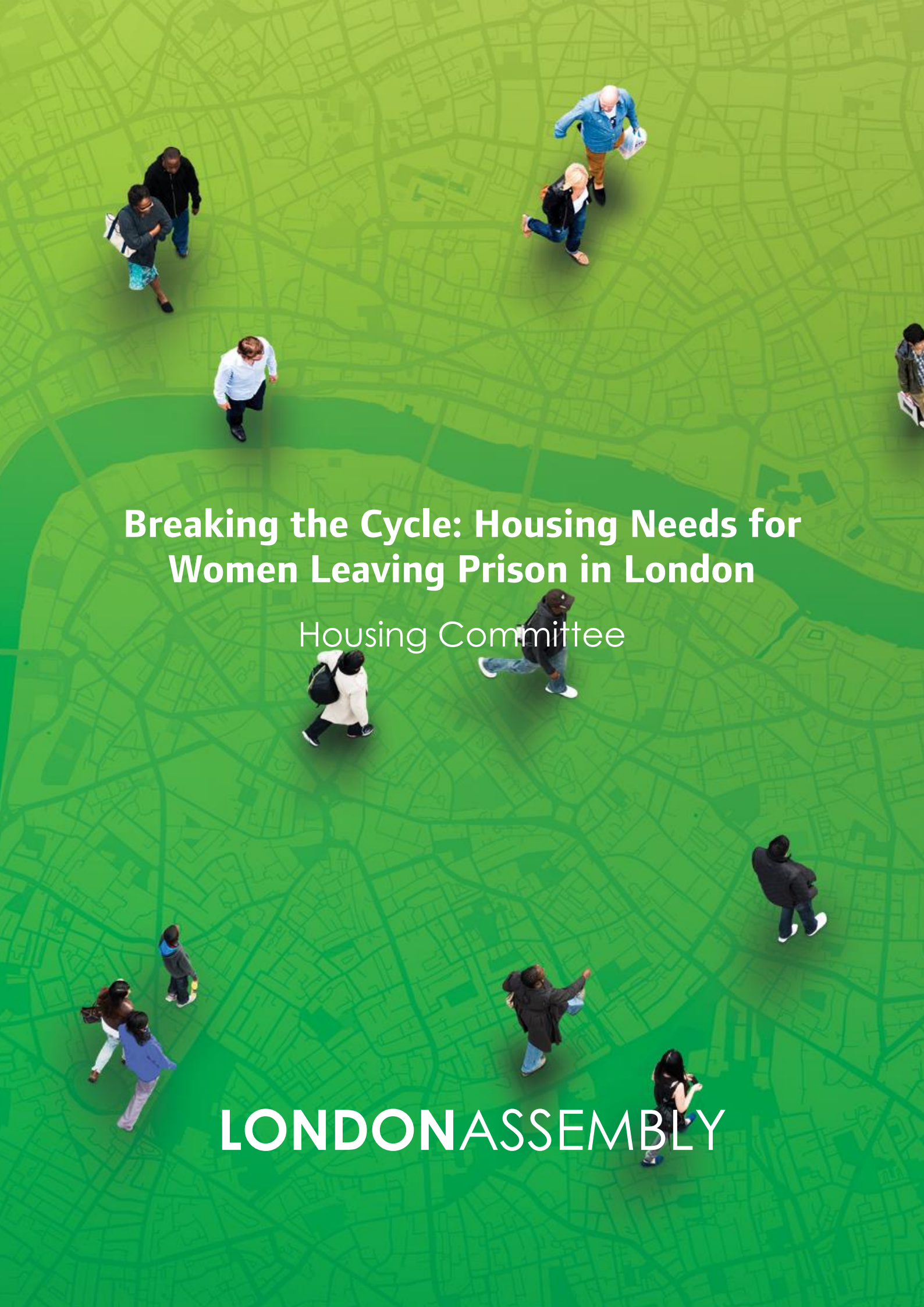


An aerial photograph of a city map, likely London, with a green tint. Several people are walking across the map, their shadows cast on the surface. The map shows a network of streets and a large body of water in the center.

Breaking the Cycle: Housing Needs for Women Leaving Prison in London

Housing Committee

LONDONASSEMBLY

Housing Committee



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The London Assembly Housing Committee examines matters relating to housing in London and leads on the scrutiny of the Mayor's housing responsibilities. To read more about our work, please visit our website.

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Foreword



Sem Moema AM
Chair of the Housing Committee

Some of our most vulnerable Londoners are being failed by a broken system which frequently places them in harm's way.

In the long-term, no woman should be in prison for a short sentence. The new Labour Government's pledge to offer alternatives to short sentences including rehabilitation and tagging – extremely welcome – can only be achieved if one has a roof over one's head.

I strongly believe in the use of community and rehabilitation-focused alternatives to harmful short sentences and urge all of us to advocate for these options. For women, prison should be reserved for only the most serious of offences. We learned during this scrutiny that up to 70 per cent of women in HMP Bronzefield were on remand, compared to around a quarter across the rest of the women's prison estate.

However, while we continue to advocate for reform, we need to make urgent changes to what happens when women are released from prison right now. It should shame us all that on release, the main housing options are street homelessness, a return to an abusive partner in an unsafe home, or a return to prison. Simply put, we need to do better and have a strategy that provides a stable home for women leaving prison so that they can rebuild their own and their families' lives, leaving the criminal justice system for good.

The findings of this investigation are sobering, with support given to women when they leave prison varying greatly across our capital. In too many cases, women are forced into a choice between homelessness or an alternative which is actively harmful to them or wider society.

It was heartening to hear examples of good practice, such as in the London Borough of Lambeth. There, a trauma informed, joined-up approach works to minimise the risk of homelessness and help women get their lives back on track. The borough's pre-release work with women on their housing options demonstrates a pragmatic, workable solution that could be emulated across London's boroughs. Our report argues for putting this in place London-wide through implementation of the Women's Release Practice Briefing.

One of the key findings of our investigation is that women-only hostels are very often not available, with potentially disastrous consequences for those women being released. Putting these most vulnerable of women in situations where they are forced to share with men, who may be dealing with addiction or involved in violent crime, does harm to recovery and increases recidivism.

Women should never be faced with having to choose between being released into unsafe accommodation, going back to an abusive partner, or out onto the streets. We heard first hand from prisoners scared to leave prison as that was their only safe housing option.

The Mayor has significant convening powers to bring together local authorities and housing associations to work towards a strategy that provides housing with support for women released from prison. With a single voice, the Mayor and boroughs can make the case to the Ministry of Justice and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on behalf of this group.

