housing and criminal justice issue, especially as domestic violence has been estimated to cost housing services £160 million a year.<sup>31</sup> However, unless a person experiencing domestic violence can prove they are vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic violence they are unlikely to be deemed in priority need and have the right to housing.<sup>32</sup> With men comprising the majority of the rough sleeping population, homelessness services are typically designed around the needs of male clients and so refuges, which provide safe accommodation and specialist, skilled support, are a vital lifeline for many women escaping domestic violence.<sup>33</sup>

24. Home Office, *Strategy to end violence against women and girls: 2016 to 2020*, Published online, Home Office, 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/522166/VAWG\\_Strategy\\_FINAL\\_PUBLICATION\\_MASTER\\_vRB.PDF](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522166/VAWG_Strategy_FINAL_PUBLICATION_MASTER_vRB.PDF).

25. Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Statistical bulletin: Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2016*, Published online, ONS, December 2016. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2016>.

26. Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Crime Survey for England and Wales; year ending Dec 2016*, Published online, ONS, 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdec2016>.

27. Office for National Statistics (ONS), *Crime Survey for England and Wales; year ending March 2016*, Published online, ONS, 2016. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2016>.

28. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Live Tables on Homelessness, Table 774*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>.

29. P. Mackie and I. Thomas, *Nations Apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain*, London, 2014, Crisis. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis\\_nations\\_apart\\_2014.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf).

30. S. Hutchinson, A. Page and E. Sample, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives Report*, London, St Mungo's, 2014. <http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives-Final-Report.pdf>.

31. S. Walby, *The Cost of Domestic Violence*, London, Women and Equality Unit, 2004. [http://paladinservice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/cost\\_of\\_dv\\_research\\_summary-Walby-2004.pdf](http://paladinservice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/cost_of_dv_research_summary-Walby-2004.pdf).

32. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Family Law Act 1996 and Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006*, London, 2014. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7841/152056.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7841/152056.pdf).

33. S. Hutchinson, A. Page and E. Sample, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives Report*, London, St Mungo's, 2014. <http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives-Final-Report.pdf>.

**Hammersmith and Fulham Council** have changed their processes when dealing with survivors of domestic violence. They understand that domestic violence affects housing and they offer a joined-up approach in partnership with other agencies to create a safe space as soon as possible for the survivor. The key to their work is identifying survivors quickly and carrying out two different assessments to work out why they are homeless and providing support to meet their needs.

country'.<sup>37</sup> In the 2017 Spring Budget the Chancellor announced £20 million of funding to be given to the campaign to end violence against women and girls and the APPGEH advises that this funding is spent on specific services for domestic violence survivors.

Certain types of tenancies also make it difficult and expensive for a survivor to leave a perpetrator. In the social sector, the local authority can 'assign' a tenancy to the other party but in the private rented sector there is a consistent failure to transfer tenancy agreements, and in some instances the perpetrator will refuse to continue to pay the rent if the survivor moves out. We heard that a survivor may put themselves in further danger by staying in the property for fear of losing the tenancy. We are concerned that the variable provision and measures to access the private rented sector, such as first month's rent and a deposit could deprive a survivor of security and affordable housing. Crisis in their Home, No Less Will Do report found that 80% of people surveyed encountered problems raising money for a deposit and 73% had difficulty with raising rent in advance.<sup>38</sup>

**The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)** is a partnership between Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (STADV), Peabody and Gentoo which aims to change the culture of the housing sectors response to domestic abuse. They have established a set of standards and an accreditation process for Housing Associations and other providers. Staff at accredited organisations have been trained to identify people at risk, navigate tenancy transfers and sign post support transitions. Any organisation awarded accreditation must undergo a review every three years to ensure they continue to meet the standards.

