

# Housing Rights Prisoner Programmes – Impact Assessment Feasibility Study

In association with Elliot Delahaye, Emily Gladstone,  
Hassan Marwan, Robert Matheson, Ella Morris,  
Siobhan Prendiville, Ellie Price and Shane Vallance



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## 1. Executive Summary

Pro Bono Economics was commissioned by Housing Rights to assess the feasibility of completing an economic cost-benefit analysis of their Housing Advice in Prisons project, an initiative to provide advice and support to prisoners to ensure they can find sustainable accommodation when they are released.

### Key findings

Overall, we find that there is insufficient evidence available to support a full economic cost-benefit analysis for the Housing Advice in Prisons project at this time for two key reasons:

- We can find no source of data on housing outcomes for prisoners in Northern Ireland not involved in the Housing Advice in Prisons programme to act as a control group or benchmark to compare outcomes against.
- Housing Rights gathers data for the first six months after release but do not follow-up over a longer time period due to the costs and practical difficulties in capturing this data. This means that there would be significant uncertainty in any economic assessment of their impact due to a lack of evidence for how long outcomes persist.

### Implications

There are several potential economic impacts that could be quantified if Housing Rights are able to strengthen the evidence base, for example: taxpayer savings from reduced housing service costs, reduced costs of future re-offending and increased tax revenue from improved employment outcomes.

If Housing Rights are keen to do this, they should consider the following options for further developing the evidence base:

- Collecting evidence for a control group themselves: this is likely to be expensive and challenging as they would need to identify appropriate individuals who are not part of their programme and gather data on a regular basis to track outcomes.
- Collaborate with Northern Irish government to develop evidence for a control group: this would require the Northern Ireland Prison Service to start routinely gathering data on housing outcomes for prisoners when they are released, potentially in line with evidence captured in England and Wales. This administrative data could then be used to construct a control group to compare Housing Rights' outcomes against.

In the meantime, Housing Rights should consider improving the feasibility of capturing longer term outcomes for their participants to demonstrate the persistence of their intervention. They could also consider the development of some indicative scenarios for the scale of potential benefits from the programme based on evidence from England and Wales.

## 2. Introduction

Housing Rights was established in Belfast over 50 years ago. It is a leading provider of independent specialist advice, advocacy and representation services to individuals and families, throughout Northern Ireland, who are homeless or suffering housing problems.

This project focuses on assessing the feasibility of conducting a cost benefit analysis (CBA) specifically on the charity's Housing Advice in Prisons Project. Housing Rights' Housing Advice in Prisons Project consists of three distinct areas of activity:

- **Prisons Housing Advice:** The service provides specialist housing advice which aims to help people who have been remanded into custody or are serving sentences in prison either to sustain their home during their time in prisons or to help find suitable accommodation when leaving the criminal justice system.
- **Prisons (Peer) Project:** The service aims to prevent homelessness across the prison population via the provision of timely, comprehensive housing advice, advocacy and representation. This element of Housing Rights' work in prisons focuses on the development of peer housing advisers in all three NI prisons to complement the work of Housing Rights' specialist advisers.
- **Beyond the Gate (BTG):** The service works to ensure that upon release from prison those with the most complex needs have suitable accommodation and are engaged with the necessary support services to enable them to sustain their accommodation.