I would like to place on record my thanks to John Plummer and the London Prisons Mission who have been tireless in their campaigning on this issue. It is in part thanks to them that the Committee considered this topic, and our report and recommendations stand in support their continued advocacy. I would also like to thank all the staff and incarcerated women at HMP Bronzefield for sharing their experiences. Additionally, I would like to thank a leading women's charity and the women now housed by them after leaving prison for hosting the Assembly Housing Committee and sharing their experiences, successes and the challenges they face every day.

Executive Summary

The absence of safe and stable housing for women leaving prison and returning to London has major consequences for women and their families.

Most women are in prison for non-violent offences and serve short sentences. These can be highly disruptive, causing women to lose their accommodation in the community. On release, many women are pushed into unsafe or temporary living situations, or even face homelessness. Without access to stable housing in London, it becomes nearly impossible for these women to successfully reintegrate into the community and rebuild their lives. As a result, many reoffend and return to prison. This cycle is unacceptable, and urgent action needs to be taken.

Leaving prison presents challenges for both men and women. However, women who have left prison often have particularly complex needs. It is estimated that approximately 60 per cent of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse.¹ Women leaving prison are likely to have experienced chaotic lifestyles involving drug and alcohol use, mental health issues, and homelessness.² Black and minoritised migrant women have additional needs, such as issues related to immigration status. And, many women in prison are mothers and primary carers for their children. While many of these challenges are national, the scarcity of accommodation in London further worsens outcomes for women leaving prison. Without secure accommodation, it is very difficult to maintain or restore positive family relationships which are essential for women's rehabilitation.³

These issues have been a long-standing concern for the Assembly. In 2022, the previous Housing Committee passed a motion containing nine recommendations to the Mayor, all focused on helping women access safer housing on release.⁴ Yet, the situation for women leaving prison remains broadly the same three years on.

Through our investigation, we spoke with representatives who support women leaving prison to find out why women cannot access suitable accommodation and housing support in London. We also spoke to women in prison and women who have left prison and are residing in the community. Several factors contribute to the issue, including:

- slow and inconsistent resettlement processes across prisons, probation services, and local authorities
- failure of some local authorities to provide housing support to women who are entitled to it by law, like women who have experienced domestic abuse

¹ [Female Offender Strategy](#), 2018

² [Female Offender Strategy](#), 2018

³ Lord Farmer, [The Importance of Strengthening Female Offenders' Family and other Relationships to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime](#), June 2019

⁴ [Safer Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#), 3 March 2022

- severe shortage of social housing across London and limited spaces in supported accommodation, for which many women do not qualify
- unsafe and unsuitable housing, including accommodation that is in poor condition, or where women are placed with men
- lack of support for women in short-term accommodation who need assistance finding long-term housing and support navigating complex, personal challenges.

As a Committee, we acknowledge the Mayor's efforts to collaborate with organisations across the sector to improve housing outcomes for women leaving prison in London. A key part of this work is the London Blueprint Delivery Group, which brings key organisations together to address this issue.

However, much more needs to be done by both the Mayor and the Government to resolve this crisis. We outline 5 key recommendations below:

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

By March 2026, the Blueprint Group should commission a training programme for agencies in London that provide housing support for women leaving prison with the aim of standardising best practice across London. This programme should provide structured training for local councils, probation services, and prison services to strengthen a coordinated, multi-agency approach to securing safe and stable accommodation. It must include training to support agencies to adopt a holistic, trauma-informed and intersectional approach, and should be developed through engagement with women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 2

In 2025, the Mayor should hold an event with all councils in London to publicly promote and disseminate the Women's Release Practice Briefing, and to showcase examples of good practice and encourage London's councils to implement it. The GLA should monitor the uptake of the briefing across local authorities and evaluate its effectiveness in improving housing support for women leaving prison and returning to London.

Recommendation 3

The Government should conduct an immediate review of the Community Accommodation Service Tier-3 Accommodation scheme to ensure women are not placed in unsuitable accommodation, such as accommodation with men. Additionally, the Government should record and publish quarterly data on the number of women released from prison and placed in CAS-3 accommodation in London.

Recommendation 4

The upcoming Rough Sleeping Action Plan should specifically address how it supports women leaving prison.

Recommendation 5

Councils and housing associations in London should ringfence a proportion of their supported housing units for women released from prison. The Mayor should also engage with Government to secure revenue funding to expand the amount of supported housing for women leaving prison.

Background

What is the current situation for women leaving prison?

There is a chronic shortage of affordable housing in London. Advance – a national charity that supports women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system – told us “the lack of available, suitable housing stock” is the main challenge for local authorities responsible for housing women leaving prison.⁵ John Plummer, Coordinator at London Prisons Mission – a charity which recruits and supports volunteers to undertake regular work in prisons – also highlighted this:

“The other thing...that we recognise in all our work with London authorities [is] that there is an intense pressure on social and affordable housing across the piece. There is no good pretending that this ought to be treated completely separately and is outside that”.⁶

In addition to the shortage of housing in London, there are further barriers that make it extra challenging for women to find accommodation after they leave prison. Many women leaving prison do not have essential identification documents, such as passports or driving licences, which are often required to rent a property.⁷ They may also struggle to provide references or a deposit,⁸ and private landlords may discriminate against women with a criminal record.⁹

Women living in social housing may lose their tenancy while they are in custody. At our meeting, Rachel Ozanne, Director of Programmes and Partnerships at Women in Prison – a national charity that support women affected by the criminal justice system – told us about the restrictions on housing benefit for women in prison: “You can get housing benefit paid towards tenancy for up to three months, but it is post three months that you then lose your accommodation if you have accommodation when you go into prison”.¹⁰

⁵ Advance, written submission, November 2024

⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁷ Prison Reform Trust, [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#), October 2020

⁸ Prison Reform Trust, [Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison](#), October 2020

⁹ Advance, written submission, November 2024

¹⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

At the Committee's visit to HMP Bronzefield, we heard about instances of women losing their accommodation at the point of arrest because involvement with the police violated their rental agreement.¹¹

Housing outcomes for women returning to London

Following the closure of Holloway prison in 2016, there are no women-only prisons in London. After its closure, women were moved to HMP Downview and HMP Bronzefield, both located in Surrey.¹²

HMP Bronzefield is the largest women's prison in Western Europe, with capacity for 572 women.¹³ However, this figure is an estimate, and we were told numbers might be higher.¹⁴ The Committee visited HMP Bronzefield as part of this investigation, to speak with the women living there and with prison staff. Findings from this visit are drawn on in this report.

