

Housing Options for people released from prison or youth detention centres



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TestValleyBC



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Key Advice:

- If you are going to be released from prison or a youth detention centre you are entitled to receive housing advice and assistance from Test Valley Borough Council. **You need to receive this at the earliest opportunity.**
- If you are in prison, speak to your personal advisor/probation officer about making contact with The Housing Options Service before your release date
- The Council will have a duty to try and prevent where possible, you becoming homeless or relieve your homelessness. The Housing Options Service will not have a duty to accommodate all ex-offenders who are being released from prison.
- You will, in partnership with the Council's Housing Option Service agree and take reasonable steps to prevent your homelessness and secure accommodation. This will be detailed in your 'personalised housing plan'. You will receive a copy of this plan. There is a legal requirement for you to co-operate in this plan and take the reasonable steps to prevent you from becoming homeless.
- The personalised housing plan is a holistic approach and may include steps to assist you in areas such as employment, maximising your income, retraining, education, health and any addiction issues.

Help securing accommodation from Probation Services

Offenders who have served sentences of 12 months or more will be released on licence and live in the community and will be supervised by the Probation Service until the end of their sentence.

If you are released on licence, your probation officer can help you find accommodation, as long as you have spent a continuous period of at least twelve months in custody. This assistance can start whilst you are still in prison.

Housing Options Service - Test Valley Borough Council.

The Council may not have a statutory duty to secure you accommodation if you are homeless on your release from prison or a youth detention centre.

The Council's duty when you are released is to;

- Where possible, prevent your homelessness by advising and assisting you to secure accommodation that has a reasonable prospect of being available for the next six months.
- Relieving your homelessness by advising and assisting you into accommodation that is available for your occupation.
- If your homelessness has not been prevented or relieved, the Council has to secure accommodation for a small group of ex-offenders, those that are;
- Eligible for assistance.
- Homeless/threatened with homelessness.
- In priority need.
- Have not caused your homelessness.
- Meet the local connection criteria.

If you have not been able to prevent or relieve your homelessness and do not meet the above criteria the Council is under a duty to continue to provide you advice and assistance.

- Failure to co-operate with your reasonable steps in your personalised housing plan and refusal of an offer of accommodation could result in the Housing Options Service discharging their duty towards you.

Housing Options in Test Valley

Private Rented Sector

Housing for Multiple Occupation (HMO's)

You could try to secure accommodation in a multiple occupation property in the private rented sector. This would be a room in a shared house or flat. Test Valley Borough Council's housing service will be able to advise you on how to find out what housing is available locally and how to apply for Universal Credit to help you with your housing costs.

Here are details of some search engines you may wish to explore;

- www.spareroom.co.uk
- Andover/Romsey advertiser
- www.rightmove.co.uk
- Gum tree
- Facebay

If you are under 35 years of age, your housing element of your Universal Credit will be of a single room rent. (SRR) The single room rent in Test Valley is £68.17 per week or £296.21 per calendar month. This rate has been frozen until 2020. If you are not in work, you will not receive any more financial assistance other than that of the single room rate.

The link to apply for Universal Credit is www.gov.uk/universal-credit

You might be able to get help with a deposit or rent in advance through:

- Test Valley's Rent Deposit Loan Scheme (RDLS)

To access our RDLS you need to meet the eligibility criteria. The housing options officers will be able to advise you if you are entitled to the RDLS. No other agency can make this decision or offer the RDLS.

Independent Private Rented Accommodation

You could try to find and secure housing in the private rented sector. The Council's Housing Options team can advise you how to find out what housing is available locally and how to apply for Universal Credit to help you with your housing costs.

To search for what private rented accommodation is available please see the link to 'private rented accommodation landlord and letting agents sheet'. The search engines mentioned above are also a useful tool in searching for accommodation.

If you are aged 35 or over, you can seek to secure a one bedroom unit of accommodation. Your housing element in your universal credit will be that of the one bedroom accommodation rate in Test Valley. This is currently, £134.02 per week or £582.35 per calendar month. This rate has been frozen until April 2020.

The accommodation does not need to be in Test Valley. If you secure accommodation in another local authority area, you will need to contact that local authority to confirm the one bedroom rate for that area. Test Valley is an area of high housing costs and accommodation outside of the borough may be more affordable for you.

You can seek details of private rented accommodation and see if you are eligible for Test Valley's RDLS whilst you are still in prison or a youth detention centre.

Please note if you are under 35 years of age and do not fall into one of the exempt categories, you will only be entitled to the single room rate even if you secure a one bedroom unit of accommodation. It's therefore likely to be unaffordable. To find out if you are exempt from the under 35 rule, the single room rent please contact 01264 368600

The Council's RDLS may be available to you to help you obtain the deposit or month rent in advance to obtain the accommodation.

