
Prison Break

Breaking the prison to homelessness cycle

*'I have nowhere to live.
At least if I commit a crime
I've a roof over my head in prison'.¹*

¹ (Male 229, Aged 32, remand prisoner, sleeping rough on committal).
www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

Key Facts

- **12,000 prisoners** were released onto the street with nowhere to go in 2005/06.²

- **1,122** prisoners were released into homelessness from **high security prisons** despite much higher reoffending rates for those who do not have a roof over their heads.³

- **78,197 prisoners** have been released with nowhere to go in the last four years.⁴ This is the equivalent to almost the entire current size of the prison population.⁵

- In the last four years, **nearly one quarter of prisoners have been released homeless.**

- Stable accommodation can reduce re-offending by up to 20%⁶ by reducing the likelihood of so called '**bed and breakfast crime**' where ex-prisoners re-offend in order to get a roof over their heads.'

- Crime committed by ex-prisoners accounts for **nearly one fifth** of all crime⁷

- 20% of prisoners on release report having nowhere to stay⁸

- Two thirds of ex-prisoners **re-offend** within two years of release.⁹

² Source – FOI request

³ Source – FOI request

⁴ Source – FOI request

⁵ For more information on the prison population go to <http://www.howardleague.org/index.php?id=444>

⁶ <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497417/docs/247610/Londonresettlementstrat.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497417/docs/247610/Londonresettlementstrat.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497417/docs/247610/Londonresettlementstrat.pdf>

⁹ 'Prisons with a Purpose', Conservative Policy Paper No.4

- A re-offending ex-prisoner is likely to be responsible for crime costing the criminal justice system an average of £65,000¹⁰

Introduction

Prison and Homelessness

The populations of both the statutory homeless and the prison population have increased dramatically in the last ten years. Although the absolute and direct correlation of these two social factors is unknown, the difficulty of re-entry into society after release increases the risk of homelessness for ex-prisoners and the lack of a stable and fixed address adds to the chance of eventual re-incarceration.

Two thirds of prisoners reoffend within the first two years of release¹¹ and 20% of prisoners report having nowhere to go on release. It is therefore unsurprising that the homeless are over-represented in the prison population.

Based on the knowledge and evidence of the cycle of homelessness, crime and imprisonment, the stabilising affect the provision of accommodation sustains should not be overlooked or underestimated.

Moreover, the complexity and longevity of the homelessness experience and the problems facing people when trying to emerge from the cycle, demonstrate the severity with which a lack of housing provision should be treated.

In 2002 the Social Exclusion Unit identified housing as a key factor in the reintegration of ex-offenders, yet as this report reveals, there is still a large and significant number of prisoners being released from prison, onto the streets, homeless.

The graphs illustrate which prisons in which regions have released the most prisoners onto the street in the last year with available data, both absolutely and as a percentage of total releases.

¹⁰ <http://www.gos.gov.uk/497417/docs/247610/Londonresettlementstrat.pdf>

¹¹ 'Prisons with a Purpose', Conservative Policy Paper No.4

Prisoners and Reintegration

The challenges and obstacles to the reintegration of prisoners into society are formidable and the importance of a successful passage back into work and community life can't be underestimated.

Assistance with reintegration needs to extend beyond merely the prison experience and cover all aspects of the reintegration process, beginning when prisoners are released. Not least of these aspects is accommodation.

The cyclical nature of homelessness and incarceration should focus emphasis on the level and availability of accommodation on release and the importance of preventing homelessness in the first instance. The time of release from prison has been described by the Greater London Research Authority as 'a trigger that leads directly to the streets'¹²

Prisoners who have little or no supervision on release face an enormous risk of reincarceration along with other social and economic problems such as addiction and finding employment. Higher reconviction rates in among homeless offenders than those with stable accommodation have been noted by numerous researchers.¹³

These problems and their consequences can often engender a descent into social disintegration that is damaging for the individual, their family and the local community. This descent into social isolation creates the necessity for support structures and rehabilitation schemes for those on release from prison.

However, while these support structures are vital in maintaining a stable address and re-developing societal connections, it should not be assumed that the loss of a fixed abode is a post-prison development. It is common for people to lose their accommodation when entering prison, through the loss of local authority or private tenancies or the breakdown of relationships between family and friends.

