

Homeless when released from prison

If you were recently released from prison and are homeless you can apply to Stratford-on-Avon District Council for housing assistance as a homeless person. It is important that you tell the Council about your accommodation and health history. This will help the Council to decide whether it owes you any housing duties.

Help from the Council if you are single and homeless or threatened with homelessness

If you are eligible and you normally reside in the UK and you are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, the Council is likely to have one of two duties to help you under the Homelessness Reduction Act. If you are threatened with homelessness the Council has ***a duty to help prevent you from becoming homeless. If you are actually homeless the Council has a duty to assist you to relieve your homelessness***, but it may not be obliged to provide you with temporary accommodation whilst it does so. If the Council accepts a duty to either prevent or relieve your homelessness you will be invited to complete a ***Personalised Housing Plan*** with a housing professional. This will outline the steps that both you and the Council will take to help resolve your situation. For the Council to be legally obliged to provide you with temporary accommodation it will have to be satisfied that ***there is reason to believe you have a priority need***.

When considering whether you have a priority need the Council will look at whether you are vulnerable as a result of:

- Having a mental illness
- Having a learning disability or physical disability
- Being under 21 and having been in care
- Having been in the armed forces
- Having fled violence or threats of violence.
- Having served a custodial sentence

Priority need for prisoners and ex-offenders

In some circumstances, the Council might decide you are in priority need because you have spent time in prison or on remand.

The Council will consider whether you should be regarded as being vulnerable by virtue of the fact that you are homeless. This has a particular meaning for homelessness applications and is not the same as being labelled vulnerable in prison.

When considering your homelessness application, the Council will look at:

- the length of time you spent in prison
- if any third party support is being provided to you either by the probation service, a youth offending team, or drug and alcohol team
- evidence provided by any third party (including any housing needs assessment) about your homelessness vulnerability
- the period of time since your release from prison and how successful you have been in finding your own accommodation and in keeping that accommodation
- any third party support networks such as family, friends or a probation officer
- evidence of any other vulnerability such as mental health problems, drug or alcohol misuse, or a history of having been in care
- any other factors that might have an impact on your ability to find accommodation yourself

The fact that you have been in prison does not in itself mean that the Council has to treat you as being vulnerable and in priority need for accommodation. It will

need to assess the evidence before it and be satisfied that you will find it difficult to seek out and maintain accommodation for yourself compared to other people who are rendered homeless.

You may wish to contact Stratford-on-Avon-District Council to find out more about how the Council decides if you're in priority need.

Prisoners and ex-offenders treated as intentionally homeless

If you are in priority need the Council's Housing Advice service may decide that you are intentionally homeless if you were evicted from your previous home because of criminal or antisocial behaviour or because of rent arrears resulting from your time in prison.

If the Council decides you are intentionally homeless, it will only offer you limited help with finding housing after the initial duty to help you prevent or relieve your homelessness ends. If you are in priority need but intentionally homeless you may be offered temporary accommodation for a short period of time so as to assist you to find your own accommodation in the private sector. The Council may take the view that you should have known that your criminal activity could have resulted in you being sent to prison, and that this could lead to the loss of your home.

The Council is less likely to decide this if the loss of your home didn't directly follow on from you being sent to prison, for example, if you made an arrangement for another person to pay the rent while you were away but that arrangement broke down.

The Council could also decide that you are intentionally homeless if you gave up your tenancy because your entitlement to Housing Benefit or housing costs through Universal Credit ended during a period in prison.

It is very important to seek advice from a housing advisor, particularly in cases where it could be argued you were sent to prison for a crime that was not premeditated, or was not deliberate because you were not able to understand the consequences of your own actions.

This could be the case because of:

- having limited mental capacity
- mental illness
- frailty
- an assessed substance abuse problem

What area can you be housed in if you are homeless?

When you apply to Stratford-on-Avon District Council as homeless, the Housing Advice service will check to see if you have a local connection with its area.

You can establish a local connection, for example, by living, working, or having immediate family (usually a parent or brother or sister) in the area.

Time spent in prison in a specific area does not give you a local connection with the area where the prison is located. However, if you have no local connection with any area or if you are fleeing domestic violence, you can apply to any Council in any area. The Council you apply to has to assist you. There may be restrictions placed on where you can live. For example, if an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) says you can't go to a particular area, you may need to seek help from a different Council.

High risk prisoners managed by a multiagency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) may be required to live in certain areas.

Emergency accommodation if you have no housing

You may need to use emergency accommodation such as a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast accommodation if you have nowhere to go following your release. As mentioned above, the Council will only have a duty to provide you with emergency temporary accommodation if you are in priority need.

If you are not in priority need you will have to secure your own temporary accommodation. Hostels provide emergency temporary accommodation. Some are direct access, which means you don't need a referral from an agency to use them. There are no direct access hostels in the Stratford-on-Avon District so you may have to go out of area to secure a hostel such as Coventry, Leamington Spa or Birmingham. You can contact the Housing Advice team for advice relating to emergency accommodation.

Help finding housing in the private rented sector

You could try to find housing in the private rented sector. The Housing Advice Team will be able to advise you how to find out what housing is available locally and how to apply for Universal Credit or housing benefit to help you with your housing costs. You might be able to get help with a deposit and rent in advance through the Council's private rented sector rent express scheme.

Apply for a housing association home

As a longer term option, you could also consider applying for a housing association home. Please note that there is a high demand for social housing in the Stratford-on-Avon District, and in particular one bedroom properties are in high demand, so some people who apply may not ever be successful with an offer of social housing. If you wish to be considered for social housing in the district you can register online at Home Choice Plus:

<https://www.homechoiceplus.org.uk/>

Help finding housing from probation services

Offenders serving sentences of 12 months or more are released on licence and live in the community supervised by the probation service (Community Rehabilitation Company) until the end of their sentence.

If you are released on licence, your Offender Manager can help you find accommodation, as long as you have spent a continuous period of at least twelve months in custody.

Help with money before you are released from prison

All prisoners are given a discharge grant paid for by the prison when they leave. This is money to help with your costs until your benefits are sorted out. If you have secured accommodation for the first night, an extra grant can be obtained for accommodation which will be paid directly to the accommodation provider.

<https://www.nacro.org.uk/resettlement-advice-service/support-for-individuals/housing/advice-on-release-from-prison/>

You may also wish to contact DWP to enquire about your entitlement to benefits upon release from prison: <http://los.direct.gov.uk/>

Warwickshire also has a local welfare scheme available to help those in crisis.

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/localwelfarescheme>

Useful support services for single homeless people

Stratford Link project- Stratford Link Project runs on week day mornings 10am-1pm.

This service is a free drop-in centre where rough sleepers and vulnerable people who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness can get a hot drink, a snack and link in with support services. There are also shower, bathing and clothes washing facilities available.

The link is located at 14 Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 6BA.

Stratford food bank

<https://stratforduponavon.foodbank.org.uk/>

You can obtain a food bank voucher by contacting Stratford-on-Avon District Council Housing Advice team.

For information on housing related support and accommodation based services within Warwickshire contact the Housing Advice Team on the number below and see Warwickshire County Council Website: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/hrs>

Stratford on Avon Housing Advice Team

The Council's Housing Advice Team can help you with either finding or keeping a safe and suitable home for you and your family. We have a team of housing advisors and homeless prevention coordinators who will work with you to explore all of your options.

Housing Advice Team

Elizabeth House
Church Street
Stratford upon Avon
Warwickshire
CV37 6HX

Phone: 01789 260861

Out of hours phone: 01789 267575

Email: housingadviceteam@stratford-dc.gov.uk