If a survivor can prove they are fleeing domestic violence they are entitled to claim local connection in any authority and evidence shows three quarters of survivors move to a new local authority area in order to access refuge places.<sup>34</sup> However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for survivors to access these services. Research from AVA shows that women with mental health and substance use problems can face barriers to accessing refuge services and LGBTQ and disabled survivors are often unable to find refuges which cater to their specific needs.<sup>35</sup> The Women's Aid Annual Survey in 2016 showed that one in four referrals to a refuge was declined due to lack of space.<sup>36</sup> Male victims require more outreach services, including domestic violence advocacy projects, and helplines. Whilst DCLG has recently delivered welcome emergency funding for refuges, the funding and commissioning landscape remains highly fragmented and insecure - particularly as the outcome of the future funding for supported housing consultation is awaited. The APPGEH supports the joint Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Committees' call for a distinct funding model that enables refuges to, 'operate as a national network, unrestrained by admission restrictions imposed by individual local authorities and with appropriate coverage across the

Another theme of our inquiry was the introduction of Universal Credit and its implications for survivors trying to access safe and affordable accommodation away from their perpetrator. For claimants of Universal Credit, almost all monthly household payments will be made to one individual within the household, and in a single payment per month. This puts survivors at further risk, as the perpetrator could spend this money or choose to withhold it. This could have significant ramifications on the whole family and make the survivor increasingly isolated. We heard evidence of perpetrators using this money to buy drugs or alcohol, leaving the family with nothing. Under the Universal Credit Alternative Payment Arrangements process, people affected by domestic violence or abuse can ask for payments to be made more regularly, to more than one member of the household, or for the housing element to be paid directly to their landlord, where applicable. However, this is a discretionary arrangement that has to be actively sought; survivors are unlikely to request payments are split for fear of further abuse as they would have to inform their abuser. We believe the risk for financial and coercive abuse with Universal Credit is high, and could potentially stop victims fleeing.

This is all the more pertinent given the level of financial abuse suffered by survivors. We are concerned about the impact Universal Credit will have on victims of financial abuse which can significantly increase a survivor's risk of becoming homeless. The Women's Aid and TUC report, 'Unequal, Trapped & Controlled' showed that 61% had been left in debt by a perpetrator.<sup>39</sup> Recognition that financial abuse is a form of coercive control and that it can create homelessness is essential. Plans for a draft Domestic Violence & Abuse Bill were included in the Queen's Speech, on 21 June 2017, and includes measures to consolidate prevention and protection measures and ensure sentences reflect the harm that domestic abuse has upon children. We would like to see financial abuse defined as a criminal offence within the Bill.

**'I had to flee my marital home at short notice with my children due to my husband's emotional and violent abuse. This was preceded by a bungled arrest by the local police and social services intervention, giving me a very tight deadline to remove myself and the children from our home. My children could have been removed from my care had I not been able to demonstrate that I had found a suitable alternative home. Whilst I did have the support of the local outreach team, there was no viable or appropriate refuge options for us and it was solely down to my family's financial support that I did not become homeless. I wasn't protected by an injunction and was told it would cost thousands to get one privately and so while we've since moved twice, my husband remains in our family home. Myself and the children were the ones being punished.'**

Emma, a survivor

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- DCLG should implement an England wide housing reciprocal initiative for survivors of domestic violence.** We heard in our inquiry that the Pan London Reciprocal, administered by Safer London, is making positive steps to prevent homelessness and maintain tenancies. By working in partnership with 30 local authorities and 28 housing providers, they are able to support survivors to transfer their tenancy to another borough, ensuring safety is guaranteed and homelessness prevented. Since its inception 52 property offers have been made. Navigating the housing market is difficult at any time and for survivors of domestic violence who may need to move to another area for

34. Women's Aid, *Meeting the Needs of Women and Children, Annual Survey*, Bristol, Women's Aid Federation of England, 2016. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/annual-survey-2016/>.

35. AVA Project, *Case by Case London Refugee Provision*, Published online, 2014. <https://avaproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Case-by-Case-London-refuge-provision-Full-Report.pdf>.

36. Women's Aid, *Meeting the Needs of Women and Children, Annual Survey*, Bristol, Women's Aid Federation of England, 2016. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/research-and-publications/annual-survey-2016/>.

37. Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Committees, *Future of supported housing*, Published online, House of Commons, 2017. <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/867/867.pdf>.

38. H. Gousy, *Home: No Less Will Do Report*, London, Crisis, 2016. [https://community.crisis.org.uk/file/home-no-less-will-do/HOME-No-Less-will-do\\_web.pdf](https://community.crisis.org.uk/file/home-no-less-will-do/HOME-No-Less-will-do_web.pdf).