¹² Greater London Research Authority, 2000: 7

¹³ Banks and Fairhead, 1976; Ramsay, 1986

Once this breakdown and loss of accommodation is complete, the cycle between homelessness and incarceration can for some be unavoidable and the path back to social intergration unknown.

Methodology and Findings

This research is based on a Freedom of Information request sent to every prison service in England and Wales asking for information on the type of accommodation available to prisoners on release in each of the last five years. The data was provided by the Open Government Unit for all prisons, for the four years between 03/04 to 06/07.

However, data was not collected prior to 2003/04 and the information for all years is not held in a format that records the type of accommodation that ex-prisoners return to. It is therefore impossible to know how many ex-prisoners recorded as having accommodation on release are actually statutory homeless,¹⁴ making the actual number of prisoners released homeless liable to be far larger.

The breakdown of accommodation provision by prison and region is only available between 03/04 and 05/06 and not for 06/07. The graphs below therefore, apply to the last year that a breakdown of figures was provided.

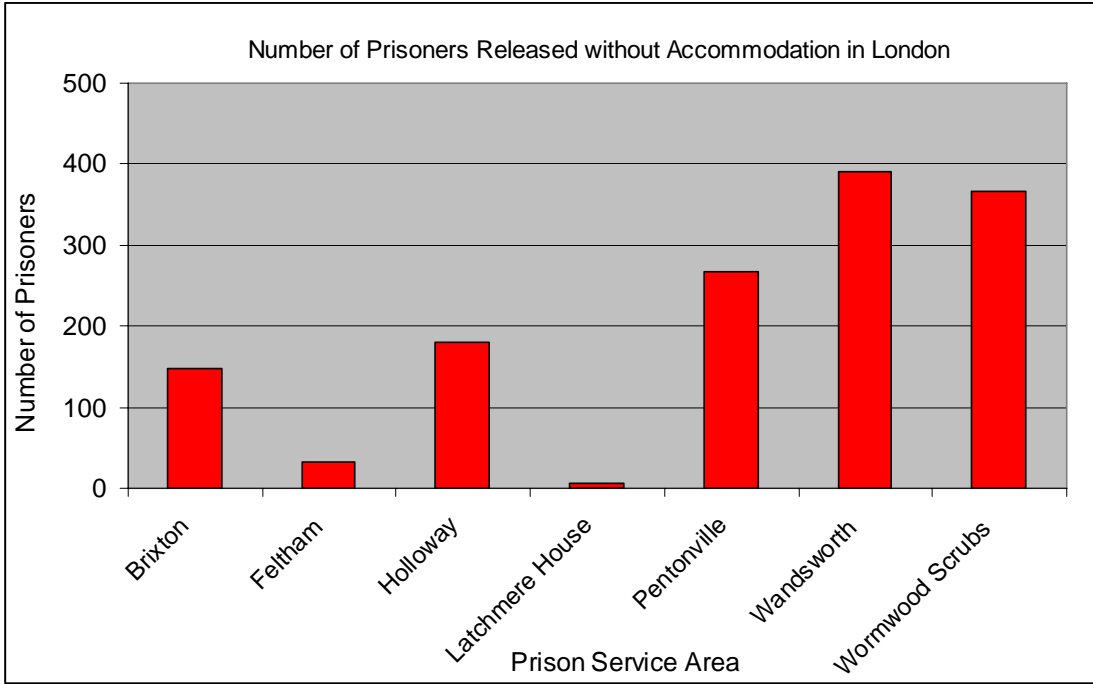
The findings that 75,217 people were released from prison in England and Wales in 2005/06. Of that number, 12,209 people were released with nowhere to go.

The remainder of people released, 63,008, are recorded as having accommodation on release. Due to the format in which the figures are held, the number of statutory homeless within this 63,008 is unknown.

However, the housing provision available to these people is not recorded nor broken down. If the accommodation to which these 63,008 people go is a hostel, bed and breakfast, any form of temporary accommodation or is provided by a friend or family member, the prisoner is still statutory homeless on release.