Most women sentenced in London will be sent to HMP Bronzefield.¹⁵ At our first meeting, we were told that approximately 50 women per month are released from prison to return to London, which equates to approximately 1-2 per borough.¹⁶

Zaiba Qureshi, CEO at Housing for Women, spoke to us about the challenges faced by organisations that provide support to women in custody now that prisons are located outside of London and support is delivered virtually instead of in-person. She told us, "...when we were working with [HMP] Holloway, we would be working with the women themselves, getting to know them...You can get a better response from people face-to face".¹⁷

The housing outcomes for women leaving HMP Bronzefield are not regularly monitored. However, in a survey carried out between February and March 2023, 67 per cent of women leaving HMP Bronzefield were without safe and secure accommodation.¹⁸ Of that 67 per cent, 31 per cent were homeless on release.¹⁹

Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development, joined the Committee on our visit to HMP Bronzefield. At our later meeting, he told us:

"...It was striking from the visit, and particularly talking to the women that we spoke to and looking at the figures, the number who do leave prison and are ending up homeless, the lengths to which they will go to, to avoid rough sleeping, essentially going and

¹¹ Prison staff highlighted this at the Committee's site visit to HMP Bronzefield on 31 October 2024

¹² Peabody, [prison history](#), accessed 4 April 2025

¹³ Sodexo, [About the Prison](#), accessed 26/02/25

¹⁴ Housing for Women's staff highlighted this at our site visit on 13 March 2025

¹⁵ Prison staff highlighted this at the Committee's site visit to HMP Bronzefield on 31 October 2024

¹⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

¹⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

¹⁸ Independent Monitoring Board, [Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Bronzefield](#), January 2024

¹⁹ Independent Monitoring Board, [Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Bronzefield](#), January 2024

becoming hidden homeless, but still probably being in quite dangerous and very precarious situations. The striking fact, which is the extent to which they will deliberately miss a probation appointment in order to come back into prison because it is safer for them in prison than outside...".²⁰

Sam Julius, Head of Influence and Communications at Clinks, told us that a similar number of men and women are homeless on release. But, that three months later, women are more likely than men to be homeless. He told us, "In terms of the numbers of people being released from prison homeless, the figure [proportion of people living in accommodation] is pretty similar when you compare men and women, but the figure is lower for women when they mark it at the three-month post-release point".²¹

Data on homelessness among women leaving prison to return to London is limited. The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database records information on rough sleeping in London. Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development, told us that some women who have left prison and are rough sleeping will be identified through CHAIN, but not all of this data is captured.²² Furthermore, the database does not record women who experience other kinds of homelessness after release, such as hidden homelessness.²³ Tom Copley explained:

"If they are rough sleepers who have been identified by an outreach team and they are on the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database and their last place of residence will be noted and that might well be prison. However, as we know, and going back to what I was saying earlier, a lot of women will not rough sleep or will go to great lengths to hide themselves and therefore will not necessarily be recorded on the CHAIN database. While we will have data on the women who are specifically rough sleeping, more broadly we would not necessarily have data if they are homeless in another way, i.e. hidden homeless".²⁴

We note in this context how being rendered homeless has major health consequences for women: in 2021, the Office for National Statistics recorded the average age of death for a homeless woman in England as 43.²⁵

²⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

²¹ [Offender Accommodation Outcomes – Statistical Summary](#), 17 February 2025

²² CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) is a multi-agency database recording information about people sleeping rough and the wider street population in London.

²³ Hidden homelessness includes people who are sofa surfing and families who are severely overcrowded or living in dangerous conditions. Shelter, [Solution out of homelessness](#). Accessed 11 April 2025.

²⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

²⁵ Office for National Statistics, Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2021 registrations, accessed 26 March 2025. The median age is recorded as 43.2 years and this figure was worked out from the recorded number of 94 deaths.

The impact of short sentences and recalls

Women are more likely than men to receive short sentences for non-violent crimes.²⁶ There is no legal definition of a short sentence, but some reports on the topic define it as a sentence of up to 12 months in prison.²⁷ In this report we adopt this definition.

John Plummer, Coordinator at London Prisons Mission, told us that approximately 80 per cent of women held in HMP Bronzefield are on short sentences for non-violent offences.²⁸ Short sentences make it particularly challenging for housing teams in prisons and local authorities to find suitable accommodation for women. John Plummer told us, “there is often not sufficient time for adequate arrangements to be made”.²⁹

Some women are more likely to be issued a short sentence than others. For example, Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Hibiscus – a charity that provides support to Black and minoritised migrant women involved in the criminal justice system – told us that Black and minoritised women are more likely to receive short sentences.³⁰

The impact of short sentences on women’s lives and housing situations cannot be underestimated. This is detailed in the government’s 2018 Female Offender Strategy:

“...Short sentences offer limited public protection, and fail to offer time for meaningful rehabilitative activity. In some cases, short sentences can aggravate vulnerabilities and raise the risk of reoffending. Going into custody often causes huge disruption to the lives of offenders and their families, causing crises in employment, housing and contact with dependents”.³¹

The Committee was also told about the high number of women who are repeatedly sent back to prison (recalled) and the challenges this presents for local authorities.³² Rose Parker, Head of Commissioning – Safer Communities, London Borough of Lambeth, told us:

“In terms of thinking about that data of the prison release service in Lambeth, you have such a high percentage of returning referrals within a year, which is due to those short sentences. That is super-disruptive because if somebody is recalled [sent back to custody] or they are going back in on a really short sentence, they are losing accommodation, or you have to restart the process again”.³³

²⁶ [Female Offender Strategy](#), 2018

²⁷ UK Parliament, [The use of short sentences in England and Wales](#), 27 July 2023

²⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

²⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

³⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

³¹ [Female Offender Strategy](#), 2018

³² A woman is recalled if she breaches her licence conditions. This is a process led by probation services.