39. M. Howard and A. Skipp, *Unequal, Trapped and Controlled Report*, London, Women's Aid for the TUC, 2015. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/UnequalTrappedControlled.pdf>.

safety reasons, it can be even more challenging. Therefore, we believe local authorities should work in partnership to ensure survivors with secure tenancies in place should never become homeless and a like for like property is secured in another town or borough. Reciprocating via a centralised system would also allow for local authorities to relieve some of their own burden by utilising stock elsewhere.

## 2. National Government should extend priority need status to all survivors of domestic violence.

Providing evidence to prove vulnerability in order to be accepted as being in priority need can be traumatic and near impossible for people who have experienced domestic violence. We heard at our inquiry that local authorities are consistently failing to provide people fleeing from domestic violence the help they need. We are concerned that the 'vulnerability test' is being used as a gatekeeping tool by local authorities. We argue all persons who experience domestic violence are, by definition, vulnerable and therefore they should be placed in the automatic priority need category.

We believe this change to the English legislation could change the culture around how survivors are treated by Housing Options teams and would speed up their recovery. It is crucial a survivor is in safe accommodation as soon as possible and this change would allow the survivor to feel supported and significantly reduce the risk that they would return to their previous home or sleep rough.

## 3. Local authorities should work with local domestic violence support services to obtain alternative solutions to identification and official documents so people fleeing domestic violence can proceed with their homelessness application.

We heard extensive evidence at our inquiry of survivors being turned away as they did not have sufficient forms of identification. This is reiterated

in Crisis' Turned Away report.<sup>40</sup> Many survivors flee from their homes quickly, and are unable to collect sufficient proofs of identification. In addition, it is difficult for survivors to know what they need when presenting at Housing Options as the legislation itself does not specify what type of ID is needed. It is unacceptable in these circumstances they are forced to return to the home they are fleeing from to retrieve it and put themselves at further risk. The police and local authorities can work together to retrieve ID documents where appropriate but this is not always feasible. Where police are involved with a case they often do not have the resources to follow up with local authorities. Therefore, specialist domestic abuse services should work in partnership with local authorities to verify a survivor's identity. These services already support survivors in accessing benefit entitlements and public services, so they are well placed to be able to oversee identity verification. Local authorities should consider the additional resources needed to achieve this.

## 4. The police should ask women whether they need help and support with housing, regardless of risk level, and refer them to a Housing Options team if they consent.

We found that too often the housing needs of survivors are only considered if they are at risk high enough to be referred to a MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). This leads to discrepancies and poor decision making, as risk is not static but can change very quickly in domestic violence cases. It also creates gaps, as survivors who are assessed at a lower risk of violence, but have other risks and needs, including the risk of homelessness, are not supported. Therefore, every case of domestic violence which is brought to police officers' attention should be referred to the Housing Options or homelessness team. We recommend that robust and comprehensive training is put in place for Housing Options teams

so they can follow up safely with any survivors that are referred. This should also include all forms of domestic abuse. Special precautions should be made for survivors who are financially dependent on their abuser. Victims of financial abuse, are less likely to be subject to a MARAC, yet they may still have high housing need. We heard at our inquiry that a survivor will face abuse 40 times on average before calling the police and this is usually because a victim has no access to money to support them after fleeing, including monies for accommodation. We believe this referral system aligns closely with the Duty to Refer within the Homelessness Reduction Act and we would like to see this initiative included in the Act's Code of Guidance.

## 5. Local authorities should accept all survivors of domestic violence under the local connection criteria of the homelessness legislation.

We heard in our inquiry that local authorities are failing to suspend local connection criteria for survivors of domestic violence. Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 states that a person fleeing violence can approach any council to present as homeless, regardless of whether there is a local connection or not. A local authority should not refer a survivor back to their authority if there is risk of further violence or abuse.