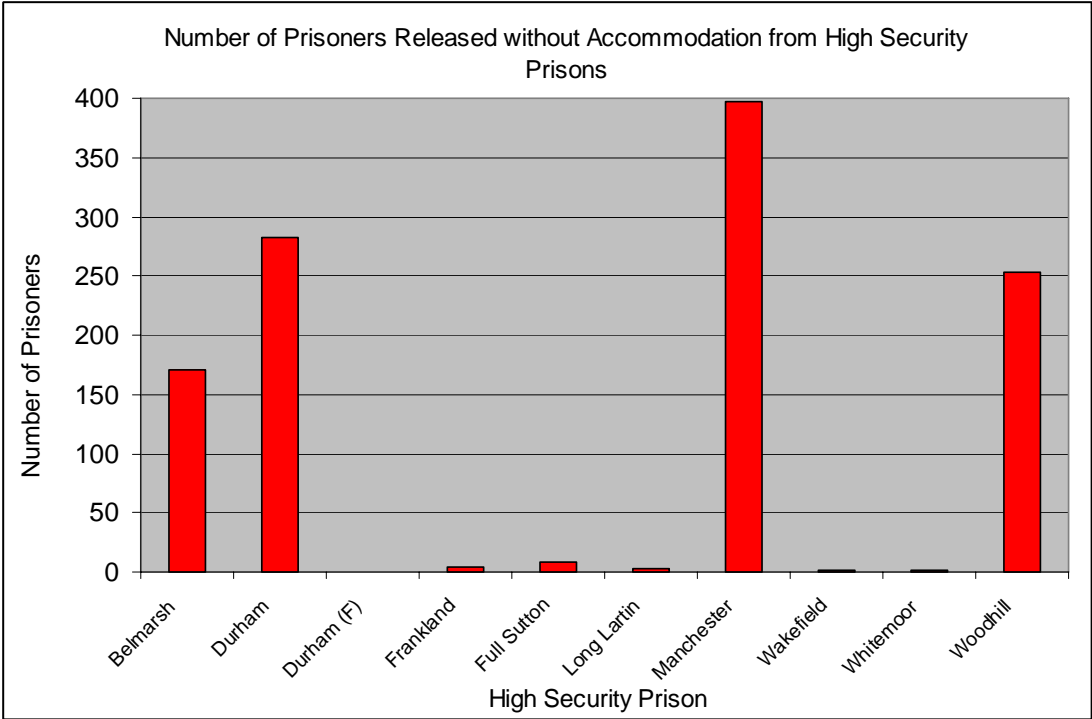
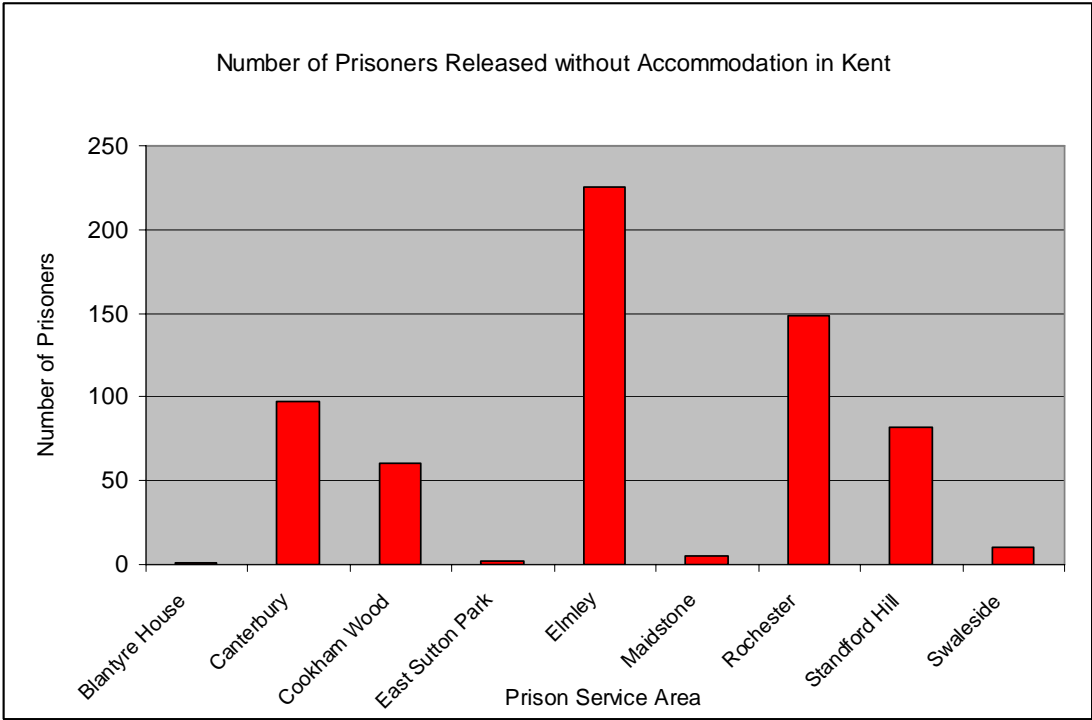
¹⁴ For example, an ex-prisoner who has temporary accommodation on release such as a hostel or is staying with friends is statutory homeless.