³³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

Zaiba Qureshi, Chief Executive Officer at Housing for Women – a charity and housing association – told us about the high cost of keeping women in custody and the impact on women’s families. She told us:

“...the cost of women being imprisoned is far greater than just that one individual person. I think it is something like £60,000 to keep a woman in prison for a year, but there is also the impact on her family potentially. They are usually caregivers or parents so there are the care costs for that family and then any other potential health or mental health needs and the costs that relate to that. Using those costs is a really great argument for an alternative to custody for women”.³⁴

On 21 January 2025, the Government launched the Women’s Justice Board; a key aim of the board is to reduce the number of women in prison.³⁵ Prior to this, in October 2024, the government had also announced a review of sentencing which would include the use and impact of short custodial sentences for women.³⁶ Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships at MOPAC, told us he views this review as a positive step.³⁷

As a Committee, we believe preventative measures in the community should be prioritised where appropriate over short sentences that push women into homelessness or unsuitable housing, and are expensive. We welcome the Government’s review of short sentences and the plan to reduce the number of vulnerable women being sent to prison.³⁸

³⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

³⁵ [Women’s Justice Board begins plans to send fewer women to prison](#), 21 January 2025

³⁶ [Independent Sentencing Review 2024 to 2025](#)

³⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

³⁸ [Women’s Justice Board begins plans to send fewer women to prison](#), 21 January 2025. A review of short sentences is part of the upcoming sentencing review.

Coordinated support for women leaving prison

The main agencies that provide housing support to women leaving prison include local authorities, probation services, non-profit organisations, and prisons. This section outlines the responsibilities of each agency, the challenges they individually and collectively face in London, and offers recommendations for how the Mayor can assist them.

Statutory agencies

The statutory agencies responsible for providing housing support for women leaving prison include prison housing teams, probation services and local authorities. All of these agencies are involved in a process called ‘Duty to Refer’.

Duty to Refer

Under the Homelessness Act 2017, prison and probation services must refer a woman to a council’s housing team if she is at risk of being homeless in the next eight weeks, is being released with nowhere to stay, or is staying in probation or bail accommodation with nowhere to go next.³⁹ The referral can be made to any local authority in England. However, it can be difficult to secure housing if there is no ‘local connection’⁴⁰ to the area.⁴¹

Local councils are then required to assess housing need and create a personal housing plan.⁴² They should also coordinate with relevant support services, such as probation and drug and alcohol teams.⁴³

Challenges to agencies working well together in London

Delayed referrals from prison

Local authorities often receive referrals from prison with little time before a woman’s release, making it difficult to assess and address housing needs.⁴⁴ During our meeting, Rose Parker, Head of Commissioning – Safer Communities, London Borough of Lambeth, shared her experience at Lambeth Council, noting that referrals are frequently “very last minute”.⁴⁵ She

³⁹ Shelter, [Help with housing when you leave prison](#), accessed 28/02/25

⁴⁰ A local connection means a person has links to a council area because they: live or have lived in the area recently, work in the area, have close family living there, get care leavers support in the area, or lived in asylum support housing in the area. Source: Shelter, [what is a local connection?](#) accessed 03/03/25

⁴¹ Prison Reform Trust, [Getting help with resettlement in prison](#), accessed 03/03/25

⁴² Shelter, [Help with housing when you leave prison](#), accessed 28/02/25

⁴³ Shelter, [Help with housing when you leave prison](#), accessed 28/02/25

⁴⁴ Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁴⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

emphasised that a council's ability to carry out pre-release housing assessments and provide tailored support depends on receiving referrals in a timely manner.⁴⁶

Community Rehabilitative Service Providers

In London, organisations called Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) providers are appointed by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to provide holistic support for women leaving prison, including housing support. CRS providers are co-commissioned by MOPAC.

There are two CRS providers for women returning from prison in London: Women in Prison, which operates in South London, and Advance, which serves North London. Both organisations work with charity and statutory partners provide holistic, gender-specialist support to woman in London who have had recent contact with the criminal justice system, including women who have recently left prison.

CRS providers face similar challenges to local authorities due to late referrals from prison. Advance told us that "Late Duty To Refer information reaching LAs [local authorities] and other agencies means that there is very limited time to find appropriate accommodation".⁴⁷ Rachel Ozanne, Director of Programmes and Partnerships at Women in Prison, shared that Women in Prison should ideally receive a referral from prison up to 12 weeks before a woman's release for pre-release planning support, so that they can work with the relevant organisations to make sure the specific needs of the women being released are met. But often they do not receive the referral with enough time to carry out this work.⁴⁸ She told us:

"The pathway is we [Women in Prison] should get a referral for a sentenced woman up to 12 weeks before she is released. That is really important that we get that referral as quickly as possible to start looking at what the support needs are, working with HMPPS [His Majesty's Prison and Probation Services] around those [housing] options..."⁴⁹

In 2022, this Committee carried out an investigation into the Duty to Refer process. Through that investigation, local authorities highlighted the same issue of delayed referrals from prison. They also noted additional challenges in these referrals, for example, the extent to which they lack important details about women being released.⁵⁰ It does not appear that there has been progress on this issue since that time.

An inconsistent approach across boroughs

⁴⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁴⁷ Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁴⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁴⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁵⁰ [Written evidence from the London Assembly Housing Committee](#), Women in prison inquiry

Under the Housing Act 1996, women who are homeless due to domestic abuse must be treated as having a ‘priority need’ by local authorities.⁵¹ This designation means the council has a legal duty to offer increased housing support and provide emergency accommodation.⁵²

However, Sam Julius, Head of Influence and Communication at Clinks – a national charity that support voluntary organisations working with people in the criminal justice system – told the Committee that there is no consistent definition of ‘priority need’ applied to women leaving prison by local councils in London.⁵³ As a result, there are instances where women who have experienced domestic abuse are not recognised as priority need and, consequently, do not get the support they should.⁵⁴ This point was reinforced by Zaiba Qureshi, CEO at Housing for Women, who told us that:

“Some of the other issues that we are facing, and our practice-based evidence is showing, is a lack of understanding around local authority obligations around re-housing for women coming out of prison. They are still quite often seen as a non-priority and therefore they do not access the same housing pathways as they should”.⁵⁵

The Committee was also told that agencies involved in providing housing support for women leaving prison are not clear about the different roles and responsibilities across the sector. Sam Julius told us, “one of the biggest issues is that there are a range of organisations that can support women coming out of prison, statutory and non-statutory. There is that confusion about who is responsible for what”.⁵⁶

A lack of consistent practice across local authorities in London creates challenges for local prisons, which have to work with a large number of local authorities with differing policies.⁵⁷

*‘For local authorities, firstly not every local authority is the same; that is really important. I can only here speak in terms of Lambeth Council, but there are 32 boroughs, plus the City of London, they all look very different. They all have very different levels of resourcing, conflicting priorities, there is not necessarily a single approach’.*⁵⁸