We took evidence from a number of organisations who reported that their clients were being refused assistance because they did not meet the local connection criteria. Not only is this against the Homelessness Code of Guidance, but it risks people experiencing violence having to choose between going home to their abuser or trying to find somewhere else to live – often on to the street. We are also concerned with the level of gatekeeping which is occurring in areas with low levels of housing supply and the complications and misapplication of the housing guidance. We would like to see greater accountability on local authorities for accepting survivors under universal

local connection and measuring the outcomes of their referral. This should be a task and focus for the forthcoming team of DCLG homelessness specialist advisors.

## 6. Priority Management Transfers

We believe no one should live in a home where they fear domestic violence or abuse, and we recognise the good practice of many housing associations that help support survivors of domestic violence by ensuring quick and efficient Management Transfers. However, we heard evidence that this practice is not universal. Therefore, we would like to see all housing associations implement Priority Management Transfers for survivors of domestic violence. We would expect all applications to be referred to the relevant local support services and with special attention made to ensure the victim's safety. This could include providing temporary accommodation. The applicant's case should be reviewed each week and a housing officer should meet with the applicant to update them of progress of the transfer until it is complete.

## 7. DCLG and the Home Office should provide joint funding for new Housing First models for survivors of domestic violence.

Housing First is an evidence-based initiative which has had marked success in reducing and ending acute forms of homelessness where it has been taken to scale. It has been adopted into national homelessness strategies in North America and various European states. Most notably, it has been a cornerstone of Finland's homelessness plan since 2008, where rough sleeping has all but ended, virtually all hostels and night shelters have closed, and all other forms of homelessness are reducing.

Housing First operates to a set of core principles, and is based on the assumption that the support needs of homeless people are best addressed after

40. S. Dobie, B. Sanders and L. Teixeira, *Turned Away The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*, London, 2014, Crisis. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237024/mysteryshopping\\_report\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237024/mysteryshopping_report_final_web.pdf).



## PRISON LEAVERS

someone has been successfully rehoused.<sup>41</sup> The APPGEH heard that this approach can and should be extended to survivors of domestic violence who have become homeless. Survivors of domestic violence often have multiple needs and their safety must be of the upmost importance when coordinating accommodation. The emotional and recovery needs of survivors and their children, in many cases, need to be met alongside physical safety to ensure they can recover from trauma. We believe a Housing First model for domestic violence survivors would ensure they are in safe and secure accommodation quickly and then their other needs could be addressed, including mental health treatment and other specific trauma induced issues.

**'Six years ago there was more of a rehabilitation culture and we started to see some excellent results. We were investing in resettlement courses and engaging with all sorts of innovative schemes and ideas. So much of that has been stripped out and now I unlock a small percentage of prisoners for any form of work, and for those that do work it might only be for 5 hours a day, that's out of hundreds of men in custody. I operate on minimum staffing levels in all residential areas, we average 55 Officers to unlock 1000 men, meaning we can only unlock prisoners who do not have employment or education for about 45 minutes a day. I don't know what I can teach them in 45 minutes, they make a phone call, have a shower and then I put them back in their cells. We know sourcing accommodation for them on release is absolutely key, but if we're not teaching people how to maintain a tenancy and pay their bills, it will go round again and it does go round again. We just don't have the staff or resources to make those interventions anymore.'**

Sally Hill, HMP High Down

The links between homelessness and offending are clear. Fifteen per cent of newly sentenced prisoners reported being homeless before entering custody<sup>42</sup> and a third of people seen rough sleeping in London in 2015/16 had experience of serving time in prison.<sup>43</sup>

The Social Exclusion Unit report on reducing re-offending from 2002 demonstrated that a third of prisoners lose their home while in prison and over a fifth face increased financial problems as a result of incarceration.<sup>44</sup>

Approximately 66,000 people leave prison every year but prisons are consistently failing to collect data on who is leaving with no fixed abode, making it difficult to estimate the true scale of the problem.<sup>45</sup> These numbers often vary as ex-offenders do not like to disclose their offending past to Housing Options teams unless obliged, such as high risk offenders who are subject to MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements).

