

Press release

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Homelessness amongst young prisoners needs to be urgently tackled according to new research by the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform today, (20th December) published a new report *The Key to the Future? The housing needs of young adults in prison*, which called on the Government to urgently review housing legislation in order to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping amongst young people who have been in prison.

The report argued that local authorities should have a statutory duty to house homeless young people when they are released from prison. It highlighted the importance of secure and stable housing to the successful resettlement of young men who have been in prison and the importance of housing in reducing reoffending.

The report found that:

- 75 per cent of young men in prison have left home and the average age that they left was 15 years old.
- The young men said that they were more likely to get involved in offending if their housing needs were not met.
- One in five of the young men in prison reported that they were homeless.
- A quarter believed that housing was crucial to their successful resettlement and would help them to live crime-free lives.

One young man who spoke to the Howard League for Penal Reform did not know where he would be staying on his first night out of prison. He said:

“I’m getting right stressed now. I’m sick of it, I came in without a home and now five months later I’m leaving without one too. The only advice I’ve been given is to go to the HPU [Homeless Person’s Unit] but I knew to do that anyway, I’ve been through the whole system in the past, I know what to do, it don’t help though. I need to know where I’m going to be staying, I can’t sleep thinking about it”.

(Richard, age 20)

The report also called for:

- Over 18 year olds to be entitled to the same housing benefit rate as older adults.
- Training for prison and probation officers to include housing related issues so that they are equipped to provide basic housing advice and know who will be able to provide more specialist help if it is needed.

Author of the report Finola Farrant, said:

“When young people themselves say that having safe and secure housing will help stop them committing further offences the Government should sit up and take notice.

Many young people will be released from prison this Christmas and will spend the coming weeks homeless. Yet having appropriate accommodation, including support to maintain it, could make all the difference between someone re-offending or not”.

Notes to the editor:

- The Howard League for Penal Reform has spent two years researching the resettlement needs of young men (18-21 year olds) who have been in prison.
- 86 young men have taken part in the research. Their average age was 19 years old. 60 per cent had been in prison previously. A quarter had been in care. 43 per cent reported mental health problems.
- In 2004 there was over 19,000 receptions of young adults into prison. At any one time there are approximately 9,000 18-21 year olds in prison.

- Research briefing 1 *A Sobering Thought*, which examined the role of alcohol in offending was published in December 2004.
- Research briefing 2 *Young, Neglected and Back*, which examined the specific needs of young adults involved in the criminal justice system was published in August 2005.

Further information

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