**Rose Parker, Head of Commissioning, Safer Communities
London Borough of Lambeth**

⁵¹ Housing Act 1996, [section 189](#)

⁵² Shelter, [Priority need](#)

⁵³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁵⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁵⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁵⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁵⁷ Prison Reform Trust, [Home Truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system](#), June 2018

⁵⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

John Plummer, Coordinator at the London Prisons Mission, told us that most London councils do not have any resettlement processes in place specifically for women who have left prison.⁵⁹ The exception to this is the London Borough of Lambeth, which has a process for receiving prison referrals and specific roles dedicated to this.⁶⁰ These roles support men and women leaving prison, but at our second meeting we heard about the benefits of these roles specifically for women. Rose Parker, Head of Commissioning for Safer Communities at the London Borough of Lambeth, detailed these roles in the Council:

“In Lambeth, yes, we have specialist specific posts, we have a Prison Release Navigator post and then also we have Single Persons Navigators. In terms of the importance of these roles is that they are flexible, proactive, pre-emptive, the ability to do that tailored support, the ability to do in-reach, to build really strong working relationships with prisons, with probation...”⁶¹

Rose Parker went on to explain why women in particular require this specialist approach:

“We are talking about not just their experience in the criminal justice system, but substance misuse, mental health, VAWG [violence against women and girls], removal of children, that they themselves were in care as children. It is clear that is a specific, bigger need for women than it is for the men who are referred to the service”.⁶²

Guests at our meetings were positive about Lambeth’s approach and suggested that more boroughs should follow its example. Zaiba Qureshi, from Housing for Women, noted “there is a lack of consistency across all of the boroughs. However, in the case of Lambeth, I would say they are a particular star in this area”.⁶³ Rachel Ozanne, from Women in Prison, suggested, “...you could take some of that good practice in some of the boroughs like Lambeth and look at what that would look like cross-borough, I think would make a real difference”.⁶⁴

To support local councils to adopt better resettlement processes for women leaving prison, and to standardise the approach across boroughs, we were told that training for local authority housing teams would be beneficial. For example, Zaiba Qureshi of Housing for Women, told us that one way the Mayor could support the sector is through “improved training for local authorities’ housing and homelessness teams”.⁶⁵

Across the UK, some charities have implemented similar approaches to Lambeth Council, establishing roles to provide holistic support for women to help them reintegrate into the community. One approach, popular in the United States but also trialled by UK charities, is the Critical Time Intervention model. This model offers intensive caseworker support to people at

⁵⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁶⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁶¹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁶² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁶³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁶⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁶⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

risk of homelessness upon release from prison.⁶⁶ Support begins before release, continues through the transition period (from custody to the community), and extends into community life, structured across three distinct stages.⁶⁷ In the UK, the charity Fulfilling Lives piloted the Community Time Intervention model in Newcastle, for men and women.⁶⁸ The outcomes of this pilot have not been published.

The importance of a gender-informed approach for women leaving prison

Women leaving prison have complex needs. Rachel Ozanne, Director of Programmes and Partnerships at Women in Prison, told us:

“The predominant issue, which you will have heard before, is that women have multiple needs. In our data, the most common number of needs we are supporting is around five, where there is accommodation, and then the most common additional issues are domestic abuse, mental and physical health, finance, benefit and debt issues, and then potentially parental issues, immigration, those other issues”.⁶⁹

For example, Advance told us about the particular housing issues women with partial custody of their children face on release. According to Advance, local authorities require homes for children to have at least two bedrooms, to provide children with privacy and space.⁷⁰ However, we were told that “... social housing authorities will not allocate properties with multiple bedrooms to women who do not have full custody of their children”.⁷¹ It went on to tell us that “This is a vicious cycle which sets women and their children up to fail”.⁷²

Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Hibiscus, described the complex needs of Black and minoritised migrant women when they leave prison and the insufficient arrangements in place to support their needs:

“Something very specific that we see and that has an impact on the women we support is the lack of planning for women’s release. There is not any specific planning and, when you have overlapping barriers, you would need to have a clear plan so you can interact and you can connect with the different agencies. The specific experiences of the women we support would be shaped by their immigration status, as I said, it is NRPF [no recourse to public funds] but it is also the fact that they might have undocumented status, they might need to access an immigration solicitor to sort out the situation. What we see is that, as they are leaving prison, there is not a real plan for them to do that. Lots of that falls onto the organisation to support the women because the agencies are not taking responsibility for that”.⁷³

At our second meeting, guests highlighted the importance of agencies adopting a ‘gender-informed’ approach to address these needs. This means recognising the distinct challenges

⁶⁶ Centre for Homelessness Impact, [Case Management/Critical Time Intervention](#), accessed 10 March 2025

⁶⁷ Case Study: Crisis CTIs in Merseyside and South Wales, 17 February 2025

⁶⁸ Fulfilling Lives, [Implementing a Critical Time Intervention model: Interim Evaluation](#), October 2019

⁶⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁷⁰ Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁷¹ Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁷² Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁷³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

women face compared to men, acknowledging the complex and interconnected nature of these issues, and being sensitive to specific traumas such as domestic abuse, separation from children or, for migrant women, previous experiences of detention.⁷⁴ Rose Parker, Head of Commissioning – Safer Homes, London Borough of Lambeth, highlighted the importance of this approach in Lambeth Council. She told us, "...the main thing is a recognition that the needs of women are different, that our [Lambeth Council] services need to be specific and specialist".⁷⁵

Our investigation found that, with the exception of Lambeth Council, statutory agencies in London do not deliver housing support in a way that responds to women's complex needs. Advance told us:

"There is a lack of understanding from statutory services of these gender-specific needs and the impact of trauma on women's behaviour, including local authorities and probation services, meaning that women do not always receive the vital support and appropriate accommodation that they need".⁷⁶

Non-profit organisations in London such as Hibiscus, Women in Prison and Advance do adopt this approach. However, we were concerned to hear that some organisations struggle with limited capacity and resources due to a lack of funding. This challenge is particularly acute for groups working with women with No Recourse to Public Funds that are excluded from government housing support. Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Hibiscus, described the demands placed on frontline workers and the impact on staff:

"When you think about an organisation that focuses on supporting a group of women who are basically excluded from any type of support and provision, the level of advocacy that you need to do as a frontline worker increases significantly...Frontline workers in the organisation do their best in terms of advocating for women and finding alternatives, but this also leads to burnout, it leads to issues with retention...".⁷⁷

As a Committee, we recognise the pressure on non-profit organisations and the need for statutory agencies to adopt a more specialised approach. Our first recommendation is for the London Blueprint Delivery Group (explained in the following section) to commission a training programme for these agencies.