### Project scope

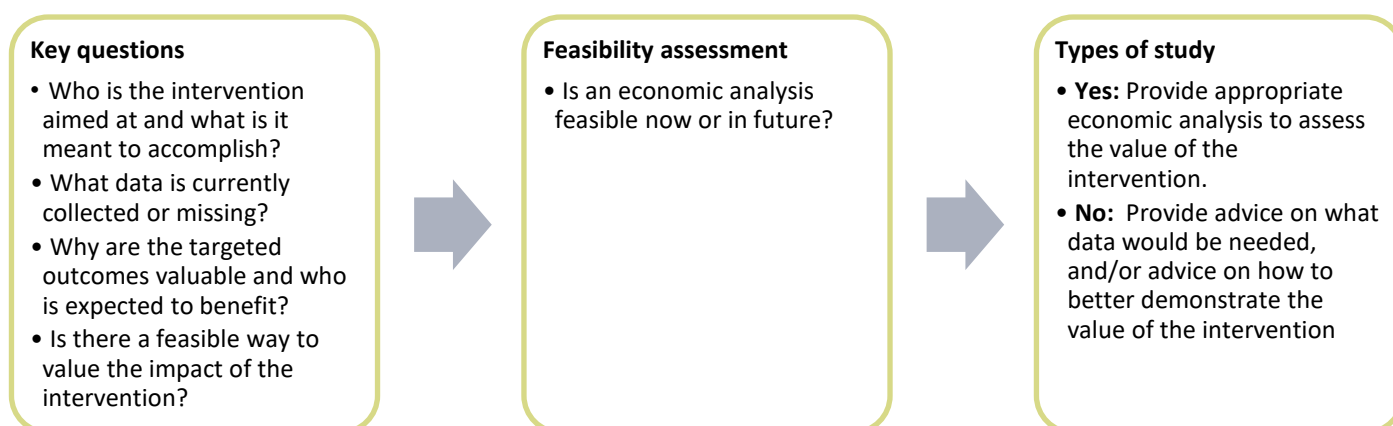
Pro Bono Economics were engaged to support Housing Rights to understand whether economic analysis was possible. Given that Pro Bono Economics is based on providing support and advice through volunteer time, this analysis was principally undertaken by economists within the Department for International Trade.

This project is firstly a feasibility study for undertaking an economic analysis of the charity's Housing Advice in Prisons Project. It is intended to cover the following areas:

- Setting out a schematic logic flow for any proposed analysis
- To understand what data is available internally, and external evidence specific to Northern Ireland region, to potentially help estimate the impact and social value of the programme
- Identifying whether an appropriate counterfactual can be established i.e. what would have happened to the beneficiaries in the absence of the support from the programme

This is shown in the figure below.