Therefore, the FOI results indicate that the absolute *minimum* number of people released homeless from the prison service in 2005/06 was 12, 209. The following fourteen graphs show the number of prisoners released from prison homeless in 2005/06 in each region.¹⁵

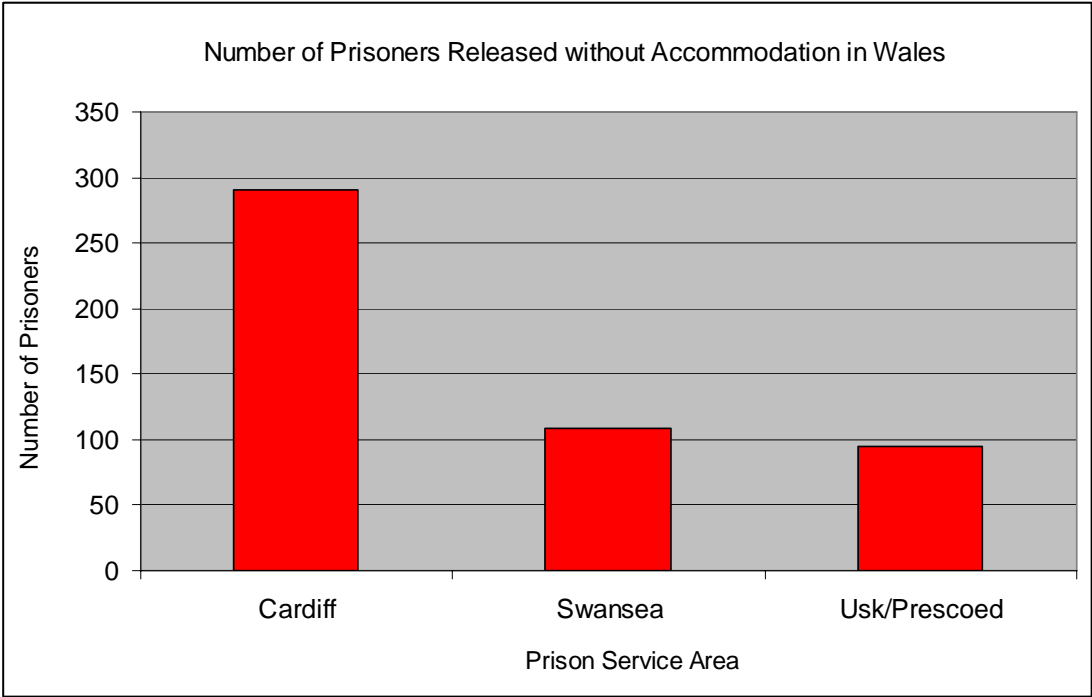


¹⁵ 2005/06 is the last year when the breakdown of this information by prison and area was made available.

