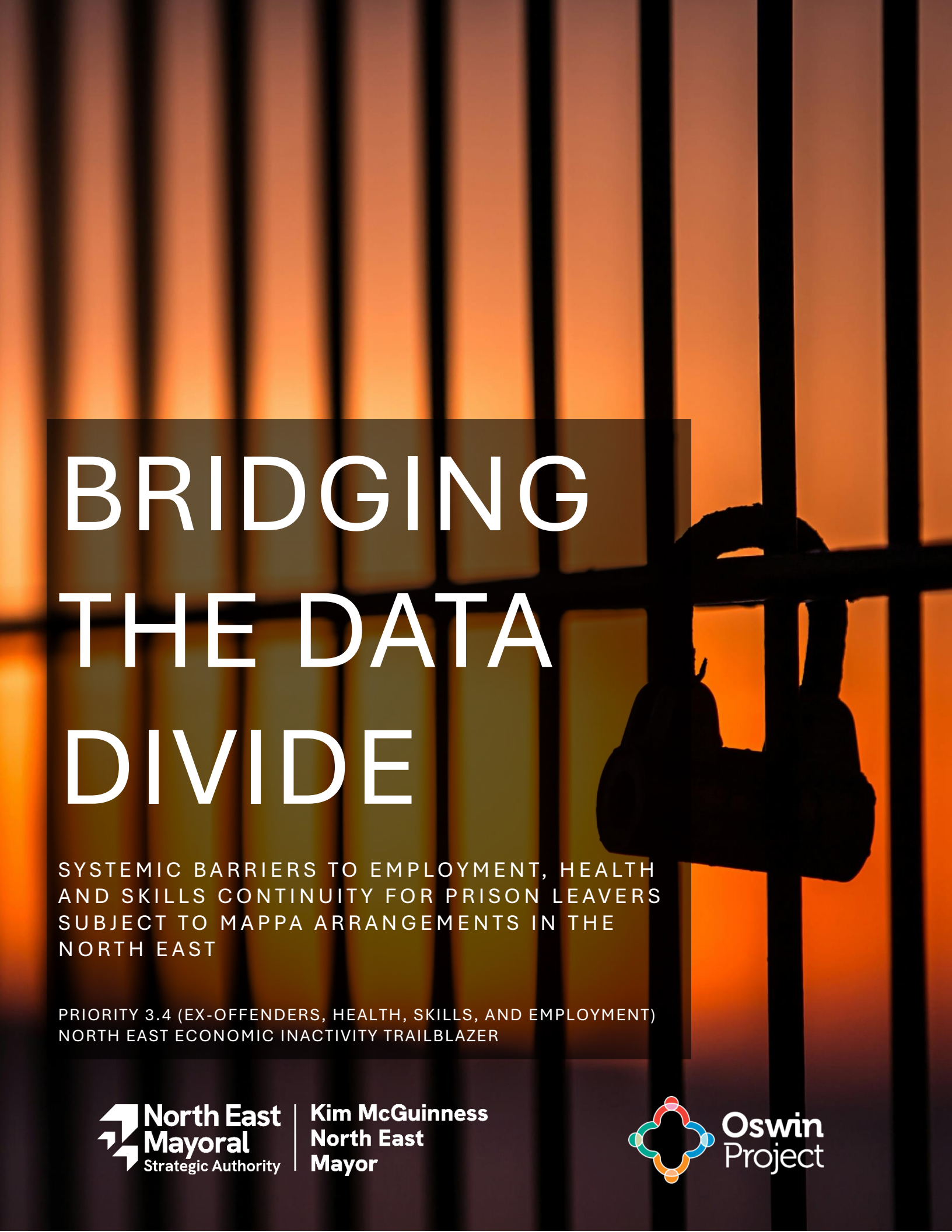

BRIDGING THE DATA DIVIDE

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH AND SKILLS CONTINUITY FOR PRISON LEAVERS SUBJECT TO MAPPA ARRANGEMENTS IN THE NORTH EAST

PRIORITY 3.4 (EX-OFFENDERS, HEALTH, SKILLS, AND EMPLOYMENT)
NORTH EAST ECONOMIC INACTIVITY TRAILBLAZER

North East Mayoral Strategic Authority | Kim McGuinness North East Mayor

Oswin Project

ABOUT

Authors: John Stubbins, James Stoddard, Lauren Marshall

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DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer

