

## **If you need housing advice or are homeless: People leaving prison or youth detention accommodation**

The Housing Advice Centre is part of Newcastle City Council and offers a free, confidential advice service to anyone that has housing problems. We aim to help people to keep their home or help them to find one that meets their needs. We can help you to understand the different options that are available in Newcastle to solve your housing problems.

Staff at the Housing Advice Centre can:

- prevent a homelessness situation from occurring, wherever possible
- explain the processes of homelessness prevention
- assist in locating alternative accommodation, such as a housing association, local authority or privately rented property
- provide you with information and advice on your options, including those listed below

There is a wide range of advice and support available in Newcastle. The Housing Advice Centre can help you, or the person you're working with, to understand the different options available to solve housing problems. The earlier you get in touch, the more likely it is that you can get help.

If you are expecting to go into custody you should think about the arrangements for your home before being remanded, contact the Housing Advice Centre if you need advice, and plan what you are going to do about your home while you are in custody and when you leave.

**Phone:** 0191 277 1712 or 0191 277 1716 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 12 noon and 1pm to 4.30pm)

**Email:** [housingadvicecentre@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvicecentre@newcastle.gov.uk)

**Website:** [www.newcastle.gov.uk/homeless](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/homeless)

**In person:** Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Newcastle City Council's Housing Advice Centre staff are only providing telephone or email advice. The Housing Advice Centre building will not be open for face-to-face advice until further notice. This will help us all to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus. Please call or email using the contacts above

If you need to contact someone after 5pm or at weekends, phone the out-of-hours service on **0191 278 7878** (ask the operator for the Emergency Homeless Officer).

### **Making arrangements for your home while you are in custody**

You might be entitled to benefits to help you pay your rent if you are in custody in England, Wales or Scotland. You should get housing advice before you go into custody or ask for it as soon as possible after you get there so that you can find out whether this is the case.

#### **Housing Benefit**

You can only get Housing Benefit to pay your rent if you intend to return home when you are released from custody. How long you can get Housing Benefit for depends on your circumstances, as follows:

- **On bail:** You can get Housing Benefit for your normal home for up to 52 weeks if your bail conditions mean that you have to live away from home (in a bail or probation hostel or anywhere else) until your court hearing
- **On remand:** You can get Housing Benefit for your normal home for up to 52 weeks while you are in prison on remand waiting for your trial or sentence
- **Sentenced:** If you are sentenced and are in prison you can get Housing Benefit for up to 13 weeks. However, you must expect to return home within 13 weeks of the date you first went into custody, including the time you were on remand. You will not be entitled to Housing Benefit for any time you are serving a prison sentence if the length of your sentence means that you will not be returning home within 13 weeks of the date you went into custody

### **Universal Credit**

If you were getting Universal Credit to help pay your rent or a mortgage before you went into prison, you can continue to get help with housing costs as part of your Universal Credit payment for up to six months. This applies if you are on bail, on remand or sentenced. However, if you receive a custodial sentence you won't get Universal Credit if you expect to be in prison (including time on remand) for more than six months.

If you are getting Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, you must let the authority that is paying you know as soon as possible if you go into prison, receive a custodial sentence, or are released.

### **Terminating your tenancy**

If you are sentenced to more than 26 weeks (six months) in prison, have no income and there is no one else staying in your home who could pay the rent, it may be best to end your tenancy. If you are going to end your tenancy, it is usually necessary to give four weeks' notice to the landlord. If you are on Housing Benefit, it needs to be claimed for the notice period. This is usually possible if you have been receiving the benefit before going into prison.

### **Finding somewhere to live when you leave custody**

If you don't think that you will have anywhere to live when you come out of custody, it's important to tell someone at the start of your sentence. There is often a housing advice service in prisons. These are run by organisations such as Depaul UK, Foundation, Nacro, Shelter, St Giles Trust, St Mungo's. They are likely to be in the prison every week, but not always every day and you will usually need to book an appointment with them. They may ask if you want an appointment if you have said at your induction that you will probably have nowhere to live on release. Otherwise, it is up to you to request an appointment. It is worth doing this at least six weeks before you are due to be released.

A few housing advice services have prisoners working with them who have been trained to help other prisoners, doing things like helping to write letters or fill in forms. They can be a good source of information for other prisoners who need help with housing.

### **Help with money when 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 a prison housing adviser has found you accommodation for your first night, you may be given a higher discharge grant (about an extra £50) which will be paid directly to the accommodation provider.

This information was accurate at the time of publishing (June 2020)

## Housing options

### Family and friends

Most people leaving custody return to family or friends, at least in the short-term. It can sometimes be difficult to get housing on release from custody, so this option is worth considering.

### Supported accommodation

Supported accommodation can offer you specialist support to address issues that may have led to your imprisonment or to help you with living independently and adjusting back into life in the community. Varying levels of support can be provided, depending on the type of accommodation service and your needs.

In Newcastle you would need to be referred to supported accommodation by a professional, such as an offender manager or support worker. If you aren't working with any agencies and you need help or support to access accommodation, contact the Housing Advice Centre.

### Social housing

Council and housing association homes are also known as social housing. In Newcastle you apply for social housing by completing an online form on the Tyne and Wear Homes website – [www.tyneandwearhomes.org.uk](http://www.tyneandwearhomes.org.uk). You will need to have references from someone who can confirm how you have managed if you have held a tenancy before.

Sometimes councils and housing associations refuse to let people go on their waiting list if they have a history of anti-social behaviour or have been convicted for an offence which might affect their tenancy, such as dealing drugs from their home, criminal damage or burglary in the local area. If you have a conviction like this, it may be possible to show that you have changed your behaviour or learnt about what being a good tenant means through some of the things you have done during your sentence to reduce the possibility of reoffending. For example, some prisons run courses for prisoners on being a good tenant. If you have done one of these courses, or something similar, it is a good idea to write a letter to the council or housing association about what you have learnt and how it will change your behaviour in the future.

You can also speak to an agency like Shelter to get help to appeal a decision which doesn't let you join the waiting list for social housing.

### Private rented accommodation

The main advantage of private rented accommodation is that you have a greater choice of location and type of property. In Newcastle you can get help to look for private rented accommodation from the Private Rented Service, which is part of Newcastle City Council. They can help private tenants and prospective tenants with questions on managing your tenancy or finding a new home.

**Phone:** 0191 277 1438

**Email:** [privaterentedservice@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:privaterentedservice@newcastle.gov.uk)

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## Other support available

### Shelter

Shelter's service in Newcastle gives advice, guidance and support and direction on a range of housing issues, including homelessness, looking for accommodation, problems with landlords, being evicted or repossessed, debt problems, benefits issues, problems with disrepair and going to court about housing. They don't offer advice to landlords.

**Phone:** 0344 515 1601

**Website:** [https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice](https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice)

### Nacro

This organisation provides advice and support about housing, access to employment and education to people with criminal records and professionals working with them

**Phone:** 0300 123 1999

**Email:** [helpline@nacro.org.uk](mailto:helpline@nacro.org.uk)