

Preventing Homelessness and Reducing Reoffending – Insights from service users of the Supporting Prisoners; Advice Network, Scotland

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Foreword

It is well documented and widely accepted that spending time in prison increases an individual's chances of becoming homeless. Prisoners who have problems securing accommodation on their release are significantly more likely to reoffend than those individuals who do not face these challenges.

This assertion is borne out through official statistics which show that in 2014/15, 6% of statutory homeless applications in Scotland came from people leaving prison¹, a significant over representation against national demographics, and that 30% of those released from prison do not know where they are going to live on their liberation². In addition, two thirds of those who were homeless after their release from prison go on to reoffend³ and research has shown a reduction in recidivism of as much as 20% for those who had stable accommodation on their release compared to those who do not⁴.

These stark figures are set against a current prison population of 7,500 in Scotland, but an annual liberation rate of nearly 20,000, due to the fact that a large proportion of prisoners are in custody for short periods of time. Of those that are liberated, one third have served less than 12 months and 44% are released from remand. Of the 19,792 prisoners liberated in 2011-12, 8,787 had been on remand and 6,548 were sentenced to less than a year.⁵ Due to the short period in custody there is less time to engage with support agencies and evidence has shown that these groups are even more prone to homelessness.⁶

The fact that there are up to 300% more liberations in Scotland annually than there are prisoners in custody, underlines the central importance of ensuring that there is a consistent approach to supporting prisoners in accessing suitable housing on their release.

Shelter Scotland has been providing services in prisons for over 15 years and contribute to a wider patchwork of provision across the country at present. Despite significant national investment in Through the Gate services provided by statutory, charitable and private sector providers, it is a recognised challenge that services at the front end are patchy and inconsistent across Scotland.

Over the last two decades, there has been significant focus on the development of services for people as they leave prison to help address some of the root causes that link reoffending and homelessness. In recent years, public policy work and practice development has moved towards a focus on the themes of co-production and early prevention to address the root causes of reoffending and homelessness, driven principally by the need to reduce national expenditure and deliver better value and outcomes in this area.

This approach has been supported by a welcome emphasis and commitment from the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to the provision of both internal and external rehabilitative support through their ThroughCare Services. This, combined with ambitious Homelessness legislation in Scotland which remains the most progressive in Europe, offers an environment and an expectation for the link between homelessness and reoffending to become less of an issue.

We need to better understand why, despite investment and undoubted commitment and efforts in this field, the link between reoffending and homelessness in Scotland remains alarmingly evident.

Understanding lived experience is the foundation stone of any genuine approach to the delivery of co-produced services and Shelter Scotland has sought the views of people who have been in prison to directly inform this report and our recommendations.

As a practitioner in this area, Shelter Scotland has sought the experiences of those with whom we have worked directly through the Supporting Prisoners; Advice Network (SPAN) Scotland – a joint initiative between Shelter Scotland, Sacro and Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau focused on tackling homelessness among ex-offenders and reducing reoffending.

The results of the research are presented in this report structured around the key themes that emerged from these interviews. This direct insight, combined with our existing research and practice experience are used to develop a series of recommendations for future policy and practice work to improve the housing outcomes for people on release from prison.

Graeme Brown
Director of Shelter Scotland

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1. Scottish Government, Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2014/15 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>
 2. Niven S and Stewart D (2005) Resettlement outcomes on release from prison, Home Office Findings 248 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110314171826/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/r248.pdf>
 3. Cited Reid Howie, 2004
 4. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners
 5. Scottish Government's latest available statistics: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/6972/13>
 6. Loucks, N (2007) Housing Needs of offenders and ex-offenders, Glasgow: The Robertson Trust. Page 4, Section 1

1. Introduction

The strong, complicated and reciprocal links between offending and homelessness are well known and evidenced. Spending time in prison increases the risk of homelessness as many people lose their tenancy whilst they are in prison, or find themselves unwelcome to return to their previous household on release.⁷

There are limited housing options for people who have become homeless whilst in prison, with long waiting lists and limited choices in the social rented sector, and significant financial and attitudinal barriers to the private rented market.⁸ Many prison leavers who have applied as homeless to their local authority will spend considerable periods in temporary accommodation, such as hostels.⁹ At the most extreme end, some people leave prison and have no choice but to sleep rough.¹⁰ A lack of stable accommodation increases the likelihood of reoffending.¹¹ A self-perpetuating negative cycle of moving between homelessness and prison can develop.¹²

The risk of homelessness for people leaving prison was recognised in the 2002 Homelessness Task Force recommendations, which called for those responsible for prisoners to develop high quality homelessness and housing advice services.¹³ They are also recognised as a group at high risk by the Prevention of Homelessness Guidance, which points to processes and staff knowledge that should be in place to respond appropriately to prison leavers.¹⁴ Since publishing the Guidance in 2009, there has been a strong focus at a Scottish Government level on homelessness prevention, which is integral to the 'housing options' approach that local authorities are required to adopt.

Likewise, from the justice perspective the issue of homelessness has been long identified as a contributing factor to reoffending. For example, the (then) Scottish Executive's National Strategy for Management of Offenders (2006) identified 'the ability to access and sustain suitable accommodation' as one of the nine offender outcomes.¹⁵

The Christie Commission further highlighted the importance of prevention and the importance of investing in prevention activities across public services in order not only to save personal crises but also as an effective way to save public money.¹⁶

Despite the above, there remains a substantial number of people every year that leave prison in Scotland with nowhere to call home.

2,108 homeless applications came from people leaving prison in 2014/15,¹⁷ although this figure is unlikely to represent the full scale of the problem, particularly when this figure is reviewed against Scottish Government statistics showing that nearly 20,000 people are liberated from prison each year. Research shows that 30% of people liberated do not have a home to go to¹⁸ so of the 20,000 people liberated, up to 6,000 people without a home might provide a truer representation. It is clear that there is still much that could be done to fully adopt a preventative approach to tackling homelessness and reoffending.

In Scotland there has recently been a renewed interest in understanding and addressing the issue of housing and homelessness for prison leavers. For example:

- Audit Scotland's report on Reducing Reoffending in Scotland (2012) highlighted that access to housing is a particular issue for people leaving prison, that many ex-offenders experienced homelessness and that housing support for offenders is not consistent across Scotland

7. 49% of prisoners surveyed said that they had lost their tenancy/accommodation when they went into prison. Scottish Prison Service (2013) Prisoner Survey 2013, Edinburgh: SPS

8. E.g. Homeless Link (2011) Better Together: Preventing Reoffending and Homelessness

9. E.g. McHardy, Fiona (2010) Out of Jail But Still Not Free: Experiences of temporary accommodation on leaving prison, EPIC/ The Poverty Alliance

10. In Glasgow in 1999, 44% of people living in hostels or sleeping rough had been in prison at least once. Homelessness Task Force (2002) Homelessness: An Action Plan for the Prevention and Effective Response. Report from the Homelessness Task Force to Scottish Ministers, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

11. The Social Exclusion Unit found a reduction in recidivism of 20% for those who had stable accommodation compared to those who didn't. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners

12. The 'Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction' survey found that 11% respondents who had served a previous sentence were sleeping rough prior to custody, compared to 3% who had not been in prison before. Williams K, Poyser J, and Hopkins K (2012) Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey, Ministry of Justice

13. Homelessness Task Force (2002) Homelessness: An Action Plan for the Prevention and Effective Response. Report from the Homelessness Task Force to Scottish Ministers, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

14. Scottish Government and COSLA (2009) Prevention of Homelessness Guidance

15. Scottish Executive (2006) National Strategy for the Management of Offenders

16. Christie (2011) Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services

17. Scottish Government, Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland: 2014/15 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

18. Niven S and Stewart D (2005) Resettlement outcomes on release from prison, Home Office Findings 248 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110314171826/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/r248.pdf>

- The Ministerial Working Group on the Re-Integration of Offenders established and selected housing as its first theme, subsequently commissioning further research into the issue (October 2013)
- ‘Improving Housing Options for Offenders’ pilot as part of the Reducing Reoffending II programme (January 2014)
- The appointment by Scottish Prisons Service of a Policy Manager for housing and welfare (2014)
- The upcoming Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill that will reshape services for prisoners’ integration into the community and has identified housing as one of the crucial factors for successful rehabilitation.