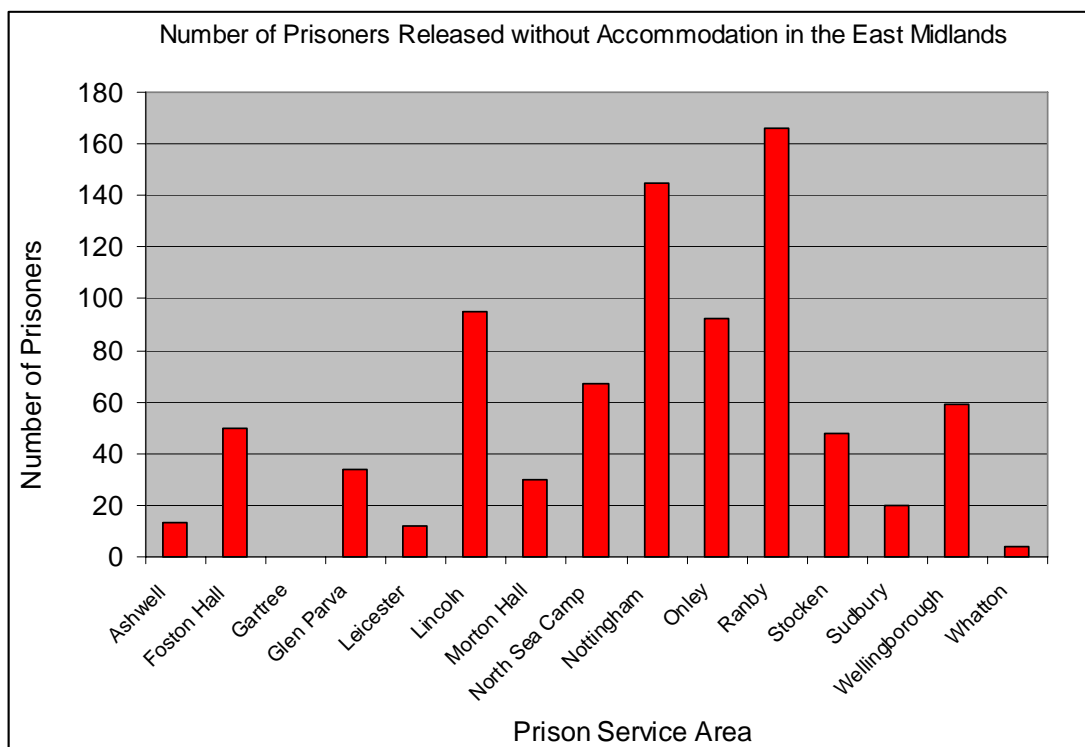
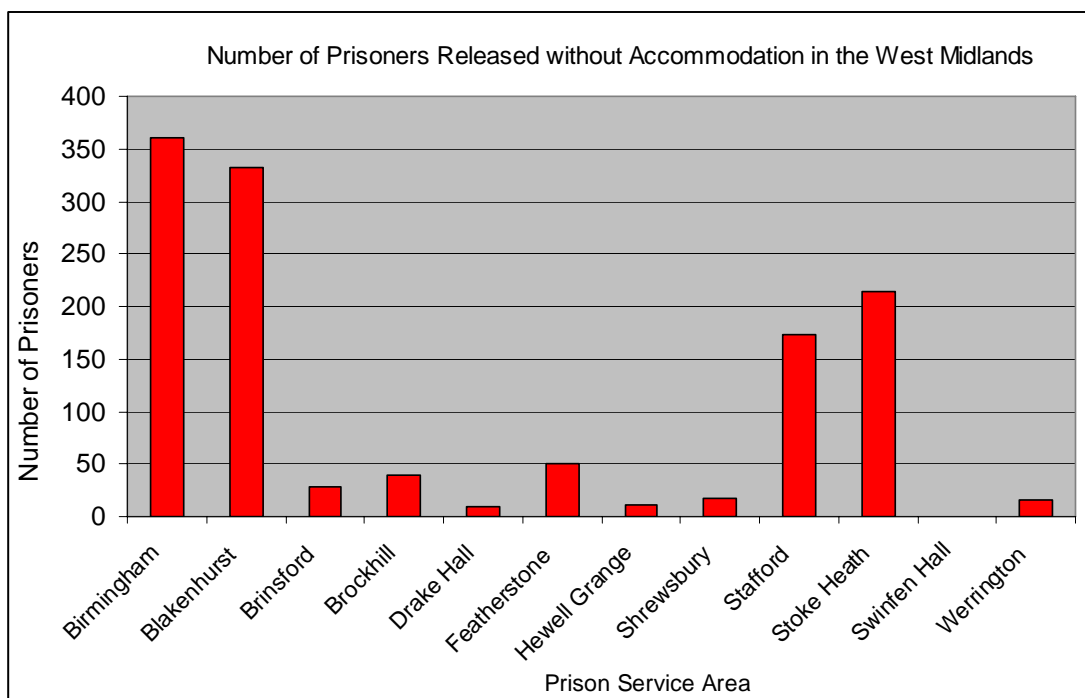