Homelessness is not confined solely to male prison leavers. Six in ten female prisoners do not have homes to go to on release.<sup>46</sup> A recent review of Bronzefield women's prison and young offender institution found that in the six months prior to the inspection, 103 women left with no fixed address and that the number of women leaving with settled accommodation had dropped from 95.5% in 2014 to 83.7% in 2015. The report stated, 'the prison had issued tents to two women who were released without anywhere to go to and the chaplaincy often gave out sleeping bags.'<sup>47</sup> Women in prison typically have more needs, and more serious needs than men in prison. The prevalence of substance misuse, mental ill health, trauma and other vulnerabilities is higher for women than their male counterparts. The excess mortality rate for women after release from prison is far higher than for men, almost entirely due to drug related deaths.<sup>48</sup> Many women are likely to have experienced domestic and or sexual abuse which could mean that returning to the family home is not safe. A significant percentage are also likely to have caring responsibilities which has an impact on their housing needs.

42. A. Hewson, *Bromley Briefings prison factfile*, London, Prison Reform Trust, 2016. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Factfile>.

43. Mayor of London, *CHAIN Greater London full 2015-2016 Report*, London, GLA, 2016. <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports/resource/db4d244e-ab51-44e1-96dd-c8b6fa65a62a>

44. Social Exclusion Unit, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002. [http://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/reducing\\_report20.pdf](http://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/reducing_report20.pdf).

45. A. Hewson, *Bromley Briefings prison factfile*, London, Prison Reform Trust, 2016. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Factfile>.

46. S. Beresford, J. Earle and Z. Litchfield, *Home truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system*, London, Prison Reform Trust, 2016. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Home%20Truths.pdf>.

47. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP & YO1 Bronzefield*, London, 2015. <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2016/04/Bronzefield-web2015.pdf>.

48. P Anders, J Leaman, R Jolley, *Rebalancing Act*, London, Revolving Doors Agency, 2017

41. <http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first>

Homelessness and or unstable accommodation is often associated with significantly higher levels of reoffending. MoJ research shows 79% of those who were previously homeless were reconvicted in the first year after release compared to 47% who had accommodation prior to custody.<sup>49</sup> In 2002, a third of prisoners lost their housing while in custody.<sup>50</sup> There has been a significant lack of recent data collection to quantify the current situation. A witness to our inquiry stated that it was better for her to be in prison with a bed, than to sleep rough.

**Crisis**, began delivering their Renting Ready pre-tenancy course in prisons in 2016. The course teaches vital tenancy management skills and helps inmates understand the realities of renting. It covers what to expect when searching for and moving into a new home, rights and responsibilities, living on a limited budget, looking after a property and managing relationships with landlords and house mates. The course, delivered by a professional Housing Trainer, can be taught to inmates or staff in order for them to deliver the course themselves.

Prison leavers receive a Discharge Grant, which is usually £47.50 (a rate set in 1995 and not adjusted since) but this fails to cover the cost of a hotel or backpackers' hostel even for one night in many parts of the country. This leaves prison leavers susceptible to homelessness on their first day of freedom.

A prisoner can retain their Housing Benefit claim if they are expecting to be released within 13 weeks and they can continue to receive the housing element of Universal Credit for six months if they are already claiming. Additionally, prisoners can claim Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks while on remand if they are likely to return home in a year or less. However, people who make new claims are not able to process

their applications before leaving prison and many prisoners will have led chaotic personal lives before being sent to prison, making it unlikely that they will have access to all of the paperwork they need on release to make a Housing Benefit claim, even if they have accommodation to move to.

Another issue is the 'finance gap' prison leavers face as they wait for Universal Credit payments to be paid to them. This is due to the five to six-week delay built into the process before a first payment. This can leave someone for a considerable period of time without any money. Prisoners do not have to serve waiting days in recognition that they could not be expected to have any savings from their previous paycheque. This is welcome, but a five-week wait is still too long for people who have nothing. It is also particularly crucial to have funds at this transition period in order for the prison leaver to access the private rented sector, which typically has high upfront costs. One way to deal with this shortfall would be to make the Universal Credit arrears assessment period shorter for prison leavers so they can access their payment, or allow them to begin their claim whilst in custody. This would improve prison leavers' chances of moving into settled accommodation as soon as they are released and may reduce the risk of reoffending.