In addition, the current Scottish Prison Service (SPS) mission focuses on “providing services that help to transform the lives of people in our care so they can fulfil their potential and become responsible citizens”.¹⁹ The SPS’ strategic commitment to develop a person-centred approach, working together with partners to support re-integration on their release, ties well with their commitment to the prevention of reoffending by taking steps to focus on the full journey through and out of custody and back into the community.

Shelter Scotland has had a dedicated service working with prisoners to prevent homelessness since 1999. Currently, we deliver the Supporting Prisoners; Advice Network (SPAN) Scotland project in partnership with Sacro and Inverness Citizens Advice Bureau, funded

by the Big Lottery. Since its inception in 2013, SPAN has worked with over 1,600 people across 3 prisons; HMP Perth, Grampian and Inverness. The SPAN project focuses on prevention of homelessness by assisting people in custody to maintain their current home where possible as well as working with people to ensure that they have a home when they leave prison.

SPAN has been committed to working with prisoners to meaningfully support the move from prison into the community. The service’s most significant learnings and developments have resulted from discussions with those people who have used the service, including the development of Peer Learning.

This report provides an opportunity for the stories and opinions of people who have been in prison to be heard, using their own words. It aims to bring together practitioner and service user opinion, coupled with examples showcasing some of the services that have evolved as a result of the views and experiences of people in prison.

This report concludes by making a range of recommendations that, if implemented, Shelter Scotland believes would contribute to improving the housing outcomes for people on release from prison. The recommendations are divided between strategic issues and the promotion of good practice on the ground. To see real change effected in the reduction of reoffending it is crucial that both strategic frameworks and practical implementation prioritise the prevention of homelessness for prisoners.

19. E.g. Reid Howie (2004) *The Provision of Housing Advice to Prisoners in Scotland: An evaluation of the projects funded by the Rough Sleepers Initiative*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research and Loucks, N (2007) *Housing Needs of Offenders and Ex-Offenders*, Glasgow: The Robertson Trust

2. Methodology

In April 2015 we conducted interviews with 16 people that the SPAN project has worked with.

Using a semi-structured interview technique, we asked questions about where they had been living, what had happened to their housing whilst they were in prison and what was going to happen/ had happened when they were liberated. We also asked about the work that SPAN had done with them and what would have happened if that help hadn't been available. A full list of the questions can be found in Appendix A. Notes were taken during each interview to capture the main points that were being expressed and where possible (9 out of 16), interviews were also recorded.²⁰

Two researchers independently reviewed all available notes and audio recordings and a thematic analysis of the interviews is presented in section 4 of this report.

In answer to both the direct question about how SPAN had worked with the interviewees and also throughout responses to other questions, information was collected about the work that SPAN has undertaken to prevent homelessness. This information is presented in section 5.

Gender	Male	13
	Female	3
Previous convictions	Yes	9
	No	2

Throughout the report, where appropriate, evidence from a literature review of existing research and Shelter Scotland's own research has been drawn upon to further inform this report.

Interviewees

Interviewees had been approached by SPAN staff to participate in the research with a view to the sample being representative of the range of the experiences and challenges that their wider group of service users face. This included two relatives of people who were in prison, as this is a significant part of SPAN's work.

Interviewees were marked (A) to (P) and throughout this report, when evidence has been drawn or quoted from an interview it has been referenced using this key to protect the anonymity of interviewees.

	Not known / not applicable	3/2
Previous tenancy	Housing association tenancy	5
	Local authority tenancy	8
	Private rented sector tenancy	1
	Not applicable	2
Background of homelessness	Yes	7
	No/ not applicable	3/2
	Not known	4
Interviewed	In custody	11
	Post-liberation	3
	No time spent in custody	2

20. McHardy, F (2010) Out of jail but still not free: Experiences of temporary accommodation on leaving prison. Glasgow: EPIC/ The Poverty Alliance

3. Themes

Two researchers independently reviewed all available notes and audio recordings from the interviews and each identified the themes they assessed as most prominent. There was a high level of correlation in the thematic analysis and through discussion based on the evidence; eight themes were selected as encompassing the most important issues to the interviewees.

Theme 1: Importance of house as home

Housing problems and solutions were not just about the practical concerns of retaining accommodation. A theme that clearly came through in the interviews was the idea of a house as a 'home'. The aspects of housing as a 'home' raised in the research can be grouped into three categories.

Home as a source of pride and investment

- “ *when I thought I was gonna lose the hoose I was depressed – I made it nice, cleaned it and that...I know I've got a chance now* ” (N)
- “ *I've had my wee hoose and that for about 15 year and I kinda, it's taken us ages and ages to get it done up and I'm kinda getting it done up the way I want to get it done up, making it my own home* ” (A)
- “ *I had done the flat up smart and didn't want to lose it* ” (L)
- “ *having a foundation has changed me, it's my own thing to have responsibility for* ” (N)

Having support close by, and knowing the neighbours

- “ *It's just my house, I've been there for so long now I'm just used to being there. It's only a bedsit but it's my wee bedsit eh so...and it's close to my mum and everything* ” (G)
- “ *We all know everybody and it's a kinda safe place and that for everybody* ” (A)

- “ *I've got it set up the way I want it to be an that...and my neighbours doesnae bother us, I speak to them in passing, there's nae noise on the landing, it's a good place* ” (B)
- “ *having a foundation has changed me, it's my own thing to have responsibility for* ” (N)

The home as safe and enabling

- “ *I don't really know what it would mean if I did lose my house, I'd probably stay back at my mum's house and I'm 34 years of age and I kinda want to have a kid and things* ” (A)
- “ *That's my ain sanctuary, I can dae what I want in my house, watch what I want, go to my bed, come and go as I please* ” (B)
- “ *I had done the flat up smart and didn't want to lose it* ” (L)
- “ *[my flat] gives me a base...don't want to go through the homeless route again. I'm 36 now and too old to be bouncing around* ” (P)

One interviewee who had been placed in temporary accommodation for over 2 months commented “*it wouldn't be so bad if I could even paint the living room ken, just so dull...I keep getting told to move on, move on...It's over a year and a half since I've been in a home...I want somewhere I can call mine*”. (H)

The importance of having a home, as described above, was also linked to previous experience, where people had spent long periods in temporary accommodation or on waiting lists and the fear that this would happen again. One interviewee who had previously been on waiting lists for eight years commented: “*took us ages to get it ken. Then I almost lost it ken, because of this. It's just pure stupidity*.” (C)

- “ *it's took me ages to get my house and to go back into a homeless again with nae nothing...and to need to start off again with the clothes that are on your back when you're coming out the jail...*” (D)

This concern around the alternative and losing the home was linked to a fear of hostels, which is analysed as a separate theme later in this document.