**Figure 1. Framework for feasibility study**

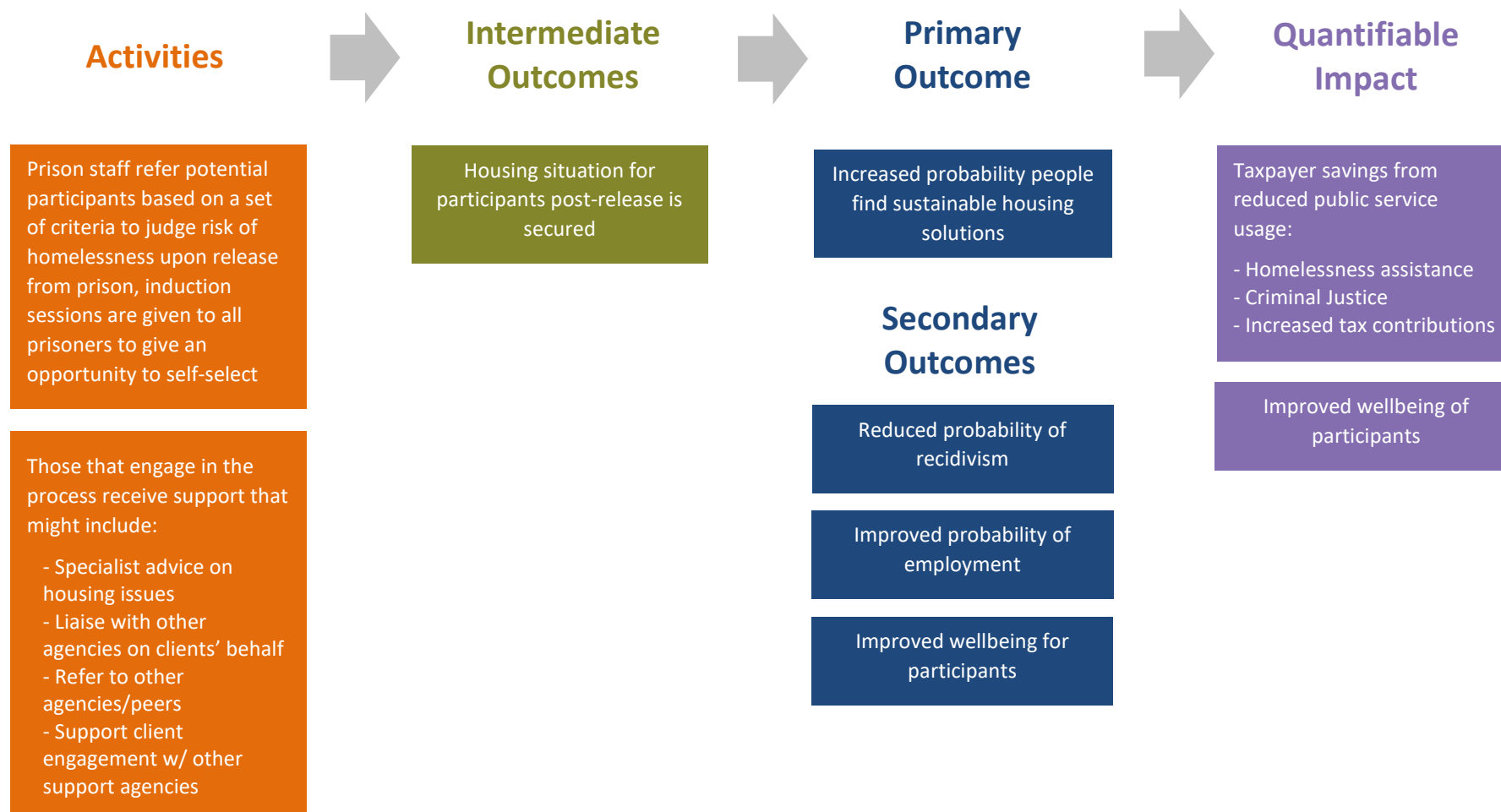


The remainder of the report details the process we have undertaken to understand whether it is possible to carry out any meaningful and robust analysis of the impact of the Prisons Project on those individuals who were supported through the programme. A primary focus has been to fully understand issues around data availability and coverage. This work has also involved a review of other available research and literature to understand whether any benchmarks/proxies are applicable.

### 3. Logic Model

To understand what method or data was needed, we first needed to understand the Theory of Change and put it into a structure that links the programme's activities with outcomes and then to measurable and quantifiable impacts. This is presented below.

**Figure 2. Housing Rights' Housing Advice in Prisons Project Theory of Change**



The Logic Model provided by Housing Rights provided a comprehensive level of detail on the actions taken and the immediate impacts. We have extended and clarified that Theory of Change (Figure 2) so that it shows a clear causal connection between activities and quantifiable (economic) impacts. This is important for communicating the benefits of the program to potential stakeholders and producing a framework for any potential social cost benefit analysis. The Logic Model presented in Figure 2 is separated into five categories. Activities shows the actions taken by Housing Rights to select its participants in the Housing Advice in Prisons Project, and the treatments participants receive. Intermediate outcomes show the direct objective and impact of Housing Rights actions – to make sure participants secure a positive housing solution immediately post-release.

Housing Rights' Housing Advice in Prisons Project's immediate aim is to secure participants' sustainable housing post release, securing short-term housing outcomes for clients. The primary outcome is that the probability that participants' find sustainable long-term housing solutions will increase. This final primary outcome/impact, of increasing the probability of clients securing long-term housing solutions, feeds into producing secondary outcomes. For example, there is research evidence from MoJ<sup>1</sup> that finds that ex-prisoners in England and Wales that were homeless or in temporary accommodation were almost 30% more likely to reoffend after one year than those who had sustainable housing solutions. Other important longer-term outcomes resulting from clients securing long-term housing solutions include increased wellbeing for the individuals supported by the programme and an increased probability of employment.

The outcomes in turn generate a potential quantifiable social/economic impact. An increased probability of programme participants securing stable long-term housing solutions means the State (or other providers of statutory/voluntary services) will spend less money on homelessness assistance; a decreased probability of participants reoffending means lower criminal justice costs and a higher probability of participants finding gainful employment reduces cost to taxpayers through reduced benefit payments, increases (income) tax revenue and benefits the economy. The increased wellbeing of programme participants is typically an important qualitative benefit of the programme which should also be considered. Emerging analysis around wellbeing measurements is beginning to allow quantitative analysis of this type – although 'monetising' these improvements in wellbeing remains methodologically difficult. Data on years of life and a utility value would need to be collected if this were to be possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, 'The factors associated with proven re-offending following release from prison: findings from Waves 1 to 3 of SPCR', 2013

## 4. Cost Benefit Analysis Framework

Using the Theory of Change established in the last section it was possible to establish a cost benefit analysis framework, which is demonstrated diagrammatically in Figure 3. This cost benefit analysis framework can be divided into two distinct stages which are elaborated below.