Getting help from a local authority can be particularly difficult for a prison leaver. Changes brought in under the Localism Act 2011 enable local authorities to discharge the main homelessness duty via a fixed-term assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector with a minimum term of 12 months so long as it meets certain other conditions. This is often referred to as a 'private rented sector offer' (PRSO). However, many private sector landlords are reluctant to let to ex-offenders in receipt of Housing Benefit and this may be compounded with the role-out of Universal Credit and direct payments, with both Universal Credit and the claimant seen as presenting a risk.<sup>51</sup> There is also the additional burden of sourcing deposits and first month's rent, with landlords generally requiring payment in advance rather than in arrears.

Local authorities now also have discretion to exclude certain groups of people from joining the social housing waiting list, and though they should have measures in place to ensure they give proper consideration to individual circumstances, evidence presented to the APPGEH suggests this is not always the case. We also heard evidence that some councils are inappropriately requiring applicants to disclose 'spent' convictions. This can be a barrier to social housing even where ex-offenders qualify for the main housing duty under the homelessness legislation, have a local connection, and are deemed to be vulnerable as a direct consequence of their having been in prison.

The SAR is also having an impact on prison leavers under the age of 35. There are exemptions to the SAR for people who are subject to MAPPAs or have lived on 'specialist homelessness accommodation'. However, there are no exemptions for prison leavers moving on from 'approved premises', although many of the same arguments about safety, stability and security apply to both groups.

In 2013, the Government launched Transforming Rehabilitation, a strategy which introduced a new public sector National Probation Service and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). CRCs are private companies (owned by varying combinations of private, public and voluntary sector organisations) that provide rehabilitation services, supported by varying layers of supply chains. The strategy aimed to incentivise CRCs with a payment by results structure intended to drive innovation and reduce reoffending, while extending the number of people who could receive probation support, with the principal change being the extension of probation support.

It also included widening access to 'through the gate' services, designed to provide continuity of support and engagement between prison and the community. In the last 12 weeks of their sentence, prison leavers should be given advice and support on finding somewhere to live

by the local CRC. This is greatly needed as the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee found that only 19% of prisoners receive advice or guidance about accommodation while in prison.<sup>52</sup> Yet despite this change in policy, a witness to our inquiry stated that he was only asked about his housing need two days before release.

**Exeter County Council** has worked in collaboration with Exeter CVS and wider partners to create Co:Lab, a multi-agency health and wellbeing hub. Bringing together partner agencies to address key issues such as health and wellbeing, housing and criminal justice. The city council has maximised the opportunity by placing services in the building, as well as within the local prison to build a 'through the gate' approach to housing offenders. In its infancy the approach is working closely with the prison and the Community Rehabilitation Company to develop pathways and is improving customer experiences as well as having the potential to improve outcomes.

Evidence from a HM Inspectorate of Prisons report shows that since the new CRC had taken over resettlement services for HMP Wormwood Scrubs, the proportion of prisoners who had accommodation on release had fallen from 95% to 60%.<sup>53</sup> The 2016 Public Accounts Committee review into Transforming Rehabilitation also found there were important gaps in data and consistency of service.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, a new joint report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation into Through the Gate services, showed that 1 in 7 of newly released long term prisoners were released with no fixed abode.<sup>55</sup> It is clear there is a lack of strategic or operational links between Housing Options teams and probation providers.

49. Ministry of Justice (MOJ), *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*, London, MOJ, 2010. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/199224/compendium-of-reoffending-statistics-and-analysis.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199224/compendium-of-reoffending-statistics-and-analysis.pdf).

50. Social Exclusion Unit, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002. [http://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/reducing\\_report20.pdf](http://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/reducing_report20.pdf).

51. H. Gousy, *Home: No Less Will Do Report*, London, Crisis, 2016. [https://community.crisis.org.uk/file/home-no-less-will-do/HOME-No-Less-will-do\\_web.pdf](https://community.crisis.org.uk/file/home-no-less-will-do/HOME-No-Less-will-do_web.pdf).

52. Home Affairs Select Committee, *Home Affairs – First Report*, London, 2004. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmhaff/193/19302.htm>.

53. HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *HMP Wormwood Scrubs*, Published online, 2016. <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/inspections/hmp-wormwood-scrubs-2/>.