Theme 2: Belongings

Connected to the theme of home, some of the interviewees also talked about the importance of their belongings. Several talked about their fear that they would lose their possessions whilst in custody if their tenancy was ended. This echoes findings from larger, broader research into the experience of prisoners that also found that loss of possessions was a common experience and barrier to rehabilitation for prisoners.²¹

“If she [girlfriend] hadn't been there they would probably have changed the locks and put my stuff in storage” (A)

“I would have lost my house and everything in it ... all my valuables and things like that ... the important things ... maybe no to anybody else ... photos of my bairns” (D)

“My flat's lovely... you don't know if all your stuff is gonna be thrown out on the street” (O)

One interviewee was concerned not about his own, but his mum's possessions, as she passed away while he was in custody and the local authority were asking him to sign over his rights to succession (F). The emotional distress caused to him by thinking about his mum's possessions being discarded was significant. This issue has been identified and actioned upon by SPAN through their work, including establishing a relationship with a local church in the area who agreed to store belongings at no cost.

Theme 3: Importance of Friends and Family

8 of 14 people interviewed who were or had been in custody mentioned the positive support and practical assistance they received from those on the “outside”. This is further evidenced by the fact that in 2014, 14% of all SPAN cases involved engagement with the families and friends of those in custody to help prevent homelessness on their release. This theme was very important for the people we interviewed both in terms of knowing that there was someone looking out for them, and in the impact that their actions had in preventing eviction. In the interviews this support fell into four categories:

Occupying the property

One of the tools used by SPAN to prevent the end of a tenancy is to negotiate and organise for somebody else to occupy the property for the period that the service user is in prison. For two of the interviewees a ‘qualifying occupier’ had been found and accepted

by the landlord. This person is usually a partner or friend. There needs to be trust in this situation as a level of responsibility remains with the original tenant. Sub-letting or creating a joint tenancy can also be options, and one of the interviewees was exploring whether either of these could be possible in his case (A). Indeed, interviewee A who had been in and out of prison for years expressed that he was quite used to relying on friends and family to take on his tenancy for the times he has been in custody.

Paying towards rent arrears

In three cases (I, K, P), interviewees reported that their mothers were paying a weekly amount towards rent arrears as a ‘good will gesture’. This had been negotiated and organised by SPAN staff with landlords in order to prevent eviction. In another case, there was an arrangement for financial help on release, “When I get out my mum and dad are going to help [pay back rent arrears], without them I'd be stuck” (O).

Practical help

Through the interviews we learnt of several ways in which family had supported people who were in prison in practical ways regarding their home. The mum that we interviewed mentioned that she had been checking her son's flat every day and was looking after the gas and electric accounts to reduce the risk of jeopardising the tenancy when the qualifying occupier moved in (I). In another case, the interviewee's mum had been going into the house to check for post and had found a letter from the landlord threatening eviction, which had spurred the daughter to get in touch with SPAN (K). Another interviewee mentioned that his brother was looking after his belongings whilst he was in prison (M).

Desire to remain living near family support

Some of the interviewees mentioned how important it was for them to live close to family support when they got out of prison. This correlates with research that has shown that finding accommodation close to positive social networks can reduce reoffending behaviour²² and is also key to preventing recurring homelessness.²³ One of the interviewees said that they would want to move to a smaller property but “it's got to be the right move – in the area near my family” (F).

Conversely, three people discussed the impact of not having support on the outside from family or friends. Interviewee P spoke strongly from his experience of having been in custody several times about people without a supportive network to go to when they leave prison, “People who haven't got a house and are isolated, when they're going to leave, they say, like,

21. Tabner, K (2013) Developing positive social networks: Research into the application and effects of a networks approach to homelessness. Edinburgh, Rock Trust
22. Williams et al (2012) Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey, Ministry of Justice Research Summary 3/12, London: Ministry of Justice
23. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Offending by ex-prisoners, London: Social Exclusion Unit

'I'll do a crime and be back next week'. In this day and age it shouldn't be like that" (P). The impact of isolation is a contributory factor in reoffending as prison can offer familiarity and a sense of community. Ignoring this basic human need is to ignore a causal link between housing and reoffending.

Theme 4: The right home helps prevent reoffending

For many of those interviewed (13 out of 16), a home was considered to be essential as a foundation to help reduce the likelihood of reoffending. This reflects the findings of previous research that has shown prisoners to have concerns about reoffending in relation to housing prospects. For example, one large scale longitudinal study that found that 60% of prisoners believed that having a place to live would help them to stop offending.²⁴

Home as a source of pride

There were two strands to this highlighted in the interviews. The first centred on the home as a source of pride that could motivate individuals to change their behaviour. Home was seen as something to work towards, to set down foundations be near family members, and take on other tasks such as volunteering, all of which it was felt that would help them not reoffend.

"it would really help if I could keep my house an' that and I do really think it'd keep me on the straight and narrow..." (A)

"I would've been back in here again...Coz when I had no furniture and no electric I just felt lost out there eh. And if I get my furniture and my electric on I'm gonna brighten up my ideas. I wanna get some voluntary work or something" (E)

"he's been trying because he was proud of his house and his job...Knowing about the house keeps him going – ...when he thought he was going to be losing his house he was self-harming" (I)

"Having a foundation has changed me, it's my own thing to have responsibility ...I know I've got a chance now...keeping my house has made me want to change" (N)

Unsuitable Accommodation

The second strand that emerged was the flip side of the above – that is, a belief that if they did not have a home, they may end up in unsuitable accommodation within an environment which led to reoffending. Generally, this relates to a fear of hostels and the negative impact on offending that interviewees feared hostels would have. (See theme 5)

Two interviewees who were currently on the housing waiting list highlighted the importance of the location of accommodation, with one saying they had told the council they didn't want to be put in an area with drug users: *"feart in case something happens and I get put back inside" (H)*. Another interviewee had requested to move area for this same reason: *"I'd just end up back in here all the time...because of people in the area I go about with" (C)*. These concerns are well-founded: research has shown that relationships with anti-social associates has been described as 'one of the most potent predictors of reoffending'.²⁶

One interviewee commented that he had seen many people who did not have a home to be released to reoffend for the purpose of returning to the prison, *"When they're going to leave, they say, like, 'I'll do a crime and I'll be back next week'" (P)*. Although none of the interview cohort expressed this as their own intention, other research has also found that some prison leavers feel driven to reoffend in order to return to the secure 'accommodation' of prison.²⁷ This clearly demonstrates that releasing a prisoner without them having a secure home to go to runs counter to the purposes of prison rehabilitation, and the Scottish Prison Service's mission to reduce reoffending by transforming the lives of people in their care.²⁸

