

Prison and Housing

If you are remanded into custody and already have accommodation that you have a rent liability for, there are steps you should take to ensure that you do not lose this accommodation.

If you will be homeless when you leave prison, you must start exploring your housing options as soon as you know you are leaving prison.

Contact your Prison Resettlement Worker at the earliest possibility; they will be able to assist you with relevant information, support and guidance on a variety of resettlement issues including education, healthcare, employment, training and accommodation needs.

We will work with you to try to prevent you from becoming homeless before leaving prison or to relieve your homelessness if you are released from prison with no accommodation available to you.

Help with housing costs

Housing Benefit (HB)

If you receive HB you must tell the Housing Benefits Team if you are:

- remanded into custody
- sentenced
- released

You will only get HB to help towards your rent **if you intend to return home when you are released** from prison.

How long you get HB for depends on your circumstances:

If you are on remand or awaiting trial or sentencing:

You can receive HB for up to 52 weeks.

You won't get HB if you sublet your property



Ask the prison to complete the "Notification of Remand in Custody Form" and send it to the Housing Benefits Team within 14 days.

If your bail conditions mean you have to live elsewhere

You may be entitled to HB to help pay the rent on your normal home until your court hearing or up to 52 weeks

If you have been sentenced:

You can continue to receive HB as long as you aren't likely to be in prison for more than 13 weeks (this includes time already spent on remand or awaiting sentence and any time you spend at home on temporary release).

The Prison Service will tell you your earliest expected release date. Tell the Housing Benefits Team if your release date changes. The Prison Service should provide a change of status or custodial sentence form to confirm to the Housing Benefit Team that you have been sentenced or released.

If you are on a home detention curfew or are released

You can claim HB as normal.

If you didn't get HB while you were in prison you may need to claim Universal Credit - we can tell you which benefit to claim.

You won't need to reclaim HB if you spend less than 13 weeks in prison as you will still have a live claim.



You must tell the Housing Benefits Team you have been released and provide a "Released from Custody Form" to confirm your release date within 14 days of your release (your prison should provide this).

Universal Credit (UC)



UC is being rolled out to replace Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits.

While you are on remand, on bail or sentenced

- You can continue to get the housing cost element of UC for up to 6 months.
- Once you are sentenced:
 - ♦ you won't get UC if you are likely to be in prison for more than 6 months - including time already spent on remand/awaiting sentencing
 - ♦ you won't get help with housing costs if they weren't included in your UC claim before you were sentenced



If you are serving a prison sentence, your partner can claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to pay the rent on your home if they are living in the property.



Ask friends or relatives to support you in keeping your home whilst you are serving your sentence to prevent you from becoming homeless when you are released from prison

Before you leave prison

If you are likely to need advice and assistance to find accommodation when you are released you should contact the Homeless Prevention Service straight away.

We will:

- speak to your offender manager (with your permission) so that they can provide the information we need to support you
- assess your situation and give you advice on your options so you can make an informed decision about your housing - this may include:
 - ♦ advice on finding a private rented property
 - ♦ a referral to our Rent Guarantee Scheme
 - ♦ making an application to apply to join Homechoice (Reading's social housing register)
 - ♦ advice on making benefit claims for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit which can help towards the cost of your rent

- ♦ a referral to our supported accommodation (if you are a single adult or part of an established couple without dependent children)
- ♦ speaking to friends and/or family who may be able to accommodate you immediately following your release from prison whilst we continue to provide you with support to move on

If you are released on licence

You might be given accommodation in a probation hostel if:

- your sentence was for 12 months or more
- you have multi-agency involvement (MAPPA) with your case

The Probation Service should arrange your probation hostel in time for your release.

Even if you are not required to live in a probation hostel you may have license conditions that restrict where you can live or visit. Ask the Probation Service about any restrictions that apply to you.

If you are homeless or at risk of homelessness

If you have already left prison and are homeless or threatened with homelessness you should get in touch with the Homeless Prevention Service.

We will assess your situation and work with you to create a personalised housing plan which will include your housing options.

If you are working with the Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) or the youth offending team we will, with your consent, invite them to be part of this process. Your Probation Officer/Youth Offending Officer may have actions to help you move forward.

Emergency Accommodation

You may be entitled to emergency accommodation if we assess you as being in priority need. You will normally have a priority need if you, or someone in your household:

- is pregnant
- has dependent children who normally live with you
- has been made homeless by an emergency such as flood or fire
- is vulnerable as a result of any physical/mental conditions or learning disability
- is vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence or having been remanded in custody

We will make enquiries (with your consent) to see if you are vulnerable as a result of your period in custody. We look at the time served in custody/ detention, any support you receive from probation services/youth offending team, the time since you were released, if you have been able to secure and maintain accommodation during that time and your support networks (and how much of a positive influence your support networks are to you).

Your Housing Options

We will discuss options that are appropriate for you and your household. The demand for all forms of housing in Reading is very high therefore you should explore all options available to you. These may include:

- **Private Rented Accommodation** - you should consider the size and type of accommodation you need for your household and how much rent you can afford. Most landlords will ask for a cash deposit (in case you fail to pay your rent or cause damage to their property).
If you don't have a deposit we may be able to help either through the Rent Guarantee Scheme or by lending you the money to pay a cash deposit direct to your landlord.
- **The Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS)** - this scheme helps households on low incomes into private rented accommodation. We pay the rent to your landlord and provide a deposit guarantee (instead of a cash deposit). You must pay your rent to us and save for your own deposit - see our factsheet "Rent Guarantee Scheme" for more information.
- **Applying to Homechoice** (Reading's Social Housing Register) so you can bid for a Council or Housing Association home. Visit www.reading.gov.uk/homechoice to complete an online application form or pick one up from the Civic Offices reception.
You usually need a local connection to be eligible for Homechoice. As a prison leaver you are unlikely to have lived in the Borough for three consecutive years before you apply, but you may acquire a local connection by exception. See our Allocations Scheme (www.reading.gov.uk/homechoice) for details.
- **Referral for supported accommodation** - this depends on your needs and whether you have lived on your own before.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

If you are working and on a low income or if you claim welfare benefits you may be eligible for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to help towards your rent. You may also be eligible for Council Tax Support. Use our online calculator to check your entitlement – becs.reading.gov.uk

You should check the Entitledto website to see if you could claim any other benefits - www.entitledto.co.uk

LHA limits the amount of benefit/credit you could get towards your rent based on the number of bedrooms your household is eligible for:

Shared accommodation	£81.14/week	£351.61/month
1 bedroom	£153.02/week	£663.08/month
2 bedroom	£193.98/week	£840.58/month
3 bedroom	£221.79/week	£961.09/month
4+ bedrooms	£315.12/week	£1365.52/month

You can ask for these payments to go directly to your landlord.

If you are over 25, single, have left prison and are managed under the multi – agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) then the shared accommodation rate should not apply to you so you will be entitled to the 1 bed rate.

Contact the Homeless Prevention Service

We are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. You will initially be seen by a Housing Advice Support Officer who will then allocate your case to either:

- a Homeless Prevention Officer if you are threatened with homelessness within 56 days or are immediately homeless
- to a Homeless Resolution and Enablement Officer if you are still in accommodation but you are worried about becoming homeless in the future

Call: 0118 937 2165 (office hours)
Email: Housingadvice@reading.gov.uk
Drop-in Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU

This information can be provided in alternative formats (Braille, audio, large print) and other languages on request