The Prison Housing Advice and Beyond the Gate programmes run by Housing Rights are substantially different from each other, therefore it may be appropriate to assess them separately. However, participants in the Prison Peers Project are drawn exclusively from the existing pool of participants in the Prison Housing Advice and Beyond the Gate programmes. As such, the Prison Peers Project cannot be assessed independently; it is, however, reasonable to analyse it as a subset of the Prison Housing Advice and Beyond the Gate programmes.

### Stage 1

In stage 1 the direct impact of each of Housing Rights' prison programmes on the homelessness outcome for a participant is estimated, where a prisoner not being homeless means that they have attained a long-term sustainable housing solution. A reasonable definition that a prisoner has a long-term sustainable housing solution might be that they have a stable housing solution 12 months after release from prison. This time period is in line with previous analysis on homelessness and recidivism.<sup>2</sup>

The expected impact of involvement in a Housing Rights programme on homelessness outcomes is the impact it has on the probability that a participant obtains a housing solution (denoted as **P** in Figure 3 below). This impact can be estimated using a methodology known as discrete choice modelling. This method requires data both on prisoners that were part of a programme and on prisoners that were not part of a programme, as well as information on housing outcomes of each and their other characteristics. This data is needed on an individual basis.

Once the data is obtained, it can be analysed using a discrete choice model to give the effect of the programme on the expected probability that a participant obtains a sustainable housing solution. However, the key issue here in the context of this work is having that data over the period where it is considered a sustainable housing solution has been secured.

### Stage 2

Stage 2 estimates the impact that having a sustainable housing solution has on the probability of reoffence, one of the major costs of homelessness. This could be considered a secondary impact of the support provided by the programme

This probability can again be estimated using discrete choice modelling. If data is collected on the characteristics of homeless and non-homeless ex-prisoners, this can be used to estimate the subsequent impact of having a sustainable housing solution on reoffence. Discrete choice modelling has already been used for this type of analysis by MoJ<sup>3</sup>. This study found that ex-prisoners that were homeless or in temporary accommodation were almost twice as likely to reoffend after one year than those who had sustainable housing solutions.

Once an estimate is reached of the likelihood of each outcome shown in Figure 3, this can be combined with information on the cost of each outcome. In terms of the direct impact, research commissioned by Housing Rights<sup>4</sup>, and various other studies, can be used to estimate the yearly cost to the taxpayer of an individual being homeless. For example, a report by Homeless Link estimated that homelessness cost the government £26,000 per person, of which was a potential £1,668 arising from the cost of reoffence.

There are some impacts in this framework where there are gaps in evidence. We could not locate any studies on the link between homelessness status of released prisoners and employment status, so it is not currently possible to produce a monetary estimate for the indirect impacts Housing Rights actions might have on participants employment status.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, K, Poyser, J, Hopkins, K (2012 b). Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Survey. Ministry of Justice Research