Theme 5: Fear of Hostels

Of the 14 interviews with people who had experienced custody, 9 mentioned having spent time previously in a hostel.²⁹ Of the 9 interviews that mentioned spending time in hostels, 7 talked about not wanting to return to a hostel. One other, whom it was not clear from the interview whether they had been in a hostel previously, was also adamant that they would not want to spend time in one. This concern has been evidenced in other, larger scale, pieces of research.³⁰ The Homelessness Task Force noted in 2002³¹ that many can get caught in a cycle of prison – hostel – prison, and this was a pattern that had been experienced by some of

24. Andrews, D and Bonta, J (2003) *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (3rd edition). Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing

25. Loucks, N (2007) *Housing Needs of Offenders and Ex-Offenders*, Glasgow: The Robertson Trust

26. Scottish Prison Service Corporate Plan 2014-2017: *Unlocking potential – transforming lives*, Edinburgh: SPS

27. This trend of offenders leaving prison and going into hostels is demonstrated by the fact that 30% of all SPAN service users supported in 2014 moved into temporary accommodation or a hostel on release – See Appendix B for a full breakdown of SPAN service user data from 2014

28. For example, Carlisle, J (1996) *The housing needs of ex-prisoners*, Housing Research 178, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

29. Homelessness Task Force (2002) *Homelessness: An Action plan for prevention and effective response*. Edinburgh, Scottish Executive

30. Sapouna et al (2011) *What works to reduce reoffending: A summary of the evidence*, Edinburgh: Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government

31. E.g. James et al. (2004) *Just Surviving: The housing and support needs of people on the fringes of homelessness and/ or the criminal justice system in West Yorkshire*. Leeds: Leeds Supporting People Team

the interviewees. Research for the Scottish Government also reports increasing consensus that rehousing prison leavers in mainstream rather than hostel accommodation will reduce reoffending.³²

Several interviewees gave specific reasons for wanting to avoid time in a hostel. Across all reasoning, it can be seen from the quotes below that most often the root of the concern was being placed in circumstances that could lead to reoffending. The experiences and opinions expressed demonstrate that for prisoners to be accommodated in hostels post-release runs contrary to the Scottish Government's prevention agenda, which has been promoted in both the spheres of homelessness and community justice. Indeed, if the fears about hostels expressed by the interviewees were realized, this practice could be seen as a key contributing factor to reoffending behaviour.

Alcohol/Drugs

For several interviewees, the thought of going into a hostel brought on fears of a drug or alcohol related relapse.

“ *Before I got my hoose I refused to go into a homeless hostel, because I'm stable on methadone and I didn't want to go back the way... I've been in there before and you've got people chapping on your door like you got this, you got that, you got any drugs, nut* ” (B)

“ *[Without SPAN] I'd have went back to hostels, got drinking, been back in [prison] again quick* ” (M)

“ *They will find you somewhere [through the homeless route] but it's maybe not suitable for you – like a hostel, you'll relapse into drugs n' that then go back to prison. It's costing the country money too* ” (P)

Loss of freedom

The loss of freedom associated with being in a hostel, in comparison to other accommodation types, was brought up in discussions.

“ *In a house I can come and go as please and do what I want [in contrast to hostel]* ” (B)

“ *It took me ages to get a home and I wouldn't want to go back to having nothing in homeless places* ” (D)

Expense

In some cases, a concern over the cost of hostels and how a service user would finance this was raised.

“ *I would have had to steal to pay for homeless hostels* ” (D)

“ *It's hard to work and be in a hostel and get yourself straight because the hostels are so expensive* ” (M)

Association with people who are a bad influence

For other interviewees, not wanting to go into a hostel was attributed to other residents and interviewees concerns about their own actions if they came into contact with them.

“ *I didnae wanna go to the hostels coz that'd be bad, it's like a prison really – it's hard to explain – it's like the people that are in there – some people are different – that's the last place I'd want to go* ” (F)

“ *The homeless unit and the jail, they're kinda like the same place... I would have ended up in the homeless unit, seeing someone I don't like – getting into trouble* ” (G)

One interviewee also spoke about his experience in a B&B as restrictive, although preferable to a hostel. Interviewee H was in a B&B for 5 ½ months, which he found depressing. The only cooking facility was a microwave, there were no washing facilities: “*I couldn't even really buy milk as it would go off by the end of the day.*” (H)

Theme 6: Stress and Depression

13 out of 16 interviewees explicitly talked about experiencing stress or depression in relation to their housing situation whilst they were in prison. The other three interviewees implied similar feelings through their tone of voice and the way that they spoke about housing, but didn't name their feelings during the interviews.

Although it is possible to assume that those who were stressed or depressed about housing would be more likely to access SPAN, one of the interviewees commented that in his experience of being in the prison halls, “*About 90% of people in here would say that housing is the thing that is most on their mind*” (P), which could suggest that housing is a very common cause of stress among the prison population.

The cause of the worry and depression discussed could be split into three main categories:

Fear of losing home

At the root of any anxiety interviewees had about not knowing what was going to happen was the fear of losing their home, as well as a fear of becoming homeless or staying in a homeless hostel.

“ *The arrears started building up when I went into jail – I was worrying, worrying, worrying...* ” (G)

“ *He has some emotional, mental difficulties...when he thought he was going to be losing his house he was self-harming.*” (I)

32. This issue has also been recently highlighted by Anderson et al (2014) Evaluation of the Community Reintegration Project, Social Research, Crime and Justice Research Findings 50/2014. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Not knowing what is going to happen

Many of the interviewees referred to a strong sense of not knowing about the systems and rules that decide what happens to them. This uncertainty was a significant cause of stress for some of the people we spoke to:

“ I was wary of what was going to happen ... I didn't know if I could keep it ... I'm worried and just keep thinking about it ” (E)

“ The house was the main worry. I was panicking because I didn't know what would happen about the Housing Benefit ” (O)

“ It was a worry off my mind... I've seen so many lassies lost their flats ” (K)

“ When I first came in I was panicky, agitated and worried before I knew what was happening with the house ” (L)

This last statement from interviewee L highlights that the stress of not knowing what is going to happen to your home can not only effect mental health but that this, in turn, can impact prisoners' behaviour.

Agitated prisoners will absorb more prison staff time and resources, as well as potentially negatively impact the behaviour of other prisoners around them.

Waiting

Four prisoners spoke about the time between going into prison and feeling reassured because SPAN was proactively working with them.

“ The time in between getting the letters and talking to Pam was difficult – I'd almost given up ” (G)

“ It was 3 ½ months before I spoke to Becky – that was a long time to feel worried ” (K)

“ SPAN was a great help, a piece of mind – but I had to wait a month to see her ” (O)

“ Sometimes by the time you get seen your house is gone ” (P)

Based on the stress that they had experienced whilst waiting, the clear message from several interviews was that advice and support would be welcomed as soon as possible once entering the prison.

The majority of responses to Question 4, 'what else would have helped?' were suggestions about how advice could be accessed more quickly. This reflects much of the literature that exists around this topic, which acknowledges that the assessment of housing need should start as soon as possible in order to enable a tenancy to be maintained or planning for resettlement.³³

However, one prisoner (N) shared a helpful insight into his heightened emotional state when entering the prison and suggested that questions about housing at the core screening can be too soon after being committed to be helpful or incur an accurate response. Core screening is an assessment meeting which takes place within the first 72 hours designed to identify the immediate needs of all prisoners across a range of areas.³⁴

“ They shouldn't ask you those [core screen] questions straight away – your head's all messed up – stressed away – You've been in the court cells, greetin', punching the walls. It's a couple of weeks until you can think straight. ” (N)

Theme 7: Lack of knowledge

One of the most frequently used phrases during the interviews was “I didn't know”. When people used this phrase they were often talking about issues such as housing benefit rules, housing rights (e.g. social housing transfers, succession) and the homelessness application process.