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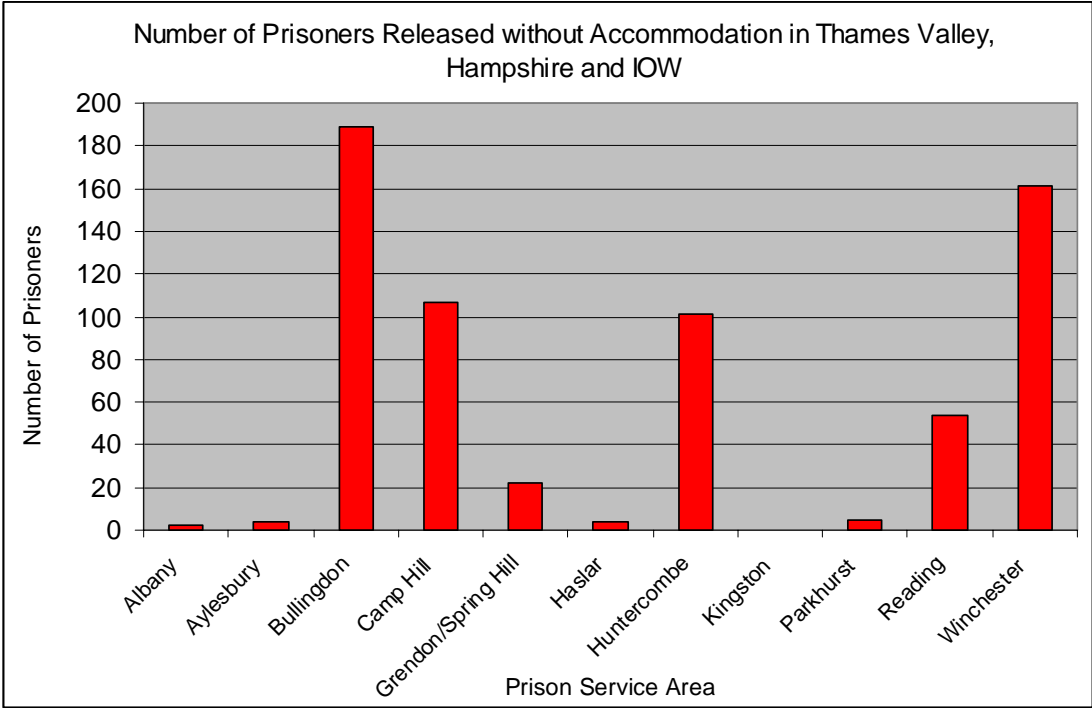
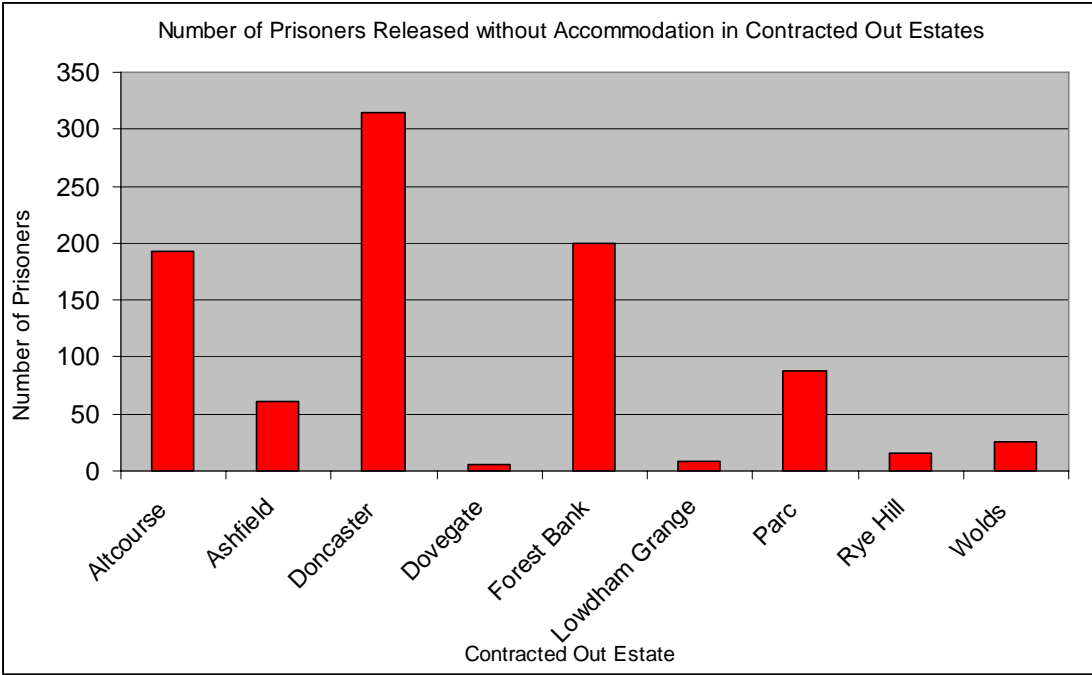
