

Women leaving prison

Key information

Publication type: Current investigation

Publication status: Adopted

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Introduction

The London Assembly Housing Committee is holding a standalone meeting to understand the current housing situation for women leaving prison and returning to live in London. The investigation seeks to understand the key challenges these women face and explore how the Mayor could provide support to them and their families.

Investigation aims and objectives (Terms of Reference)

This standalone meeting on ‘women leaving prison’ will seek to:

- Understand the current housing situation for women leaving prison and returning to live in London, including the key challenges these women face, and the impact this has on women’s lives.
- Identify how the London Probation Service, local authorities, housing associations, and the voluntary and community sector provide housing support to women leaving prison, both before and after release from custody.
- Understand to what extent the Mayor is able to provide housing support for women leaving prison and their families.
- Explore what opportunities there are for the Mayor to improve the housing situation for women leaving prison and their families.

Key issues

- There is a lack of secure housing for women leaving prison, which makes securing employment, maintaining positive mental health, and preventing a return to harmful behaviours very challenging.¹
- Though women in prison make up approximately 5 per cent of the prison population in England and Wales, the impact of not addressing resettlement needs has far-reaching consequences for women and their children.²
- According to the Government's Female Offender Strategy, homelessness is a significant problem for the female prisoner population, and the community provision of services that should support women at risk of homelessness are inconsistent.³
- The 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act gives prisons a 'duty to refer' anyone at risk of homelessness on release to the relevant local authority. However, a report by homeless organisations and prison reform/advocacy groups state that this Act is failing women leaving prison.⁴
- In 2022, the London Assembly passed a motion on 'Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison', which included 9 recommendations.⁵ The Mayor responded to the motion in a letter to the Chair of the London Assembly on 24 June 2022.⁶
- London boroughs face specific challenges when responding to the needs of women leaving prison, due to a lack of social housing and affordable housing.⁷

Key questions

1. How are women and their families impacted by the lack of suitable accommodation and housing support after release from prison?
2. What housing support is available for women leaving prison, both before and after release from custody?
3. What are the key challenges for local authorities and probation services in finding suitable accommodation for women leaving prison?
4. How do housing associations support women leaving prisons? What challenges do they face?
5. To what extent does the Mayor support women leaving prison with access to suitable accommodation and housing support services? What opportunities are there for the Mayor to support further?

[1] St Martin in the Fields, London Prisons Mission and the Prison reform Trust, '[Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)', October 2020

[2] Tracey McMahon, '[A sense of place: A study of accessing housing for women existing prison – housing first not housing last](#)', 2018

[3] Ministry of Justice, '[Female Offender Strategy](#)', June 2018

[4] St Martin in the Fields, London Prisons Mission and the Prison reform Trust, '[Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)', October 2020

[5] GLA, [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)

[6] Mayor of London, [Letter – Motion 6, Safer Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#), 24 June 2022

[7] St Martin in the Fields, London Prisons Mission and the Prison reform Trust, '[Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#)', October 2020

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