“ I'm not clever with things like that, I'm just pure stupid about things like that – it's hard, ken? ” (C)

“ Rent arrears were going up and up and I didnae know what to do about that ” (D)

“ The amount of people in the halls that d'nae ken where they are wi' their hoose... ” (F)

“ It's actually quite fine for me to know that there's somebody on the end of the phone that I can actually speak to that can help me through things because I havenae a clue ” (I)

Many of the interviewees had been told about the help that the SPAN project could give them by people in their hall who had previously benefitted from the project. One of the interviewees mentioned that they would do likewise: “If I knew someone was in the same situation I would be able to tell them where to go coz I've had some brilliant help” (G).

Unfortunately, sometimes the sharing of knowledge between prisoners can also be unhelpful when the information is not accurate, or not universally applicable. This was mentioned a few times during the interviews. For example, a common misconception shared in prisons is that everyone gets 13 weeks of housing benefit paid, whereas in reality this is only true for prisoners sentenced to under 6 months. Another rumour was that unless you stay in a hostel you cannot be assessed as homeless (P). This wrong knowledge can be more damaging to successful housing outcomes than no knowledge at all. An absence of universally available, accurate prevention advice to counter poor information can either result in complacency, with

33. More information about the SPAN project can be found in Appendix B

34. N.B. Due to the informal nature of the interviews, sometimes these questions were answered in discussion during another part of the interview

prisoners assuming that everything will be alright and then losing their tenancy, or in resources needing to be used more intensively to put right any damage done.

Three interviewees felt that prison officers had not been available as a source of information or help around housing.

“ Some of the prison officers don't know how it works with housing ... some of them don't care” (G)/ “Naebody [prison officers] told me nothing. One of the girls from the halls said go and see Becky ” (K).

All of the people who commented on this felt that that would have liked prison officers to be more informed about housing and the specialist agencies that are available for prisoners. Interviewees also suggested that leaflets/ forms for housing and housing benefit being available in halls and a greater availability of SPAN staff would help prisoners with their lack of knowledge.

Educating prisoners on housing is one of the aims of SPAN, who have provided information sessions for people in prison. These have proven very successful with over 150 people attending over a 6 month period. The commitment to sharing knowledge within the prison is evidenced through the “Insiders Project”, a co-production initiative developed between SPAN and prisoners which provided training in housing to volunteers within the prison who then acted as Peer Mentors, supported by SPAN. This has been developed further to include SQA accreditation, creating a qualification for the volunteer with the aim to help support individual development and reintegration upon release.

Theme 8: Communication with professionals

The impact of poor communication within and across agencies was raised by many of the interviewees. Communication from landlords about tenancies had frequently been unhelpful and unclear for the recipients. Issues around poor communication were often exacerbated by the prisoner's confinement.

Interviewees spoke of confusing language being used in letters regarding their tenancies, thought by some to be deliberately misleading or worded in a way that promoted the best interests of the landlord rather than laying out all the different options available to the tenant. In many instances this was a letter asking interviewees to sign over their tenancies because they were in custody, worded in a way that made it sound as though this was the only or best course of action.

“ I got letters and that off [housing association] and that and it was a mandate letter or something like that saying if I fill this in if I want to give my hoose up, and I started panicking ” (A)

There was also a common issue of requests being made of prisoners by agencies that they felt unable to

fulfil when they were in prison. An example of this was a letter sent to the prison requesting that the interviewee visit the office to discuss the issue (P), an action that would clearly be impossible for anyone in custody.

In some instances, the letters were sent to the original address, and interviewees had to rely on friends or family passing these on to them. In some examples the landlord was aware the interviewee was in custody and indeed that was the basis of the letter. For example, Interviewee J, whose partner was in custody, received correspondence to the flat in her partner's name. The letters that she had received did not explain that although she wasn't a named tenant, she had the right to talk to the council as an interested party.

Issues around communication were compounded by the difficulties faced by prisoners, due to the nature of their confinement, to communicate with outside agencies. Interviewee G described the barriers in place to contacting his SPAN worker: having to write down a telephone number then wait a week before being allowed to make a phone call, or being questioned when taking a letter to the hall. Other interviewees mentioned letters going missing or being delayed in being delivered.

4. Supporting Prisoners; Advice Network (SPAN) Scotland

This section provides an overview of the SPAN service, what it does and how people accessed the service.

SPAN is a project established for both prisoners and their families to prevent homelessness. It offers independent advice and support to people with convictions at all stages of the journey into, within and upon leaving prison.

Shelter Scotland provides advice and advocacy on all areas of housing in HMP Grampian and HMP Perth, Inverness CAB provide advice and advocacy on all areas of housing in HMP Inverness and Sacro provides throughcare support within the community post liberation.

Throughout the interviews conducted to inform this report, there was general reference to SPAN's work and how the service had helped in relation to the particular issues raised.³⁵ In addition, we asked interviewees two specific questions around their interaction with the SPAN project:³⁶

- 'How has SPAN/ Shelter Scotland worked with you?', and
- 'What do you think would have happened if you weren't involved with SPAN/ Shelter Scotland?'

Accessing the SPAN service

The Link Centre within each prison has the potential to be the meaningful route to SPAN services due to the core screening process completed by prison staff at the point of entry into prison. This provides an opportunity for housing issues to be identified as soon as possible and so that SPAN can advocate to prevent loss of a tenancy. In reality, this route was the (self-stated) referral route for only 5 of our interviewees. Three interviewees commented on the fact that the screening was not the most appropriate place to do this due to the proximity to the start of their sentence (K, P), and the highly emotional and stressful point at which it takes place (N). The environment and situation were not seen to be conducive to a frank discussion about other areas of life affected by imprisonment.

Other referral routes included:

- Fellow inmates (B, F, K, M).
- Referrals to SPAN through other agencies working both internally (N, P) and externally to the prison (I, J).
- Self-referral (D, G, O). This of course relies on prisoners knowing a) that they need help, and b) how to get it: *“ you have to be very proactive and keep on at them [the prison officers] until they link you...if it wasn't for me and my big mouth... ”* (G).
- Interviewee K commented that the process and structure for sharing information about services needed to be improved, for example making more leaflets available.
- Proactive contact by SPAN staff, for prisoners who were in prison for the second or subsequent time (C, M). This information sharing was important in enabling SPAN to respond quickly to risk of homelessness and therefore increasing the chance of successful prevention.

What SPAN does

Practical solutions

For many of the interviewees the first and most basic step that SPAN took was to ensure that the landlord knew that the tenancy was not abandoned, *“ I don't think [housing association] would have heard from me if it wasn't for SPAN ”* (A). In three cases covered in the interviews SPAN was investigating a 'qualifying occupier', sub-let or joint tenancy, or had negotiated this already.