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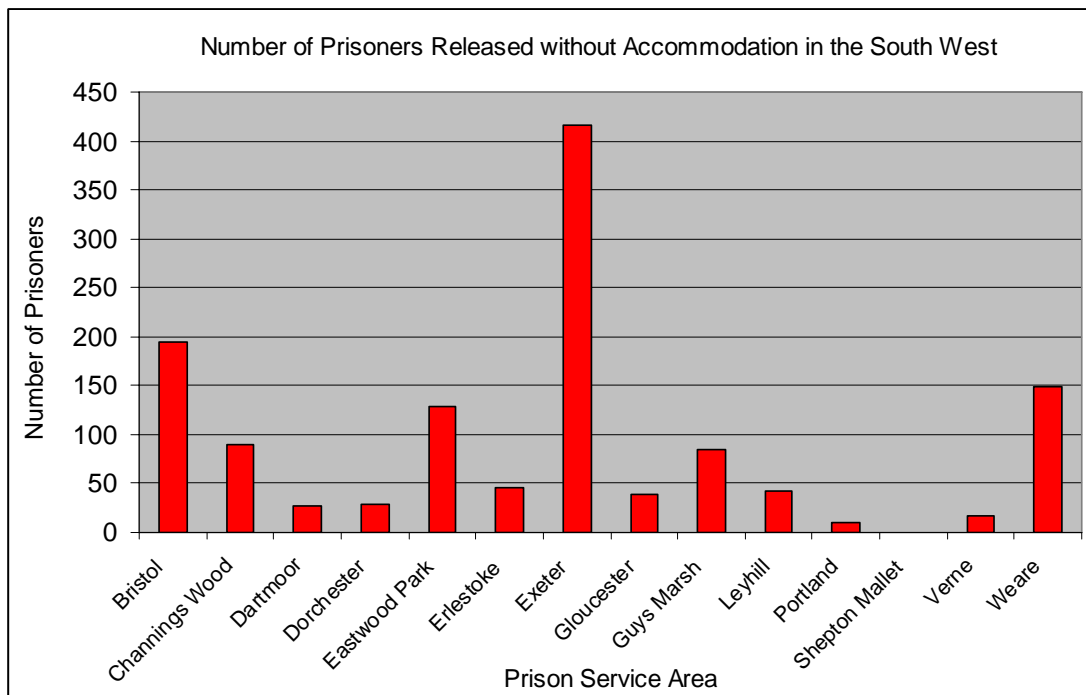