54. Public Accounts Select Committee, *Transforming Rehabilitation Inquiry*, London, 2016. <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/484/48402.htm>.

55. HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation, *An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Prisoners Serving 12 Months or More*, Online, 2017. <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cji/inspections/throughthegate2/>.

Unfortunately, there is limited data available around post-release resettlement of prisoners.

The 2016 Prison Safety and Reform White Paper proposed the introduction of new performance standards for prisons, including measures to help people prepare for life after prison. This includes reporting against 'the rate of prisoners in suitable accommodation on release, compared to before they entered custody.' We would welcome this approach and would like to see prisons and probation providers put greater emphasis on the successful resettlement of prison leavers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. The MoJ should hold a wider inquiry to determine the mix of needs faced by the offender population in prisons and in the community, and the number of offenders being released from prison with no fixed abode.

Through our inquiry we found there was a lack of understanding of who was responsible and accountable for meeting the housing needs of prison leavers. We also found a significant gap in evidence to determine where issues should be resolved, in custody or post-release. We would like to see the MoJ take ownership of this problem and investigate the true scale of the homelessness of prison leavers and publish its findings, with an accompanying housing strategy for prison leavers.

The inquiry should commission and collect new data, and make an assessment of the main issues, including:

- the impact of welfare reform on prison leavers;
- the extent to which local connection can be used differently;
- how the priority need vulnerability test works in practice;
- delivery of preventative housing services within prison;
- responsibility and role of CRCs in homelessness prevention; and
- the impact of homelessness on re-offending rates.

### 2. The MoJ should increase the amount of Discharge Grant available to prisoners on release.

Prison leavers can apply for Discharge Grant of £47.50 and an extra grant of about £50 to pay for accommodation on their first night of release, if organised in advance. We heard that it was uncommon to pre-arrange accommodation before release and that £47.50 is not enough to cover basic living expenses. Very few people leave prison with any savings and despite the assumed safety net of the Discharge Grant, it is failing to meet the needs of prisoners on release. The grant has not increased for 22 years and should be £90-95 if adjusted for inflation. This could be used to pay for immediate accommodation which, in many parts of the country is more than £50 a night. We recommend that the MoJ increases the Discharge Grant to the same level in real terms as it was set at in 1995 and should be maintained as such.

### 3. The MoJ should obligate prison Governors to introduce integrated transition plans for all prisoners and introduce measurable housing outcomes for CRCs.

The APPGEH heard evidence that prisoners were often unaware of what would happen to them on their release and so pathway or transition plans should be introduced to meet this need. They should comprise of the following components and stages.

**Stage One:** The plan should be presented to the prisoner by a main point of contact (CRC supply chain, 'dedicated officer', social worker, prison officer or other) on his/her first day in custody. This should highlight current accommodation status and if they are in work and or in receipt of benefits. The main point of contact should work to resolve any issues presenting at this stage, including identifying if the prisoner has any substance misuse needs, mental health problems, or other support needs.

**Stage Two:** To bring the plan in line with Transforming Rehabilitation, this stage would take place at the 12-week CRC assessment. Here the local CRC should provide advice and support on finding somewhere to live post release. It

should also identify any worries the prisoner may have about securing accommodation and the contact can make the necessary interventions. For example, creating opportunities for pre-tenancy training and advice. Prison Governors should countersign birth certificates and bank accounts for prisoners at this stage so they can receive benefits on release thereby avoiding any shortfalls in payments delays.

**Stage Three:** This stage should be completed four weeks prior to release. If sentenced, a prisoner will get a letter with a release date and the transition plan should prepare the prison leaver for that. It will explain to the prisoners what they need to do on their first day on release, who they need to see and why mapped out. The plan should identify if they are being released on a Friday and how to manage that risk.

**Stage Four:** This should be completed four weeks after release by probation services. CRCs should be required to measure the housing outcomes of the prison leavers they work with and to publish statistics on the number of prisoners who are released into settled accommodation.

### 4. We recommend that local authorities and Job Centre Plus develop partnerships with their local prisons to allow for data sharing of prisoner information.