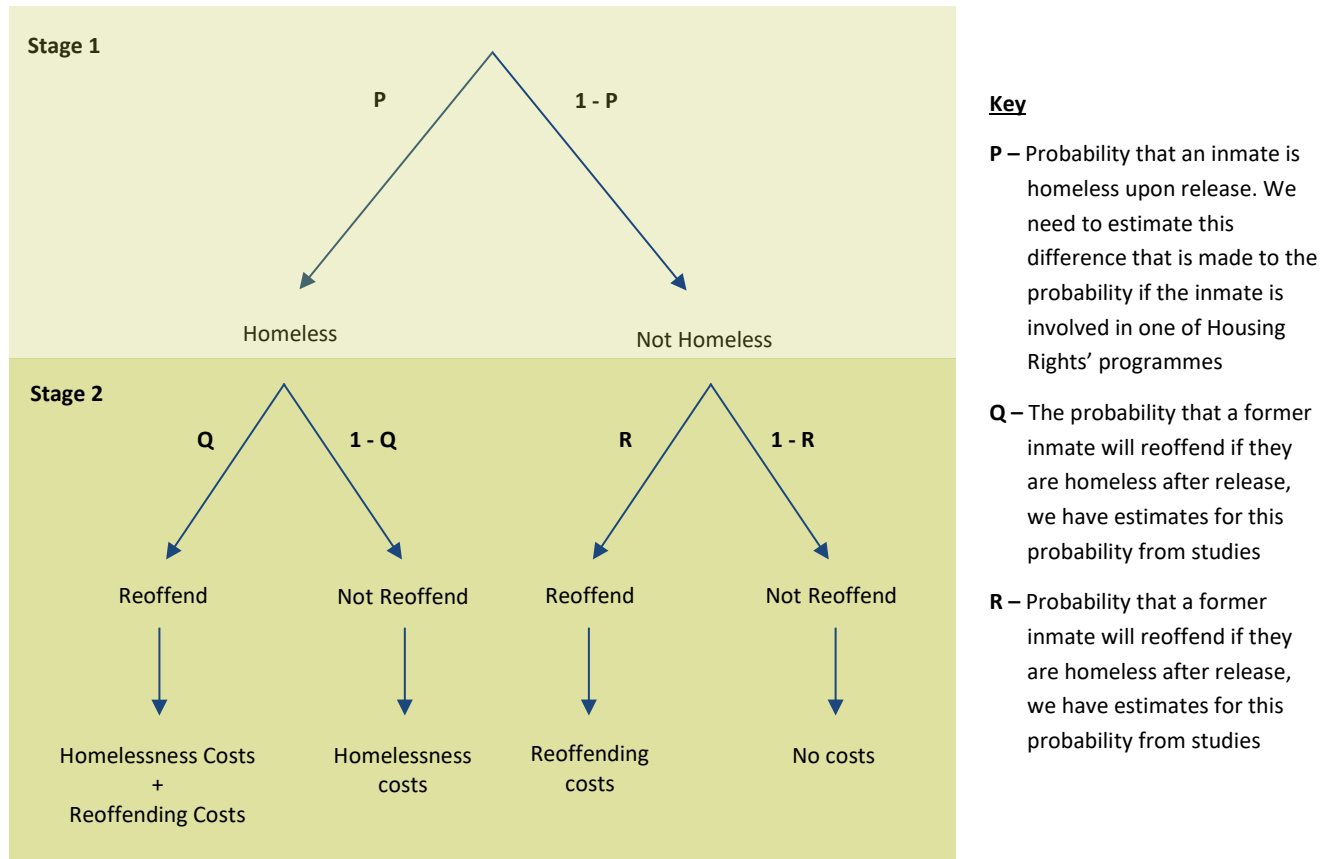
<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Justice, 'The factors associated with proven re-offending following release from prison: findings from Waves 1 to 3 of SPCR', 2013

<sup>4</sup> Fiona Boyle Associates, 'Calculating the cost of homelessness in Northern Ireland?', 2015



Likewise, there is no widely agreed methodology to assign a monetary value to participant wellbeing. Both factors should still be considered/recognised, although they may only be reflected in a qualitative sense.

**Figure 3. Cost Benefit Analysis Framework**



## Data Issues

The data sources used in Stage 2 of the cost benefit analysis framework depends on whether Housing Rights can access reoffending data that is held by the Northern Ireland justice department. If Housing Rights are allowed access, the analysis can use primary data on reoffending rates enabling estimates to be tailored to the specific nature of unemployment and re-offending in Northern Ireland. If access is not possible then secondary estimates based on studies from England and Wales could be used. Stage 1 of the framework relies firstly on having housing outcome data for participants in one of Housing Rights’ programmes (the treatment group). Secondly, the framework relies on having data on a control group; individuals who would meet the conditions to be a part of Housing Rights’ programme but did not receive treatments. Here we encounter three important data issues:

### 1. No data is currently collected by the Government regarding prisoner housing outcomes

Although Housing Rights collects some data for the housing outcomes of its programme participants. at present it is our understanding (informed with discussions with the Northern Ireland Department of Justice) that no data on Northern Ireland prisoners’ housing outcomes post release is collected. It is our understanding that the Northern Ireland Prison Service plans to launch a 5-year programme to collect longitudinal data on a wide array of prisoner outcomes. However, in our discussions it has been indicated that housing outcomes are not currently intended to be an outcome that will be tracked through this longitudinal research. Housing outcome data for prisoners in England, Scotland and Wales is collected, though prisoners in these areas might not be a suitable control group for Northern Ireland prisoners.