The London Blueprint Delivery Group

The London Blueprint Delivery group consists of organisations that provide support to women involved in the criminal justice system. MOPAC's Director for Justice and Commissioning chairs

⁷⁴ Being in detention refers to the act of being held, typically by authorities, in a facility where an individual is restricted in their freedom of movement. For migrants, detention usually happens when they are in the process of being investigated, deported, or awaiting a decision regarding their immigration status

⁷⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁷⁶ Evidence from Advance, November 2024

⁷⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

the group.⁷⁸ Members include London Councils, MOPAC, the National Probation Service, the Metropolitan Police, Lambeth Council, and charities like Hibiscus and Housing for Women.⁷⁹

The group formed in 2019, the same year its pan-London strategy was launched: ‘London’s Blueprint for implementing a whole system approach to women in contact with the criminal justice system’ (the Blueprint). It aims to improve the way organisations in London work together to address women’s unique challenges, including experiences of abuse, through holistic, gender-responsive support.⁸⁰ The Blueprint acknowledgement of the complex needs of women who have left prison and the importance of better coordination across agencies to support them.

Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnership at MOPAC, told us “They [The Blueprint Group] have actually just come to the end of one set of this action plan. We are now onto the second set which has been agreed and will be published shortly”.⁸¹ The Committee was not provided with the expected date of publication. The Blueprint Group will also be publishing an impact evaluation of the first action plan, which according to Will Balakrishnan, demonstrates real progress against the action plan.⁸²

We cannot attempt to evaluate the actual progress of the Blueprint Group without access to this action plan. However, we look forward to seeing the impact evaluation of the first action plan and the actions for the next in due course.

At our meetings, we spoke to members of the Blueprint group who spoke positively about it. Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez from Hibiscus, described it as an “important forum to help drive change”.⁸³ Zaiba Qureshi, from Housing for Women, highlighted its role in “...sharing information, innovation, good practice, and, more importantly, identifying gaps and challenges for women coming out of prison”.⁸⁴

The Blueprint Group is clearly a valuable platform for sharing ideas and it is encouraging to see many of the most relevant agencies working together on this important issue. The Committee commends MOPAC’s leadership within the group.

Our investigation highlights two key challenges in London: first, the lack of consistent processes for supporting women leaving prison; and second, the absence of a gender-informed, specialist approach to the available support. To address these issues, we recommend that the

⁷⁸ [London’s Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System](#), 2019-2022

⁷⁹ [London’s Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System](#), 2019-2022

⁸⁰ [London’s Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System](#), 2019-2022

⁸¹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁸² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

⁸³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁸⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

Blueprint Group commission a training programme focused on improving both areas. The Committee views this training as urgent, given the ongoing poor housing outcomes for women leaving prison.

Recommendation 1

By March 2026, the Blueprint Group should commission a training programme for agencies in London that provide housing support for women leaving prison with the aim of standardising best practice across London. This programme should provide structured training for local councils, probation services, and prison services to strengthen a coordinated, multi-agency approach to securing safe and stable accommodation. It must include training to support agencies to adopt a holistic, trauma-informed and intersectional approach, and should be developed through engagement with women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.

Women's Release Practice Briefing

The 2023 Women's Release Practice Briefing - created by the London Prison Mission initiative with the Blueprint Group and MOPAC - was designed to help agencies work together to improve the provision of safe and suitable accommodation for women leaving prison.⁸⁵ It includes ten recommendations aimed at strengthening joint practice, which address many of the challenges we heard about in our investigation. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of agencies, and emphasises the importance of gender-informed and trauma-responsive approaches.⁸⁶

Guests at our meetings were positive about the briefing. Zaiba Qureshi, of Housing for Women, noted that "it's great to have it all set out very clearly as guidance for other agencies" and that it "brings consistency to the piece".⁸⁷ She told us that, "...all ten recommendations almost echo some of the things that we have talked about today".⁸⁸ These recommendations include suggestions related to gender-informed service provision, improving processes for handling prison referrals in local authorities, and overcoming affordable housing shortages to ensure that women-only housing and support services are available for women who have left prison.⁸⁹ This briefing clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved in supporting women leaving prison.

Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez, from Hibiscus, praised the briefing for explicitly recognising the specific experiences of Global Majority migrant women.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ MOPAC, [Women's Prison Release Practice Briefing](#)

⁸⁶ MOPAC, [Women's Prison Release Practice Briefing](#)

⁸⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁸⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

⁸⁹ MOPAC, [Women's Prison Release Practice Briefing](#)

⁹⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

However, we did hear some concerns about the effectiveness of the briefing. John Plummer, Coordinator at London Prisons Mission, told us, “it is hardly working at all at the moment because it has not been really seriously, publicly launched”.⁹¹

At our second meeting, Velvet Dibley, Senior Housing Policy Officer at the GLA, told us that at a recent housing event led by MOPAC, attendees had discussed to what extent the briefing had been circulated to boroughs.⁹² MOPAC had committed to disseminate it further. She told us:

“Everyone around the table is very keen to understand exactly how Lambeth were doing it, and I think that we - MOPAC and the GLA - did take an action to disseminate that further so that that was understood where it could be applicable to other boroughs”.⁹³

While we are pleased that the dissemination of the Women’s Release Practice Briefing is on the Mayor’s agenda, we believe there is more to be done to ensure it has real impact. We urge the Mayor and MOPAC to take further steps to support its effective dissemination and implementation across local authorities. We recommend the Mayor formally launch the briefing at a dedicated event with local councils to raise its profile, as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2

In 2025, the Mayor should hold an event with all councils in London to publicly promote and disseminate the Women’s Release Practice Briefing, and to showcase examples of good practice and encourage London’s councils to implement it. The GLA should monitor the uptake of the briefing across local authorities and evaluate its effectiveness in improving housing support for women leaving prison and returning to London.

Housing available for women leaving prison in London

The accommodation available for women leaving prison is limited.

The Prison Reform Trust said in its 2018 report *Home Truths* that local authorities are experiencing a shortage of affordable housing, and do not see women coming out of prison as a priority.⁹⁴ According to guests at our meeting, where women leaving prison are able to access accommodation, it may not be appropriate.