For some, however, due to the length of their sentence and without anyone being available to take the tenancy on in their absence, closing down the tenancy is the only viable option. For interviewee M, SPAN assisted them to do this in a constructive way, so as not to accrue rent arrears and to explore recovering possessions.³⁷

In total in 2014, SPAN worked with 467 service users. 64% of these (299) had a tenancy when they entered prison and of these, 84% (250) were successfully

35. With the upcoming implementation of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, it will become increasingly important for tenancies not to be 'abandoned', which can suspend their eligibility for social housing

36. E.g. Reid Howie (2004) *The Provision of Housing Advice to Prisoners in Scotland: An evaluation of the projects funded by the Rough Sleepers Initiative*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research and Auditor General and Accounts Commission (2011) *An Overview of Scotland's Criminal Justice System*. Edinburgh, Audit Scotland

37. Auditor General and Accounts Commission (2011) *An Overview of Scotland's Criminal Justice System*. Edinburgh: Audit Scotland

supported to keep this tenancy upon release. (See Appendix B for more SPAN statistics).

Negotiating with landlords

A large proportion of the work that SPAN staff had undertaken to prevent tenancies ending was through negotiating with landlords on a case by case basis. For example, SPAN staff:

- Asserted that the service user had a high likelihood of receiving a Home Detention Curfew (commonly known as a tag) in the near future, so would resume paying rent shortly (B, D).
- Negotiated that the service user was eligible for succession to the tenancy, after his relative had passed away whilst the service user was in prison (F).
- Challenged a local authority's letter that threatened eviction yet did not state any legal grounds (K.)
- Reasoned that the service user (H) had a local connection to the area as he was an employee of the local authority, despite a previous decision that no connection existed and therefore the service user wasn't eligible for homelessness assistance in that area.

Paying the rent

The main reason for people being evicted during their time in custody is the accrual of rent arrears, which for some interviewees had started before going into prison.

Provision is made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for Housing Benefit to be paid to prisoners in certain circumstances. However, due to challenges with paperwork and communication, this is not always claimed or received as it should be. In almost every case, SPAN had worked with the DWP to ensure that the Housing Benefit that should be paid during custody was in place.

In addition, there were several strategies SPAN employed to tackle rent arrears for the interview cases. For example, SPAN staff:

- Demonstrated two interviewees (D, P) were due Housing Benefit for periods prior to going into custody, secured the backdating of these payments and used these to negotiate with and placate the landlord and retain the tenancy.
- Organised contributions to rent arrears by family members or by the service user themselves, for example one service user sent some of their prison pay through a credit union (O).

- Arranged payments plans to be put in place for some interviewees when they were liberated, and organized appointments to ensure that full Housing Benefit could be reinstated as soon as possible after liberation.
- Organised discretionary housing payments for two interviewees subject to the removal of the spare room subsidy to cover the shortfall, alongside helping them to make sensible decisions about downsizing in the future to more affordable homes (D,F).
- Considered whether bankruptcy was appropriate for one service user (G) whose debt was so large that a repayment plan would not be appropriate.

Engaging with the courts

In cases where landlords had commenced court eviction proceedings, SPAN was fully engaged in the process in order to save the tenancy, for example, through recalling decrees where it is possible and appropriate to do so (F). If a case goes to court, where possible SPAN would provide a defense lawyer, through Shelter Scotland's own legal team if feasible. For example for interviewee G, a decree for eviction was recalled and the case was made that the tenancy was reinstated whilst under recall, providing an address for a tag to be assigned to and as such enabled the tag to be issued.

Ongoing support to settle in a home

Although charting the support needs of participants was beyond the scope of the current study, there are multiple, robust studies that have shown the high prevalence of multiple support needs among prison leavers.³⁸ Evidence from the literature suggests that ensuring tenancy sustainment for prison leavers requires holistic assessment identifying the full range of housing related and wider support needs,³⁹ and that if practical needs remain unmet, progress in reforming behaviour and other areas of development are unlikely to be successful.⁴⁰

Six interviewees mentioned that they had appreciated the holistic practical support that exists alongside housing advice within SPAN, including accessing funding to pay off arrears on utility bills (for example C), and one interviewee who highlighted his need for support in sourcing a bed (E). Three others talked about having ongoing support from staff that they had found helpful in the process of leaving the prison and resettling into the community, such as in looking for opportunities for meaningful activity (D, H, M).

38. Malloch et al (2013) The elements of effective through-care part 1: International review. Glasgow: Scottish centre for Crime and Justice Research

39. Families Outside (2009) Support and information for children affected by imprisonment, In Brief 4, Edinburgh: Families Outside

40. For example, in prisons which reported partnership arrangements with housing providers, prisoners were less anxious about their prospects on release. Gojkovic et al (2012) Accommodation for ex-offenders: Third sector housing advice and provision. Southampton: Third Sector Research Centre.

Contacting and supporting relatives

SPAN doesn't solely support prisoners, but also their families. In Scotland, imprisonment affects an estimated 16,500 children annually.⁴¹ Two interviewees noted that SPAN had been in touch with their partners to make sure that everyone was informed of what was happening and to progress their case (A, N). One example of family support was work with the ex-partner of someone who was in custody, who had become homeless with her young son due to her ex-boyfriend's conviction and eviction (J). SPAN assisted the service user with her homelessness application and in navigating the temporary accommodation process.

How SPAN works

A theme also emerged through the discussions around the ways in which the team had worked with the interviewees, with comments regarding the reassurance and information provided by SPAN, as well as the proactive and integrated approach taken.

The process of having somebody listen to concerns, understand their situation and act in their interests had lifted the sense of anxiety for interviewees (L, O);

“ *The main thing was reassurance that I wasn't losing my house* ” (G)

“ *[SPAN] will really fight your corner* ” (M, N).

In contrast to the strong sense of “not knowing” some interviewees described with regards to certain systems and processes in the prison, three interviewees

commented on the clear communication from SPAN staff (D, J, L).

The proactive design of the SPAN service was highlighted in the interviews – “ *She's done a lot – she went a bit further than I'd asked her to do* ” (P). A clear example of this was SPAN staff looking at lists of people entering the prison and proactively arranging meetings with previous service users, allowing them to work quickly to prevent the loss of a tenancy without having to go through the usual prison referral process.

Eight of the interviewees spoke positively about the integrated way that SPAN works with other agencies to help them, such as in one case requesting information from the police to challenge an intentionality decision for a homelessness application (J). Another mentioned the way in which SPAN workers had sought and found the right person from the council/ housing association to talk to directly about their tenancy and had negotiated successfully with them. “ *Shelter will work together with other services. They ken me on a personal level and pass it on.* ” (N). In addition, the importance of continuity of support after liberation was highlighted. Both these themes are supported by existing research and literature on this topic.^{42, 43, 44}

41. When relationships between statutory and third sector agencies are strong there is more effective and consistent support for service users. Malloch et al (2013) The elements of effective through- care part 1: International review. Glasgow: Scottish centre for Crime and Justice Research

42. Continuity of support, in the development of trusted relationships, is a core element of successful continuing engagement Malloch et al (2013) The elements of effective through- care part 1: International review. Glasgow: Scottish centre for Crime and Justice Research

43. The implementation of these changes is still a few years away. In the meantime, recommendations made to Community Justice Partnerships are equally as applicable to the current Community Justice Authorities in the transition period.

44. Scottish Executive (2005) Homelessness Code of Guidance, Section 8.16

5. Conclusion

The 16 interviews with SPAN service users gave a valuable, and often poignant, insight into their experiences around housing. Interviewees shared their high levels of anxiety, fear of being released to accommodation that would set them back again and their overwhelming sense of being at the mercy of systems they don't understand.