### 2. Issues finding a suitable control group

As outlined above no data is collected on Northern Ireland prisoners’ housing outcomes post release. This means that it would also not be possible to collect data for a control group of prisoners from Northern Ireland who were not a part of

Housing Rights programmes. Although housing outcome data for prisoners in England, Scotland and Wales is collected, prisoners in these areas might not be a suitable control group for Northern Ireland prisoners.

Housing Rights does not randomly select its participants from amongst the prison population; prisoners with the highest risk of being homeless upon exiting prison are selected to partake in Housing Rights prison programmes. This means it would not be possible to select a control group randomly from amongst the general prison population, or use general statistics on the probability that prisoners in Ireland will become homeless upon exiting prison, since the general population are not comparable to the high homelessness risk prisoners supported by Housing Rights programmes. So, assuming it would be possible to develop a database on housing outcome data for supported prisoners, ideally it would then require additional 'characteristic' data for the wider prisoner population to develop a comparable group against Housing Rights programme participants. One of the principle characteristics would need to consider the risk of homelessness upon release.

### 3. Housing Rights Data

Housing Rights collects housing outcome data immediately post release for its Prisons Housing Advice programme, and post release, 3 months and 6 months after release for the Beyond the Gate Programme. Therefore, the current Housing Rights tracking system measures the short-term housing outcomes post release. However, it is our understanding that that this isn't captured for the whole beneficiary population. As stated in the Theory of Change, the important outcome of Housing Rights programmes which supports economic impacts are their effect on the probability that participants will find long-term sustainable housing solutions. A reasonable measure of this would be to record housing outcomes at the 1-year post release mark. This time period is in line with previous analysis on homelessness and recidivism.<sup>5</sup> We recognise that as a small charity, it is very difficult and resource intensive for Housing Rights to track housing outcome data from programme participants post release, certainly it gets more difficult the longer after release. Fundamentally, it also requires the beneficiaries to partake in any post-release tracking – something that is not acceptable to many.

If it is not possible to record housing outcomes 1-year post release it would be necessary to alter the cost benefit analysis framework, adding an assumption on how securing short-term housing solutions for prisoners affects the probability prisoners will secure long-term sustainable housing solutions. An estimate could be established by using housing outcome data for prisoners in England, Scotland and Wales to assess how being in housing at time  $t$  (for example, six months) affects the probability of being in housing at time  $t + 1$  (for example, twelve months). However, performing this kind of study would face selection bias issues, since prisoners are not randomly assigned to short-term housing solutions after release, those who secure short-term housing solutions likely have qualities which make it more likely that they will secure long-term housing solutions as well.

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, K, Poyser, J, Hopkins, K (2012 b). Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Survey. *Ministry of Justice Research*

## 5. Cost Benefit Analysis Feasibility

As demonstrated in the last section, there are two issues which make a full cost benefit analysis unfeasible. Firstly, there is the issue that Housing Rights does not capture data on the long-term housing solutions of its programme participants. Secondly, the data to construct a control group for the programme does not exist. For a cost benefit analysis to be possible, both of these issues must be resolved.

Below we explore some possible actions that might be taken to make a full CBA of Housing Rights' programmes feasible:

### Assess the indirect impact of Housing Rights' programmes: **unfeasible**

An option we have explored was to assess the potential indirect impacts of Housing Rights' programmes on re-offence rates. Re-offence data is collected for all NI prisoners, including those on Housing Rights programmes. We considered it might be feasible to assess the difference in probability of re-offence between the general prison population and Housing Rights' participants. However, this runs into two major issues. Firstly, as discussed in the last section, Housing Rights' programme participants are not comparable to the general prison population. Secondly, prisoners are generally on multiple programmes which affect probability of reoffending, alongside other outcomes such as addiction, employment etc. Singling out the specific impact of Housing Rights' programmes on the probability of reoffending is therefore fraught with difficulty in terms of separating out the impact that could be attributable to the programme.