We found in our inquiry that prisoners could not make appointments with Housing Options services or Job Centre Plus while in custody due to local authority email addresses not being secure. This creates data protection issues and means prisoner details can't be sent in advance of release. This undoubtedly causes delays in getting accommodation organised and claims set up. We found that the initial Universal Credit claimant checks could be made while in custody, therefore we encourage Job Centre Plus to set up telephones directly to their job coaches in prison so this step can take place early. If secure email addresses

were implemented, prisoner data could be shared and problems surrounding a claim can be detected at an earlier stage and plans put in place before release. Staff from Housing Options teams could also begin implementing drop-in sessions within prisons for offenders who are due to come to the end of their sentence. During these sessions, the offender could familiarise themselves with the process of making a homelessness application, should they need to make one, and gain a better understanding of their needs and rights. This would also speed up their applications for when they are released.

### 5. We encourage Prison Governors, at their discretion, to extend and make better use of release on temporary licence (ROTL).

We learned that many offenders would benefit from the opportunity to do work experience outside of prison, building progression skills needed on release, many which are vital in avoiding homelessness on release. It would also give prisoners the opportunity to go to appointments with the local authority or banks to get their affairs in order and offer a level of choice by giving them independence in their decisions, including choosing their own accommodation. With greater use of ROTL an offender can attend external training courses giving them confidence and knowledge to navigate the benefit and housing systems. During 2014-15, there were a total of 1,273 people taking advantage of ROTL, but on average only 368 people per month were working out of the prison on licence.<sup>56</sup> ROTL, when used appropriately, can embed independence into the culture of rehabilitation and gives prison leavers the opportunity to begin getting their lives back on track.

56. National Offender Management Service, *Annual report 2014/15: Management information addendum*, Table 20, London, Ministry of Justice, 2015. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-and-probation-performance-statistics-2014-to-2015>.

# CONCLUSION

Care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence only represent a small proportion of the homeless population, yet crucially they are a proportion whose homelessness could have been prevented. Through our evidence sessions and meetings, we learnt that these cohorts all have something in common; they are easily identifiable. At some stage in their journey before becoming homeless they should have been known to their local authority or to other local services, yet they somehow slipped through the net. We have also learned that there is a significant cross-over between these groups.

As we have laid out in our recommendations, preventing homelessness for these cohorts is achievable despite many complicating factors. Responsibility was a key theme throughout our inquiries. It was difficult to draw the line to where responsibility lay for each cohort and this is further complicated as individuals transitioned between different services. It was noted that at these transition points, such as moving between children's services to adult services, they are effectively given up on by their previous support network or service.

We heard overwhelming evidence that both local services and national government have missed opportunities to intervene and it is clear we are failing these groups. Care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence can all be deemed in priority need if they are viewed to be vulnerable as a result of their situation. However, our findings demonstrated just how little this occurs in practise. Furthermore, a lack of sufficient documentation to demonstrate their homelessness and eligibility is another underlying issue faced by these cohorts presenting at Housing Options. We also heard that changes to the welfare system and in particular, the introduction of Universal Credit, will have a particular detrimental effect on all these groups.

Stability, safety and security are crucial for these groups. Homelessness, unsuitable or unsustainable housing can devastate an effective transition process. If made homeless, people in all three cohorts are at increased risk of being victims of violence, coercion and turning to crime in order to source a bed. Integration of services is crucial to preventing homelessness for these groups, as well as ensuring that a clear handover and plan is in place so services and local authorities can monitor an individual's journey to stable housing.

The Homelessness Reduction Act includes a Duty to Refer for local agencies and this will go some way to help create the culture change needed, but it is not enough. The APPGEH therefore calls on the Government to take action and make the much needed change to prevent these people from becoming homeless. As we have laid out in this report there are genuine and achievable opportunities for improved provision of services and positive policy change.

We urge the Government to take steps to prevent and end homelessness for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. We recommend that the Government establishes a joined up, cross-government strategy to prevent homelessness. Departments should work in partnership to audit existing policies and design programmes to specifically support care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence. The Government has committed to putting prevention at the heart of its future working, and with the Homelessness Reduction Act, and a manifesto commitment to launch a Homelessness Reduction Taskforce; there is an opportunity to bring together national policies and local frontline work to prevent and end homelessness for these cohorts for good.

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