We were concerned to hear Rachel Ozanne from Women in Prison tell us that “quite often” women leaving prison are placed in hostels with men, where they feel unsafe, face high-risk situations, and are likely to reoffend and return to prison.⁹⁵ Rachel Ozanne also told us that there is an inconsistent approach to women-only accommodation for women prison leavers in London, and that this “really varies across boroughs”.⁹⁶

⁹¹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

⁹² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

⁹³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

⁹⁴ Home truths: [housing for women in the criminal justice system](#), June 2018

⁹⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

⁹⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

A small number of women are placed in Approved Premises, a type of accommodation funded by the Ministry of Justice that offers intensive supervision for high-risk individuals.⁹⁷ Women are assessed as high-risk if probation services determine they pose a potential risk of serious harm to others.⁹⁸ There are only 13 Approved Premises in London, with just one being all-female.⁹⁹ While the exact number of women placed in these premises is unknown, a representative from the London Probation Service told us that this number is likely low.

Community Accommodation Service Tier-3

In July 2021, the Ministry of Justice introduced the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS-3) program, which provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers.¹⁰⁰ This accommodation is intended to be women-only and should provide women with access to a support worker.¹⁰¹ CAS-3 should also help women transition into longer-term housing within the three-month period.¹⁰² William Balakrishnan, from MOPAC, told us that the Mayor successfully lobbied for women-specific accommodation within the CAS-3 programme in London, which we welcome.¹⁰³

Between July 1 2021 and March 31 2024, the Ministry of Justice reported placing 12,205 prison leavers in CAS-3 accommodation nationwide, with 755 (6.2 per cent) of them being women.¹⁰⁴ However, the number of women placed in CAS-3 accommodation in London is not recorded. As part of this report the Committee is calling for the Ministry of Justice to record and publish the London-specific data. Without this information, it is challenging to understand the full picture of what happens to women who have left prison to return to London.

Through our investigation, we heard concerns from our guests about the groups of women who are excluded from CAS-3 accommodation, including:

- Women on short recalls¹⁰⁵
- Women on remand (in custody until their trial begins)
- Women with No Recourse to Public Funds
- Women with severe mental health needs¹⁰⁶

Rachel Ozanne of Women in Prison, expressed her concerns about the exclusion of remanded women, stating:

“The number of remanded women is skyrocketing, and at one point, 70 per cent of women at [HMP] Bronzefield were remanded. This presents numerous challenges

⁹⁸ HM Prison & Probation Service, [Risk of Serious Harm Guidance 2020](#)

⁹⁹ Provided by HMPPS on 16 April 2025

¹⁰⁰ HM Prison & Probation Service, [Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 \(CAS3\)](#), accessed 08/03/25

¹⁰¹ HM Prison & Probation Service, [Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 \(CAS3\)](#), accessed 08/03/25

¹⁰² Ministry of Justice, [Accounting Officer Memorandum – Community Accommodation Services Tier 3 \(CAS3\)](#), National Roll-Out

¹⁰³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

¹⁰⁴ [Offender Accommodation Outcomes – Statistical Summary – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰⁵ A short recall refers to when a person has been released on parole (released into the community with certain conditions they must follow) is sent back to prison for a brief period, usually for a minor breach of their release conditions.

¹⁰⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

because some pathways for women leaving prison, like the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS-3), which provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 days, do not apply to remanded women or women on short recalls”.¹⁰⁷

Sam Julius raised concerns about the 84-day limit for CAS-3 accommodation:

“There is an issue after the 84 nights about where the woman will go, because, as you all know, there is a significant lack of affordable housing”.¹⁰⁸

Rachel Ozanne also highlighted how some local councils fail to offer further housing support after a woman is placed in CAS-3:

“There was one local authority that felt their responsibility was fulfilled because the woman had received 84 days of temporary accommodation”.¹⁰⁹

At our site visit to HMP Bronzefield, we spoke to women detained at the prison. One woman told the Committee about her experience being placed into CAS-3 accommodation with men during a previous release. She had previously been assaulted by men and found it too traumatic to stay in this accommodation. For her own wellbeing, she had to make the decision to leave.¹¹⁰

At the Housing for Women site visit, we heard other problems about CAS-3 accommodation. Staff told us that although women in CAS-3 should receive a weekly visit from a support worker, some are not getting this crucial support.¹¹¹ Staff also raised concerns around the fact that women are placed in studio flats in CAS-3, which might make them feel isolated. They stated that supported housing would be a much better option for women leaving prison, offering consistent support and opportunities for community and socialising.

We were very concerned to hear the issues that women leaving prison face in CAS-3 accommodation in London. These issues include being placed in housing with men, experiencing isolation, and receiving little support from services. Without adequate data from the Ministry of Justice, we cannot determine how many women in London are facing these conditions. We are calling for an immediate review of this programme.

Recommendation 3

The Government should conduct an immediate review of the Community Accommodation Service Tier-3 Accommodation scheme to ensure women are not placed in unsuitable accommodation, such as accommodation with men. Additionally, the Government should record and publish quarterly data on the number of women released from prison and placed in CAS-3 accommodation in London.

Mayoral housing programmes

¹⁰⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

¹⁰⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

¹⁰⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

¹¹⁰ Prison staff highlighted this at the Committee’s site visit to HMP Bronzefield on 31 October 2024

¹¹¹ Housing for Women’s staff highlighted this at our site visit on 13 March 2025

The Mayor does not fund housing specifically for women leaving prison. However, there are housing schemes in London for which some women leaving prison will qualify.¹¹² Referrals for these programmes come from local authorities rather than directly from prisons.¹¹³ Tom Copley, Deputy Mayor of Housing and Residential Development, listed the following programmes:

- **The Domestic Safe Accommodation Homes Programme** funds safe housing and specialist housing support to women who have experienced domestic abuse.¹¹⁴
- **The Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme** funds accommodation for people with a long history of rough sleeping or the most complex needs, and vulnerable young people (aged 18-25) at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping. The focus of this programme is longer-term accommodation.¹¹⁵
- **The Care and Support Specialist Programme** funds specialist and supported housing for older and disabled people.¹¹⁶
- **The Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme** provides move-on accommodation and support to rough sleepers.¹¹⁷
- **The Move on Programme** provides move-on accommodation and support to rough sleepers and people who have experienced domestic abuse.¹¹⁸

The GLA does not track how many women in the criminal justice system access housing through these programmes.¹¹⁹

Our investigation highlights the necessity of women-specific, trauma-informed, and intersectional support for women leaving prison. We suggest the Mayor provides specific support to this group by recognising these needs and providing targeted housing solutions for them.