### Collect data for a control group: **likely unfeasible**

Aside from the lack of data on long-term housing outcomes for beneficiaries from the services of Housing Rights' programmes, an additional obstacle to conducting cost benefit analysis is the absence of housing outcome data for prisoners outside of Housing Rights' programmes. A potential solution might be investigating the possibility of Housing Rights constructing and collecting the data for its own control group. Perhaps it might be arranged that Housing Rights could collect housing outcome data for a pool of prisoners who nearly qualified for Housing Rights programmes but did not receive treatment, and therefore are comparable to Housing Rights' programme participants in their risk of being homeless post release. Understandably this option may not be feasible, as it involves collecting data from prisoners who are not participants of Housing Rights' programmes and the charity therefore has even less 'leverage/influence' over that individual. A more likely solution for this would involve discussing with the NI Prison Service the variables of data that are currently collected on prisoners more widely, and whether this could include data on housing.

### Collaborate with the Government: **unknown feasibility, requires further investigation**

Given that the Northern Ireland Prisons Services is seeking proof of value for money on Housing Rights prison programmes, and an important obstacle to producing cost benefit analysis is the absence of housing outcome data provided by the NI Government, there is a potential case to be made that Housing Rights could discuss options for housing outcome data to be collected for the wider prison population with the NI Prison Service. In the longer term it may be possible for Housing Rights to influence future NI prison services data collection initiatives to collect housing outcome data. It is important to stress that whilst the absence of such data is a problem, the lack of this same data for Housing Rights' programmes is also a problem and one that the charity are in control of. Whilst both sets of data are needed in the long run, focussing on collecting data for programme participants, if that data has some intrinsic use for the charity, may be meaningful a first course of action. Firstly, this course of action solves one of the two main issues preventing a robust economic analysis being conducted, and secondly having this data available at charity-level may allow Housing Rights to put forward a stronger case when collaborating with, and trying to influence, Government in any future data collection endeavours.

### Collect more comprehensive outcome data for Housing Rights Programme participants: **likely unfeasible**

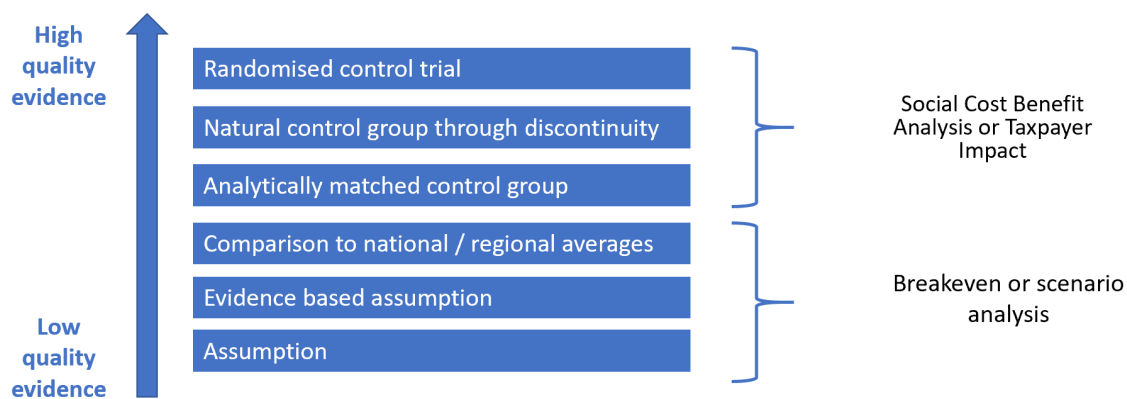
As discussed in the last section, the important outcome of Housing Rights programmes which generates economic impacts are their effect on the probability that participants will find long-term sustainable housing solutions. A reasonable measure of this would be to record housing outcomes at the 1-year post release mark. It is very difficult and resource intensive for Housing Rights to collect outcome data from programme participants post release, and it gets more difficult the longer after release data collection is required. Ultimately, any longitudinal tracking needs the beneficiary accepting involvement. This difficulty is heightened when dealing with an ex-prisoner population. Investing resources into improving the collection of housing outcomes data for programme participants would be useful in the

long-term for the charity, allowing it to better demonstrate the outcomes of the programme. However, we are aware of considerable resourcing issues that would need to be overcome. From a robust economic analysis perspective, this data would ultimately need to be accompanied by responding data for former inmates who did not participate in Housing Rights' programmes.