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Top Ten Worst Offenders¹⁶

The table below shows the ten prisons where the most people were released homeless in 2005/06. Perhaps of note is that two of these are in London, two in the West Midlands and two are high security prisons.

Prison Area and Establishment	Number released homeless
Leeds	463
Exeter	416
Manchester	397
Wandsworth	390
Wormwood Scrubs	367

¹⁶ Figures apply to 2005/06

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Birmingham	361
Blakenhurst	332
Doncaster	314
Cardiff	291
Durham	282

The table below show the ten prisons where most people were released homeless in 2005/06 as a percentage of the total released that year. Of note is that three of these prisons also appear in the above table for the absolute number released homeless; Exeter, Manchester and Wandsworth.

Prison Area and Establishment	Percentage of prisoners released homeless as a percentage of total released (%)
Haslar ¹⁷	66
Swaleside	35.7
Exeter	35.6
Stafford	34.8
Weare	34.4
Manchester	33.6
Nottingham	33.3
Bristol	31.7
Preston	31.1
Wandsworth	30.5

Prisons where at least 25% of people were released homeless in 05/06

Prison Area and Establishment	% released homeless
Haslar	66.7
Swaleside	35.7
Exeter	35.6

¹⁷ Haslar is an immigration detention centre, but part of the Prison Service Estate.

Stafford	34.8
Weare	34.4
Manchester	33.6
Nottingham	33.3
Bristol	31.7
Preston	31.1
Wandsworth	30.5
Camp Hill	30.3
Full Sutton	30.0
Rye Hill	29.6
Wormwood Scrubs	29.2
Elmley	28.7
Woodhill	28.5
Cardiff	28.3
Cookham Wood	28.3
Durham	27.8
Leeds	26.4
Bedford	25.2
Birmingham	25.1

Conclusion

Homeless offenders present a number of challenges that extend beyond the lack of a stable and fixed address. It is therefore crucial that more is done to reduce the risk of prisoners losing their accommodation on arrest and that we make the necessary requirements to provide for those with nowhere to go on release.

Emphasis needs to be placed not only on housing provision for those on release from prison, but what can be done to ensure that people don't lose their accommodation when taken into custody. It is estimated that around a third of prisoners lose their housing as a result of imprisonment.¹⁸ The scarcity of the housing stock, any formal restraints or informal prejudices that challenge their search for a tenancy agreement should also be considered.

The ease and speed at which prisoners lose their tenancy agreement on entering prison is in part a result of the lack of clear guidelines as to how and

¹⁸ The Prison Reform Trust, 2003 <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/subsection.asp?id=381>

the degree to which each prison should inform and advise prisoners on their housing options.

We also need to look into at what stage of the incarceration process the majority of homelessness applications are being made and accepted. The earlier this process can begin, the better and more likely the provision of accommodation on release will be.

Our prison redevelopment proposals would involve the redevelopment of up to a fifth of the prison estate. We favour the building of smaller, local prisons to replace old, often Victorian, facilities. Smaller prisons are proven to have better rehabilitation outcomes. They would also better enable prisoners to remain in contact with their families.

Under our prisons proposals, former prisoners would automatically be enrolled on the most intensive work for welfare programme supervision. We would also pay private and third sector organisations bonuses to reward their success at reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners. The savings from reduced re-offending will instead be used to incentivise providers to invest to provide programmes that rehabilitate prisoners and reduce re-offending. This will release £250 million for rehabilitative services.

Currently, prisoners receive a £46 discharge payment but may have to wait up to six weeks for payment of any welfare benefits. This is the time that ex-prisoners are most vulnerable to the attractions of drugs and acquisitive crime.

Under our proposals for prison work, earnings from prison work would be split three ways: over half would go into a Victim's Fund, to compensate victims of crime; a small amount would be available to spend in prison, as at present; the rest would be held in trust for the prisoner and paid out in installments after release to support the prisoner's resettlement and rehabilitation. This might, for instance, help prisoners secure accommodation – using their own money that they have earned.

For many prisoners, this would be their first experience of legal work and their first experience of maintaining and accommodating themselves.

Quotes

'Right now there's a revolving door from prison release to homelessness and often back into prison again. It's a trap which is letting everyone down and renders what little rehabilitation work goes on within prison, virtually useless.

Ensuring that prisoners have adequate housing on release is fundamental to their re-integration into society and would dramatically reduce the rate of ex-prisoner re-offending.

Failing to resolve this issue ultimately costs the taxpayer and local communities a fortune as everyone is forced to bear the consequences of increased 'bed and breakfast crime' where ex-prisoners re-offend in order to get a roof over their heads.'

Grant Shapps MP, Report Author

'Short-term prisoners have barely any support on release, and most go on to commit new crimes. Prisoners who are released without a home to go to are even more likely to re-offend.

We must break this depressing cycle of crime. Our rehabilitation revolution will unlock new resources and support from charities and companies to resettle offenders, getting them off drugs and into work and a home, to help them lead a law-abiding life.'

Nick Herbert MP, Shadow Justice Secretary