While we welcome the Mayor's efforts to provide supported and specialised housing in London, we are concerned the Mayor does not fund any programmes that specifically address the complex needs of this group.

We therefore welcomed the information shared by Deputy Mayor Tom Copley at our meeting, who spoke about the Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan of Action, which aims to support the Mayor's ambition to end rough sleeping in London by 2030. He highlighted as part of this plan, the GLA is exploring the idea of a London-wide housing pathway for women leaving prison.¹²⁰

"[A London-wide housing pathway for women leaving prison] is something that we [...] are exploring as part of our work on the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action, and more broadly in the engagement that we do with London Councils and the Government on homelessness more broadly. It is quite clear at the moment that the system is not working because of just the perverse things that we heard in prison about how, for example, the system is clearly encouraging women to miss their Probation appointments

¹¹² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

¹¹³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

¹¹⁴ GLA, [Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation and Support – Continuation and Contractual Awards](#), 2023–24

¹¹⁵ GLA, [Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme](#), December 2022

¹¹⁶ GLA, [The Mayor's Care and Support Specialist Housing Fund](#), November 2023

¹¹⁷ GLA, [Funding for supported and specialist housing](#), accessed 26 March 2025

¹¹⁸ GLA, [Funding for supported and specialist housing](#), accessed 26 March 2025

¹¹⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

¹²⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Panel 2](#), 12 November 2024

so they can go back in because they are ending up homeless. Clearly there is something that is not working at the moment.”

At the end of December 2024, the Committee responded to the Mayor’s consultation on the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action and included the following recommendation:

“The Committee recommends that the Mayor prioritize women leaving prison in the rough sleeping Plan of Action. He should collaborate with London Councils to standardize boroughs’ housing support and ensure a pan-London commitment to prioritising housing for women leaving prison”.¹²¹

The Committee requests that the Mayor provides an update on this recommendation to ensure women leaving prison are reflected in the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action. We understand this is due to be published shortly.

Recommendation 4

The upcoming Rough Sleeping Action Plan should specifically address how it supports women leaving prison.

Supported housing for women leaving prison in London



The Housing Committee at Housing for Women’s Reconnect+ programme, 13 March 2025

¹²¹ Rough Sleeping Plan of Action Roundtable Minutes, 29 October 2024

The Committee visited Housing for Women's Reconnect Plus Programme in south-east London, and spoke to the women there. Housing for Women – a London-based housing association and charity – is the only housing association in London that has a programme specially for women who have left prison.

The programme was launched in June 2021. It offers ten bed spaces across two properties. There are three support workers that provide trauma-informed, holistic support to women in the programme.¹²² Staff assist women in areas such as:

- building healthy relationships
- understanding and recovering from domestic abuse and exploitation
- improving emotional well-being, self-esteem and confidence
- staff also support mothers who have lost custody of their children.¹²³

Housing for Women also helps women to find homes in the private rented sector, once they are ready. There is no cut off point for women living at Reconnect+. While Housing for Women assume women will stay around 6 months, but some have stayed for longer.¹²⁴ Zaiba Qureshi, speaking about the programme, highlighted:

“Our specialist support providers deliver one-on-one support through psychologically informed training. We have proper supported housing models, we have got on-site skilled staff. It is not just a case of staff visiting once or twice a week; people are there all the time. They are delivering things like group work, which might be around budgeting or relearning life skills like cooking and looking after a household. The women that have come to us have had multiple disadvantages, poverty, debt, mental health, physical or mental health issues, and drug and alcohol dependency in some cases. In terms of the outcomes, half of the women have been successfully rehoused. Our recall rate [number of women sent back to prison] is really low”.¹²⁵

Currently, Housing for Women receives funding from the Ministry of Justice, which is used to support its round-the-clock services. This funding was set to expire in April 2025.¹²⁶ At the visit we were pleased to hear from staff that this funding has been extended.¹²⁷

The Committee saw first-hand how valuable supported housing is for women leaving prison. We would like to see more of this specialist provision in London. We recommend that the Mayor collaborate with local councils and housing associations to provide supported housing specifically for women leaving prison. John Plummer, Co-ordinator at the London Prisons Mission, stated that around 50 women per month (600 per year) are released from prison into London.¹²⁸ This is an average of 18 women per borough. The Committee recognises that demand may be higher in some boroughs than others, and that there needs to be flexibility for boroughs to meet their own demand. We have built this flexibility into our recommendation.

¹²² Housing for Women's staff highlighted this at our site visit on 13 March 2025

¹²³ Reconnect+ Note for GLA visit March 2025

¹²⁴ Housing for Women's staff highlighted this at our site visit on 13 March 2025

¹²⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

¹²⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6](#), 21 January 2025

¹²⁷ Housing for Women's staff highlighted this at our site visit on 13 March 2025

¹²⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Panel 1](#), 12 November 2024

We look forward to working with the GLA to implement this recommendation, along with others outlined in this report. Access to good quality, safe, secure housing with the right level of support is the first step to getting things right for women leaving prison in London.

Recommendation 5

Councils and housing associations in London should ringfence a proportion of their supported housing units for women released from prison. The Mayor should also engage with Government to secure revenue funding to expand the amount of supported housing for women leaving prison.

Committee Activity

This investigation sought 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.

This investigation is inclusive of trans women and non-binary people.

Evidence collated

- Committee meeting 1:
 - Panel 1 - Policy experts, programme leads and campaigners
 - **John Plummer**, Coordinator at London Prisons Mission
 - **Sam Julius**, Head of Influence and Comms at Clinks
 - **Natasha Clough**, Female lead for CAS-2 accommodation at Nacro
 - **Rachel Rozanne**, Director of Programmes and Partnerships at Women in Prison
 - Panel 2 - GLA and MOPAC
 - **Tom Copley**, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development
 - **Velvet Dibley**, Senior Housing Policy Officer
 - **Will Balakrishnan**, Director Commissioning and Partnership at MOPAC
- Committee meeting 2 - a charity, local authority and housing association
 - **Elizabeth Jiménez Yáñez**, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Hibiscus
 - **Zaiba Qureshi**, Chief Executive Officer at Housing for Women
 - **Rose Parker**, Head of Commissioning for Safer Communities at the London Borough of Lambeth
- Visits:
 - **HMP Bronzefield** on 12 November 2024
 - **Housing for Women's Reconnect Programme**, 13 March 2025

Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email assembly.translations@london.gov.uk

Chinese

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Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

Greek

Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.

Turkish

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Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਅਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লিখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Urdu

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Arabic

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Gujarati

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