The general assumption amongst prisoners had been that they would become homeless. Many of the people we spoke to had received letters from their landlords suggesting that they give up their tenancy and some had been threatened with eviction, on occasion without due reason. Others felt so intimidated by the mounting rent arrears that they felt hopeless.

Perhaps most powerfully, we heard about how much having a home matters to people who have spent time in custody. A home meant far more than just accommodation for the people we spoke to: it represented a sanctuary, something to have pride in and safety for the future. Crucially, we received the strong message from interviewees that they believed having a home would reduce the chance that they

would reoffend. Almost all of our interviewees believed that they would have become homeless if they had not received help.

The housing pathways of interviewees showed definitively that it was possible to keep their home during time in custody and, thus, to be prevented from becoming homeless. SPAN staff had saved many tenancies using a wide range of skills and tools. The service that interviewees had received went well beyond traditional housing advice, with proactive, practical help being offered both in prison and post-liberation. Often this had included intensive negotiation with landlords, linking with family members or getting involved with finances to put together payment plans. That staff had been reassuring, informing and proactive was also important for interviewees, alongside the integrated nature of the service with other agencies.

Behind the individual stories we observed systems and processes that do not help – and in some cases positively hinder – prisoners' housing pathways. The most fundamental challenge is the lack of priority across a number of partners given to housing need which, as the interviews highlighted, is the goal for successful community reintegration and desistance.

The recommendations section to follow details where improvements can be made, how and by whom, to ensure that fewer prisoners are released into homelessness and an increased risk of reoffending.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations draw on what we heard from the interviewees, combined with Shelter Scotland's longer policy and practice experience in this area. The recommendations are divided between strategic issues and the promotion of good practice on the ground.

To see real change effected in the reduction of reoffending it is crucial that both strategic frameworks and practical implementation prioritise the prevention of homelessness for prisoners.

Strategic Recommendations

This report highlights several themes which are integral to the evolving Community Justice agenda. The Community Justice (Scotland) Bill (in draft at the time of writing) has set out its plans for a national strategy and performance framework with devolved accountability at a local level. This provides an excellent opportunity to stitch housing into the fabric of any discussions around recidivism. However, there are specific points that should be addressed in the establishment or delivery of Community Justice Scotland and the new community justice partnerships in order to bring about effective positive change.⁴⁵

Housing given central place in community justice agenda

“ It's over a year and a half since I've been in a home... I want somewhere I can call mine ” (H)

At every level of community justice, stable housing needs to be acknowledged as crucial to desistance, providing a foundation for successful re-integration. A house is a home for those who have been in prison in the same way as it is for everyone else. The emerging themes of home as a source of pride and community support, as well as a place of safety, reflects a basic human need without which we all struggle.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Stable housing should be given due recognition as a foundation of desistance in the national Community Justice Strategy. This should be reflected in national outcomes performance framework targets being set around sustainment of tenancies and positive housing outcomes to ensure consistency of provision across Scotland.

A national network of housing advice

The experience of Shelter Scotland services is that the currently piecemeal provision of housing advice for prisoners and lack of knowledge about geographically distant housing options does not correlate with the frequent movement of prisoners around the prison estate. Nationally networked services are needed that can provide specialist localised advice and support to proactively maintain tenancies and prevent homelessness, but also provides close links and integrated knowledge with receiving authorities across Scotland.

RECOMMENDATION 2: As a national body, Community Justice Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Prisons Service should consider investigating how housing advice could be best delivered across Scotland to ensure that prisoners that are incarcerated at a distance from the area they will return to receive the same level of service as prisoners that are returning to the local area.

Prison officer training

“ Some of the prison officers don't know how it works with housing... some of them don't care ” (G)

As the most frequent point of contact during someone's time in custody, prison officers should be aware of the basic issues around housing, its importance in the rehabilitation of offenders and the specialist agencies that are available to provide advice and support in the prison.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Basic, advanced and refresher training on housing issues should be included in the training offered by Community Justice Scotland through its hub function, as well as ensuring that local knowledge about agencies delivering housing advice and support working in local areas is also shared.

Resources

“ People who haven't got a house and are isolated, when they're going to leave, they say, like, 'I'll do a crime and be back next week' ” (P)

The evidence from the interviews adds weight to the already well-established case for the effectiveness of prevention and the 'spend-to-save' approach. The cost of not providing effective housing advice and support

45. Scottish Executive (2005) Homelessness Code of Guidance, Section 8.2

is wide and falls to many parties. For example, agitated prisoners require more supervision from prison officers, eviction costs for landlords and homelessness processes provided by the local authority. Most significantly, however, is the increased likelihood of reoffending, which carries substantial financial costs, as well as costs to society. Financial resources must be made available for preventative services that secure positive housing outcomes for prisoners on release.

RECOMMENDATION 4: A proportion of the funding received by the Community Justice Partners should be dedicated to improving the housing advice and support available to prisoners.

Good Practice Recommendations

From the themes drawn out in the interviews and the direct voice of SPAN service users themselves we identified specific ways of working as being particularly effective in preventing homelessness and appreciated by service users. Community Justice Scotland may wish to consider these recommendations as part of its remit around learning and development.

Housing advice is intensive, proactive and creative

“ *She really fought my corner* ” (M)

The work of SPAN in providing housing advice went far beyond traditional models of housing advice. Staff had helped prisoners to keep their home by working proactively and creatively with landlords and a range of other agencies to sustain a tenancy until release. For prisoners that had not been able to keep their home, SPAN worked with them to access a home by discussing housing options and by working with landlords to help secure a tenancy and support resettlement.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Service commissioners should allow capacity in service design and funding for housing advice teams to carry out more intensive work, which takes time but is more effective in preventing homelessness and reducing offending in the long run.

Involve families

“ *Without them I'd be stuck* ” (O).

Relatives were often found to be a source of practical help and could be instrumental in saving tenancies. These networks of support are a valuable resource that, with time and effort, can be mobilised to help prevent homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Where possible, community justice practitioners should investigate whether relatives could help to prevent the end of tenancy e.g. through payment of rent, collection of mail, paying bills, checking security of property etc.

Belongings

“ *I would have lost my house and everything in it...the important things...photos of my bairns* ” (D)

The loss of identification, valuables and items of sentimental value can set someone's resettlement back post-release. Ways need to be found for prisoners' belongings to be kept safely if they have to lose their tenancy.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Registered Social Landlords and community justice practitioners or supportive relatives should work together to facilitate a trusted person collecting specific personal items before a tenancy is closed down. SFHA/ALACHO should consider issuing a briefing note on the impact of disposal of belongings for prisoners and should point members towards best practice solutions.

Resettlement location

“ *It's got to be the right move* ” (F)

The location of a tenancy is important for people post-release from prison: evidence shows that positive and negative social influences can be significant determinates of the risk of reoffending. Currently, local allocation policies can work in opposition to prison leavers accessing accommodation that will promote desistance. It is essential that the person leaving prison is involved in the decisions around where they are best placed to live.

One alternative to the allocation restrictions of socially rented housing is the private rented sector, which can provide a means for prisoners to access housing options in geographical areas that would be helpful for them. However, there are significant access issues for prison leavers including affordability and the need for a deposit.

