



Email

Dear Sir,

Inquest Touching the Death of Barrie Forster

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report of the 5th November 2024 issued following the conclusion of the Inquest into the death of Barrie Forster. This response has been prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and is provided on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice.

I know that you will share a copy of this response with Barrie Forster's family, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my condolences for their loss.

In your Report, you raised the following concern:-

There is a lack of accommodation available to the Probation Service in which prisoners released from custody may properly be placed. This includes both Approved Premises (which I understand to be the responsibility of the MoJ) and more generally through the local authority to avoid homelessness. As a consequence, some prisoners are released and become effectively homeless (with increased difficulties in supervision) while others are accommodated at unsuitable premises, as happened in this instance.

His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service provides an accommodation service in specific circumstances, via Homelessness Prevention Teams, Strategic Housing Specialists and Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS). The Probation Service manages a three-tier structure of temporary accommodation known as the Community Accommodation Service (CAS): CAS1 (accommodation with a public protection focus for higher-risk offenders, known as Approved Premises), CAS2 (low to medium risk offenders on Home Detention

Curfew or bail) and CAS3 (up to 12 weeks basic accommodation for prison leavers at risk of homelessness).

Homelessness Prevention Teams are embedded in all probation regions and play a significant role in developing and leading the regional probation response to reducing homelessness for People on Probation, transitioning from custody to the community. They are tasked to choreograph local activity between the Probation Service and a range of strategic partners, including Local Authorities, Housing Providers, Police, Health, Strategic Housing Specialists (SHS), CRS providers and the Voluntary/Community Sector. This joint working helps to embed and expand housing options for prison leavers.

Across our prisons 49 full time equivalent Strategic Housing Specialists (SHS) operate working to clusters of geographically close prisons across England and Wales. Their key responsibilities include Identifying, developing, and delivering a range of solutions that remove barriers to accommodation, including solutions to logistical barriers. They develop and deliver training products to upskill prison staff on accommodation pathways and act as subject matter experts on housing and homelessness for prison senior leaders and regional prison structures. They work in partnership to improve regional responses to homelessness amongst prison leavers and lead Local Authority Pre-Release Homelessness Panels which are multi-agency meetings that aim to identify the most appropriate accommodation pathway for individuals who would otherwise be homeless. In turn, this supports other areas of resettlement work such as ensuring the continuation of healthcare or securing employment in the correct area.

Additionally Commissioned Rehabilitative Service (CRS) provision exists in all regions of England and Wales. Providers have specialist knowledge to give support in obtaining accommodation, including securing social or supported housing, securing a tenancy in the private rented sector, help to sustain existing accommodation and help to close down a tenancy at the start of a long sentence. Accommodation CRS provision for women is part of the women's holistic CRS offer and not accessed via the region's CRS Accommodation provider (for men) but from the CRS Women's Services contract provider.

There are currently 2339 Approved Premises bed placements across England and Wales. The Approved Premises Expansion programme concluded in March 2023, delivering 169 additional spaces, 115 male and 54 female. This has enabled us to have the capacity for those presenting the very highest risks, to stay in Approved Premises (AP) for up to 12 months. We have also expanded provision for women by over 30%, increasing the opportunities for women to have a place in an AP after release, as part of a community order or as a bail placement. The closure report for the expansion project concluded that there are now an additional 40 bed space placements in the Southwest South-Central Area.

CAS2 provides suitable gender specific accommodation for Bailees and prisoners eligible for Home Detention Curfew (HDC), who might be remanded or not released due to lack of suitable accommodation. Additionally, they provide accommodation in some circumstances for those who lose their accommodation whilst subject to licence in the community, all individual placements receive weekly support sessions to help ensure successful completion of their residency. CAS2 currently has c850 bed spaces in over 275 properties across England and Wales. This is an increase from 550 at the commencement of the current contract in October 2022. CAS2 continues to increase capacity, working towards 1350 spaces in the next year.

CAS3 provides transitional accommodation for up to 84 nights for prison leavers and those moving on from CAS1 and CAS2, subject to probation supervision who would otherwise be homeless, with basic floating support to move on into settled accommodation. All prison

leavers who are at risk of being released from prison homeless and will be subject to probation supervision upon release, will be offered accommodation through our CAS3 provision; however, this is a consent-based arrangement and not all prison leavers will accept. The service is delivered by regional Homelessness Prevention Teams working in collaboration with contracted accommodation suppliers in 10 probation regions, and via grant funded arrangements in partnership with Local Authorities in Greater Manchester and Wales.

CAS3 supported over 6,000 people last year (April 2023-March 2024) and the service which currently provides 2603 bedspaces is expanding to support more people at risk of homelessness each year.

This provision provides a critical stabilising environment for people on release from prison from which they can address other aspects of their behaviour linked to their risk of re-offending.

In the case of prison leavers not placed in Approved Premises, who are at risk of homelessness, it is essential that services work together to fulfil their respective roles so that risk is effectively identified and appropriate accommodation is provided.

Local Authorities have statutory duties to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. They work in partnership with HMPPS to ensure those placed in CAS temporary accommodation have the move-on accommodation which is appropriate to any identified risks.

In 2021 MHCLG, working closely with MoJ, launched the Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AfEO) scheme, which provides funding to local authorities to support ex-offenders to move to settled accommodation in the private rented sector. Since 2021, approximately thirty three million pounds has been awarded to local authorities for this purpose and 5,988 individuals have been supported to access tenancies.

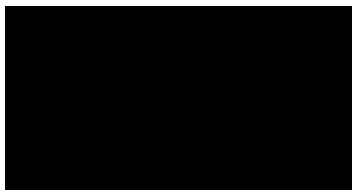
Evidence shows that these programmes have enabled occupants to access and remain in accommodation. However, more action is needed to ensure all prison leavers are able to access accommodation. MoJ and MHCLG are continuing to work closely together to identify and implement what is needed.

This work is part of cross-government work led by the Deputy Prime Minister to end all forms of homelessness. The Deputy Prime Minister is chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group which brings together ministers from across government to develop a long term strategy, which will include action to avoid risk of homelessness for individuals leaving institutions, including prison. It is expected that the strategy will be published next year following the conclusion of the next spending review. In the meantime, as announced at budget, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million. This includes support for areas to maintain and develop pathways for prison leavers into settled accommodation. The MHCLG Homelessness Advice and Support Team will continue to work with local authorities to promote a partnership approach to the statutory referral mechanism and improve quality of information sharing to promote better assessments and convening events to share best practice.

The Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Lord James Timpson, will lead on driving forward the Department's priority to reduce the number of people leaving prison homeless and ensuring that there is appropriate accommodation to support those offenders who have higher support needs.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to our attention. I trust that this response provides assurance that action is being taken to address this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Probation Officer