

LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES

When you know you are going to leave the armed forces and will be in need of accommodation, you should start exploring your options as soon as possible.

This can be as early as six months (or more) before you leave, when the Ministry of Defence (MOD) will give you a Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement with the date that you will stop being entitled to forces accommodation.

We have specialist officers who will work with you to try to prevent you from becoming homeless before leaving or to relieve your homelessness if you are discharged with no accommodation available to you.

We can help with:

- supporting you to find accommodation
- try to prevent you from becoming homeless
- look at alternative housing options

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/identifying-your-need-for-housing>

When we have been contacted by you when you know you will be leaving at a future date, e.g. when the MOD give you notice, our Shelter team

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/your_situation/ex-services will contact you to provide you with the appropriate advice and assistance.

Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO)

You can also contact the JSHAO for advice on your civilian housing options at any time during your career.

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/housing-help/>

Housing Options in Westminster

Finding accommodation: Finding suitable accommodation in Westminster can be very difficult given the high cost and lack of available places. It can be particularly difficult if you are trying to find a place for the first time. You will need to know how much you can afford to pay in rent (with the assistance of Housing Benefit if you are not working, or have a low income) and where possible, money to cover any deposit due upfront when renting a home. You need to be realistic and consider:

- How **much** you can afford to pay each week
- What **facilities** you want (e.g. central heating, a telephone, a garden)
- What **size** property you need (e.g. bedsit or a two-bedroom flat)
- The **location** (e.g. somewhere close to public transport, shops, friends, etc.)

- **Who** you want to live with (e.g. whether you want to be a lodger in your landlord's home, live on your own, or have flat mates).

You need to think very carefully how much you can afford to pay and realistic. Do not overstretch yourself because you will have other bills to pay for apart from your rent.

Financially, it may be better for you to share the cost of accommodation with others. However, you need to decide if you can live in accommodation where you have your own bedroom, but will have to share the lounge, bathroom and kitchen with others. If you flat-share, you need to be aware that one of your flat-mates might move out. If this happens, the full rent will still have to be paid.

To check your eligibility for housing and any other benefits you should visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits>

Staying with family or friends: If possible, ask your friends or relatives to support you in keeping your home whilst you are in prison to prevent you from becoming homeless when you are released. If you do not have accommodation, living with family or friends is the cheapest form of accommodation. It may also give you the opportunity to save money towards a deposit. If your relationship with family and friends has broken down we can arrange mediation to help rebuild your relationships. If this is a temporary solution we can continue to explore your other housing options and help you to move in a planned way.

Private Rented Accommodation: You should consider the size and type of accommodation you need for your household and how much rent you can afford. You should also consider whether the accommodation is suitable for your health needs.

To check the amount of rent a private landlord is asking for is reasonable, you can check what the Local Housing Allowance amount is. This is the maximum Housing Benefit you will be allowed to have for the property size you need, if you are eligible for it. <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/what-youll-get>