### Alternatives to Cost Benefit Analysis

Figure 4 below demonstrates the relationship between evidence quality and the feasible level of analysis. At present the evidence quality is not in the top three levels, because as discussed control group data for Housing Rights' programmes do not exist, this makes social cost benefit analysis infeasible. In addition, since no data on housing outcome of former inmates is captured by the Government there is no data available on national averages for ex-inmate long-term housing solution; if there were, it could not work as a comparison for the long-term housing solutions for Housing Rights' clients since Housing Rights does not capture this long-term data, and works with high risk-of-homelessness clients which would not be comparable to national averages.

**Figure 4. Matching the approach to the quality of available evidence**



Using evidence-based assumption to perform breakeven scenario analysis is a possibility. Referring to the cost benefit analysis framework, shown below, there are two stages in the framework. As discussed earlier in the cost benefit analysis framework section, the data necessary for stage two of the analysis has already been undertaken through previous longitudinal studies. However, it is important to reiterate that this analysis was undertaken on the ex-prisoner population in England and Wales and does not cover Northern Ireland. The implicit assumption that would need to be applied is that similar patterns are followed in Northern Ireland. It was stage one – estimating the impact of Housing Rights' programmes on clients' probability securing long-term housing solutions (1-P), which proved infeasible with the quality of evidence available.

However, it would be possible to perform a breakeven analysis by estimating the minimum impact which Housing Rights must have on its clients' probability of securing long-term housing solutions in order to break even in social cost benefits. This figure could provide some insight into whether Housing Rights provides value for money. For example, if Housing Rights programme only needed to, on average, increase the probability of its clients securing long-term housing solutions by 0.5% that would provide a case for the value for money of Housing Rights' programmes. Though as stated earlier, this framework does not contain non-quantifiable impacts, such as the impact on clients' wellbeing of securing long-term housing solution and increased probability clients securing employment, which must be reflected qualitatively.

Key data sources that could support such a scenario or breakeven analysis include:

- Ministry of Justice, 'The factors associated with proven re-offending following release from prison: findings from Waves 1 to 3 of SPCR', 2013
  - This MoJ study uses discrete choice modelling econometric analysis to estimate the impact of homelessness on the probability of re-offense, and also provides estimates for the costs to the criminal justice system in the event of re-offense. This study found that ex-prisoners that were homeless or in temporary accommodation were almost twice as likely to reoffend after one year than

those who had sustainable housing solutions. This study provides the figures used for Q, R and re-offense costs used stage two of the cost benefit analysis framework.

- Fiona Boyle Associates, 'Calculating the cost of homelessness in Northern Ireland?', 2015
  - Research commissioned by Housing Rights to estimate the yearly cost to the taxpayer of an individual being homeless in NI. This should be cross compared with the results of other studies.

## 6. Conclusion

In this report we have reviewed the feasibility of completing a cost-benefit analysis for Housing Rights' Housing Advice in Prisons project.

Overall, we find that there is insufficient evidence available to support a full economic cost-benefit analysis of the project for two key reasons:

- We can find no source of data on housing outcomes for prisoners in Northern Ireland not involved in the Housing Advice in Prisons programme to act as a control group or benchmark to compare outcomes against.
- Housing Rights gathers data for the first six months after release but does not follow-up over a longer time period due to the costs and practical difficulties in capturing this data. This follow-up also does not necessarily encapsulate all beneficiaries. This means that there would be significant uncertainty in any economic assessment of their impact due to a lack of evidence for how long outcomes persist.

### Implications

There are several potential economic impacts that could be quantified if Housing Rights are able to strengthen the evidence base, for example: taxpayer savings from reduced housing service costs, reduced costs of future re-offending and increased tax revenue from improved employment outcomes.

If Housing Rights are keen to do this, they should consider the following options for further developing the evidence base:

- Collecting evidence for a control group themselves: this is likely to be expensive and challenging as they would need to identify appropriate individuals who are not part of their programme and gather data on a regular basis to track outcomes.
- Collaborate with Northern Irish government to develop evidence for a control group: this would require the Northern Ireland Prison Service to start routinely gathering data on housing outcomes for prisoners when they are released, potentially in line with evidence captured in England and Wales. This administrative data could then be used to construct a control group to compare Housing Rights' outcomes against.

In the meantime, Housing Rights should consider improving the feasibility of capturing longer term outcomes for their participants to demonstrate the persistence of their intervention. They could also consider the development of some indicative scenarios for the scale of potential benefits from the programme based on evidence from England and Wales.