RECOMMENDATION 8: When considering a homeless application from a prison leaver, local authority staff should consider applicants that would not usually be considered to have a local connection as a 'special circumstance',⁴⁶ understanding that they are likely to have a 'good reason'⁴⁷ for applying to that area.

46. As included in England's 'Gold Standard Challenge' for Housing Options

47. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Reoffending by Ex-Prisoners

RECOMMENDATION 9: Local authority private rented sector access schemes should be open to prison leavers and include a rent deposit guarantee scheme.⁴⁸ The importance of private rented sector access schemes, especially for prison leavers, should be mentioned in the Housing Options Guidance currently being developed for Scotland.

Avoid hostels

“ *I’d have went back to hostels, got drinking, been back [in prison] again quick* ” (M)

Often individuals are placed in hostels as emergency accommodation because they have not been able to make a homelessness application prior to release, so there has not been time to plan more appropriate accommodation (see recommendation below). Interviewees for this research strongly held that being placed in hostels as temporary accommodation would have a negative impact on their reoffending and wellbeing. The cycle of prison – hostel – prison is well documented and the risk of substance misuse relapse creates anxiety for people leaving prison.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Wherever possible, local authority homelessness teams should avoid placing prison leavers in hostels as temporary accommodation.

Early intervention

“ *Sometimes by the time you get seen your house is gone* ” (P)

Advice and support around housing issues should be available as soon as possible once someone enters custody, in order to have the best chance of saving an existing tenancy. However, questions about someone’s housing situation will not always be fully or accurately responded to during the core screening process. If a prisoner identifies that they will be homeless on release, a homelessness application should be made as soon as possible in order that appropriate temporary accommodation can be planned.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Prisoners who have tenancies should be proactively asked on multiple occasions by key prison officers (who have been trained to understand basic housing issues) as a matter of routine about their housing situation.

RECOMMENDATION 12: Prison staff and local authority homelessness teams should partner to form protocols, as exist in many areas already, to ensure that homelessness assessments are being carried out prior to release so that alternative forms of temporary accommodation can be planned. This should be monitored by community justice partnerships, and incorporated into Housing Options Guidance.

Proactive promotion

“ *The amount of people in halls that d’nae ken where they are wi’ their hoose* ” (F)

Proactive promotion to prisoners of potential housing issues and the services that are available to assist will increase awareness and help people to address issues as soon as possible. Homelessness for many could be avoided if prisoners were made more aware of the circumstances in which they might have need for help with housing.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Scottish Prisons Service should encourage proactive promotion across the prison estate through best practice materials being identified, modified and shared across all prisons (e.g. posters, videos, leaflets, sessions at induction etc.).

Landlord communication

“ *It was a mandate letter or something like that saying if I fill this in if I want to give my hoose up, and I started panicking* ” (A)

A lot of stress and unnecessary homelessness could be avoided if landlords communicated clearly and appropriately with people in custody about their tenancy rights, responsibilities and the help that might be available to them.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The Scottish Housing Regulator should monitor communication to tenants that are in custody as part of the Landlord’s responsibility under Section 2 of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

48. Scottish Government’s latest available statistics: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/6972/13>

Appendix A

Core SPAN service user interview questions

The following are the core questions that were used to inform the 16 interviews conducted with SPAN service users that contributed to the preparation and drafting of this report:

- Before going into prison, where were you living? (Rented/ council/ homeless/ with partner)
- [If applicable] What happened with the place you were staying?
- Did you think that you might need help with housing?
- Who was available for you to go to for advice? How did you know to go to them?
- What else would have helped?
- [For people in prison] What is your situation with housing now? What's that like?
- [For those out with prison] What happened with housing when you left prison?
- What made the situation worse/ bad? What would have made the situation better?
- What would you like to happen with housing in the future?
- How has SPAN/Shelter worked with you?
- What do you think would have happened if you weren't involved with SPAN/Shelter?

Appendix B

Snapshot summary of relevant outcomes for Supporting Prisoners; Advice Network (SPAN) Scotland in 2014

In 2014, the SPAN service supported a total of 467 people, including:

- 136 service users supported from HMP Grampian
- 169 service users supported from HMP Perth
- 162 service users supported from HMP Inverness

Service user demographics in 2014:

- 93% of service users were men and 7% were women
- 16% of service users were disabled and 84% were not disabled
- 18% of service users were below the age of 25
- 81% were in the age bracket 25-64.
- 1% were 65+

Further service user insight:

- 35% (163) of SPAN service users entering prison were homeless upon entering
- 5% (21) of SPAN service users left prison and moved into a private let
- 30% (142) of SPAN service users moved into temporary accommodation or a hostel
- 64% (299) of SPAN service users had a tenancy when they entered prison and of these:
 - **84% (250) of were supported to keep this tenancy upon release**
 - 16% (49) of SPAN service users were supported to formerly end their tenancy due to issues such as length of sentence, thereby mitigating against further arrears for the service user
- 14% (64) of SPAN cases involved family and friends – either in homelessness prevention for the prisoner or their family

Top level outcomes achieved in 2014:

- In 2014, a total of 334 SPAN service users were supported leading to improvements in their housing situation
- 226 SPAN service users were supported to have sufficient knowledge to take independent steps to resolve their housing problems (this is

ascertained through follow up calls and assessments post liberation)

- In 2014, 121 SPAN service users have been supported to manage their own tenancies. This includes guidance in completing applications for benefits and joint working with Criminal Justice Social Work

In addition to the above, further analysis of these cases undertaken by Shelter Scotland reveal that:

Of 169 SPAN service users in HMP Perth:

- 45 were homeless prior to prison, and had homelessness status on leaving prison and were going into temporary accommodation
- 12 people were homeless prior to prison but had secure accommodation on release through the private rented sector
- 97 had secure accommodation on entering prison and we managed to retain these tenancies for their release and prevent homelessness
- 15 people had secure accommodation on entering prison but had to terminate these in a planned way due to their length of sentence
- In addition, 49 families of people in prison in HMP Perth received housing advice, advocacy and support to deal with housing issues as a result of their family member going into prison.

Of 136 SPAN service users in HMP Grampian:

- 46 were homeless prior to prison and had homelessness status on leaving prison and were going into temporary accommodation
- 7 people were homeless prior to prison but had secure accommodation on release through the private rented sector
- 48 had secure accommodation on entering prison and we managed to retain these tenancies for their release and prevent homelessness
- 30 people had secure accommodation on entering prison but had to terminate these in a planned way due to their length of sentence
- 5 service users disengaged or were moved to other prisons outwith Scotland and we could not ascertain what their housing outcome was

- In addition, 11 families of people in prison in HMP Grampian received housing advice, advocacy and support to deal with housing issues as a result of their family member going into prison.

Of 162 service users in HMP Inverness;

- 51 were homeless prior to prison and had homelessness status on leaving prison and were going into temporary accommodation
- 2 people were homeless prior to prison but had secure accommodation on release through the private rented sector
- 105 had secure accommodation on entering prison and we managed to retain these tenancies for their release and prevent homelessness
- 4 people had secure accommodation on entering prison but had to terminate these in a planned way due to their length of sentence
- In addition, 4 families of people in prison in HMP Inverness received housing advice, advocacy and support to deal with housing issues as a result of their family member going into prison.

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Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

We need your help to continue our work.

Please support us at www.shelterscotland.org

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