Emergency Accommodation

If you are unable to secure private rented accommodation you may need to secure emergency accommodation in the form of a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast if you have nowhere to live following your release.

There are hostels across Hampshire that you may have access to. Please find below details of the hostels you can be referred or self referred to;

LIST OF HOSTELS and REFERRAL PROCESS

Your Probation Officer, Personal Advisor, Housing Options Officer or whoever is supporting you can help you with the referral process or refer on your behalf.

The Council's Housing Options team may be able to refer you to an emergency bed at the Two Saints Hostel, Dene Court which is in Andover or Winchester Night Shelter.

You can also search the Homeless England directory to find hostels, emergency and longer term accommodation and day centres in your area. This information can be found at www.homeless.org.uk.

You can also access Shelter's directory or call Shelter's free housing advice helpline on 0808 800 4444 to find services near you. The Shelter directory can also be located at www.shelter.org.uk.

Hampshire Home Choice (HHC)

From the age of 16 you will be allowed to register on Hampshire Homechoice for Test Valley Borough Council's housing register, this is for social and affordable rented properties.

You can apply by registering on the following website: <https://www.hampshirehomechoice.org.uk>

You will need to provide the following documentation to prove you are eligible for our register:

- Proof of identification (Birth Certificate / Passport / Driving Licence)
- Proof of current address (Driving Licence / Utility Bill / DWP Award Letter)
- Proof of local connection (Evidence that you have been resident within the borough for a period of 12 months or more OR evidence that close family member (Mother / father / brother / sister) has been resident within the borough for 5 years or more.

You can have an active HHC application whilst serving a prison sentence. It is your responsibility to inform the Housing Service of your change of circumstances and renew your application on an annual basis.

There is a considerable wait for social housing in Test Valley; the average wait for one bedroom accommodation in band 3 is 2 years and 11 months. Social housing is no longer let on a life time tenancy. Tenancies are likely to be fixed term for a five year period, all starting on a probationary tenancy and rents will only be 20% lower than market rents.

Any offer of a tenancy for accommodation via Hampshire Home Choice is the decision of the housing association who own the accommodation. They will carry out reference checks and your time spent in prison and the reason why you were convicted maybe a barrier to accessing housing association accommodation.

Please note that not everybody who applies to Hampshire Homechoice may be eligible or will qualify. It is not an open register. The Housing Options service can advise you whether your eligible and qualify.

Shared Ownership

If you are able to raise a small deposit and are able to purchase a property but cannot afford to buy on the open market, you may want to consider shared ownership. This is where you would pay a proportion of rent to a housing association and have a mortgage on the other part. If you are interested in this housing option please see the website links below.

- <https://radianhomes.co.uk/>
- <https://www.helptobuysouth.co.uk/>

Help with money before you are released from prison.

All prisoners are given a discharge grant paid for by the prison when you leave. This is money to help you with the costs until your benefits can be sorted out or you start paid work.

If your Prison Housing Advisor has secured you accommodation for your first night, you may be given a higher discharge grant, which is paid directly to the accommodation provider. Please check with your prison advisor if you can receive this additional money.

You may be able to prepare for your release when you are in prison by saving some of your prison wages. You could consider opening a credit union account when you are in prison. The prison can provide you details regarding this.

Other agencies that may be useful for you when being released from prison or youth detention centres

Clinks

Clinks.org

supporting voluntary organisations that works with offenders and their families.

NACRO

Nacro.org.uk or telephone 0300123

NACRO offers resettlement advice to offenders including housing, employment, education and training and health.

PACT

prisonadvice.org.uk or telephone 0808 808 3444

The Prison Advice and Care Trust is a national charity which supports people affected by imprisonment. They provide practical and emotional support to prisoner's children and families and prisoners themselves.

RECOOP

recoop.org.uk

(for aged 50+) provides resettlement and care for older offenders and prisoners, offer resources for professionals in contact with older residents

St Giles Trust

stgilliestrust.org.uk

St Giles Trust is a charity helping offenders and disadvantaged people to move their lives forward.

Women in prison

Womeninprison.org.uk or telephone 0800 953 0125

Women in prison offers dedicated housing support to women affected by the criminal justice system both in prison and in the community.

Test Valley Borough Council
Housing, Health & Communities Service

Beech Hurst, Weyhill Road, Andover, Hampshire, SP10 3AJ
Tel: 01264 368000

Former Magistrates Court, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 8AQ
Tel: 01794 527700

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