

Property and money

How much property is someone allowed to keep in prison?

Prisoners are usually allowed to keep about six cubic feet of property (two large boxes) plus one outsize item, such as a sound system. A small number of prisons allow people serving long sentences to keep pet birds – at prisons where this applies, a bird cage is also allowed.

Are there any other restrictions on what they can keep?

The rules vary from prison to prison, and there may well be some items, like certain types of radios or glass picture frames, which are prohibited.

What if they have more than the permitted amount or a prohibited item with them when they go in?

If a prisoner has with them items they cannot keep in their cell, or more than they are allowed, the surplus is placed in a sealed bag for storage. The bag is sealed in front of the prisoner who will be asked to sign to confirm what is in the bag and that it was sealed in their presence. It will be returned on release.

My relative was wearing a valuable watch. Will s/he be allowed to keep it?

Restrictions on property are on volume rather than value, although some prisons may not permit prisoners to keep very expensive items. If they are allowed to keep it, they have to bear in mind that the Prison Service will not accept responsibility for loss or damage of property unless it can be proved that the prison was negligent. If an item is valuable but not essential, it may be wise for the prisoner to make arrangements for it to be handed over to you during a visit. If they do keep it, or it is stored for them, they should tell the prison staff about the item so the details are correctly recorded on the property sheet.

Will the prison provide things like changes of clothes and toiletries?

Yes. If there is no requirement to wear a prison uniform, and the prisoner does not have suitable clothes, the prison is obliged to provide enough clean clothes in reasonable condition to keep them warm and healthy. This includes underwear and socks. Basic toiletries such as soap and toothpaste are also provided – many prisons provide them as part of a reception pack. It will also be possible to buy more from the prison shop, or “canteen”.

How can a prisoner get money to buy things at the canteen?

Prisoners taking part in work or education are paid a weekly amount which varies according to the job or course they are doing. This, and any money that they had with them on arrival in prison, and money sent in by family or friends, is held by the prison in a personal account. The amount they can actually spend weekly varies according to whether they are convicted or on remand, and whether they are on a basic, standard or enhanced regime. The standard weekly spending allowance for a convicted prisoner from April 2003 is £12.50.

How do I send money to someone in prison?

send a cheque or a postal order and write the prisoner's name and prison number on the back. Most establishments have their own bank accounts and ask for cheques/POs to be made payable either to “HM Prison Service” or “The Governor”. It's best to phone the prison before hand and check which system they use. The money will be transferred into the person's private account. The amount of spending money a prisoner is allowed each week depends on whether they are on remand or convicted, and the privilege level they are on.

Can they buy anything they need from the canteen?

What is available from the canteen will vary from prison to prison, but generally things

like sweets, stationery, phone cards, cigarettes and toiletries will be on sale. It may be possible to ask for specific items to be ordered. It is often possible for prisoners to buy things from approved mail order companies. In some prisons, mail order is the only permitted way to obtain some items.

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If a prisoner is transferred to another prison, will their money and property go with them?

Yes. If they have property stored for them by the prison, they may be shown the sealed bag and asked to sign to confirm that the seal has not been tampered with. Their private cash account is transferred to the new prison usually within a day or so.

Can a prisoner get compensation if any of their property is lost?

If property that is held in store by the prison gets lost during reception procedures or during transfer the Prison Service will be liable to pay compensation provided that the items lost are listed on the inventory the prisoner signed on arrival. Prisoners are not usually compensated for the loss of things that are kept in their cells, unless the prisoner was moved from their cell without being given a chance to move their things, or if the cell was not properly sealed during temporary release or if the prisoner absconds.

How is a claim made if this happens?

The prisoner will have to make the claim themselves, to the Governor first through the internal complaints system. If they are not satisfied with the response, they can appeal.

Can a prisoner send money out of his prison account to a relative or friend outside?

There is no regulation saying they cannot, or any restriction on the amount, but the Governor will want to satisfy him/herself that the person receiving it is a bona fide relative or partner and that the money is not being sent to drug dealers etc. A letter to the Governor from the recipient outside confirming who they are is usually enough.