Priority 3.4: Ex-Offenders, Health, Skills and Employment

The authors wish to thank the police, probation, and prison professionals who gave their time and expertise to this project, the third-sector organisations who shared their experiences of working alongside the statutory system, and the people subject to MAPPA supervision who trusted us with their stories. This report exists because of their willingness to speak openly about a system that affects their lives. We hope it does justice to what they told us.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme (2024–2026) is a national test-and-learn initiative. In the North East, Priority 3.4 focuses on ex-offenders, a group disproportionately affected by barriers to employment, housing, health continuity, and information transfer that drive both economic inactivity and reoffending cycles. This three-month research project, led by The Oswin Project, mapped those systemic barriers and explored practical ways to address them. The Oswin Project brings unique credibility to this work: 70% of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system, and its model has achieved a 96% non-reoffending rate in the first year for low to high-risk service users. This compares starkly with the MOJ publication, January 2026 reporting a national average of 43.8% for the January to March 2024 cohort. That track record represents an estimated relative saving of £1,480,000 to £2,000,000 for a given cohort of 100 prison leavers who work with the Oswin Project every year.

WHAT WE DID

Using reflexive thematic analysis and a pragmatic realist approach, the study brought together evidence from:

- 18 prison leavers, including five detailed follow-up interviews with individuals under MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) supervision
- Two employer confidence workshops with 24 participants from social care, housing, and customer service sectors
- One dedicated third-sector engagement day with 15 organisations
- Interviews with HMP Durham staff (Head of Education, Skills and Work; Prison Employment Lead)
- In-depth discussions with two senior MAPPA professionals: Deborah Alderson (retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police) and Winton Keenen (retired Chief Constable, Northumbria Police)

KEY FINDINGS

Why Vital Information Gets Lost When People Leave Prison

Information about prison leavers, including qualifications, health records, appointment details, and employment history, exists within statutory systems such as the DPS (digital prison system) and ETP (Education Training Portfolio). But it is routinely fragmented, inaccessible, or arrives in unusable formats at the point of release. This is not primarily a technology problem. It is a relational and cultural one. High remand turnover at HMP Durham (approximately 450 releases per month), short intervention windows, and post-Transforming Rehabilitation fragmentation all compound the issue. Even when documents are partially in place, people leave custody without the trusted relationships needed to use that information effectively.

Prison Leavers Face a 'Cliff-Edge' on Release

Across all 18 interviews, participants described the first weeks after release as profoundly overwhelming. Housing instability was the single most cited practical barrier, cited by 15 of 18 participants. Documentation gaps affected 14 of 18. Anxiety, boredom, and isolation were identified as key triggers for potential recall by 12 of 18. Without meaningful daily structure, and without trusted human connection, even people who had secured their ID and bank account while still in custody found themselves in a state of prolonged instability.

Third-Sector Support is the Critical Protective Factor

Seventeen of 18 participants credited third-sector relational support as a key protective factor in their resettlement, contrasting its flexibility and trust with the more bureaucratic, time-limited nature of statutory supervision. Senior MAPPA professionals confirmed that statutory services are "demand-rich and capacity-poor," and that third-sector Information Bridge Workers could provide the relational scaffolding that statutory services cannot replicate at scale.

Employers Are Open, Not Hostile

Employer risk perception was moderate rather than averse: the mean risk score across workshops was 3.0 out of 5, with the most common descriptors being "Trusting," "Opportunity," and "Second chances." When using a traffic light system to grade Employers readiness to hire someone who had a criminal offence, they consistently indicated they would move from an undecided "amber" to a "yes" when clear rehabilitation evidence and third-sector mentoring support were available. The primary barrier is not prejudice but the absence of accessible tools and structured support.

The case for inclusion of Third-Sector Organisations in the MAPPA process.

Senior MAPPA professionals described statutory teams as "demand-rich and capacity-poor." They lack the time and resources to gather detailed, day-to-day knowledge of prison leavers' lives, needs and gaps. In contrast, third-sector organisations hold deep relational insight into the individuals they support, insight that prison leavers themselves repeatedly described as essential for successful resettlement. Despite this expertise in housing, employment, mental health and desistance, third-sector organisations are currently excluded from MAPPA structures and meetings. Participants strongly agreed that giving vetted third-sector organisations a pathway to contribute to the MAPPA process, with appropriate safeguards and information-sharing protocols would be common sense. It would strengthen both risk management and rehabilitation outcomes without compromising public protection.

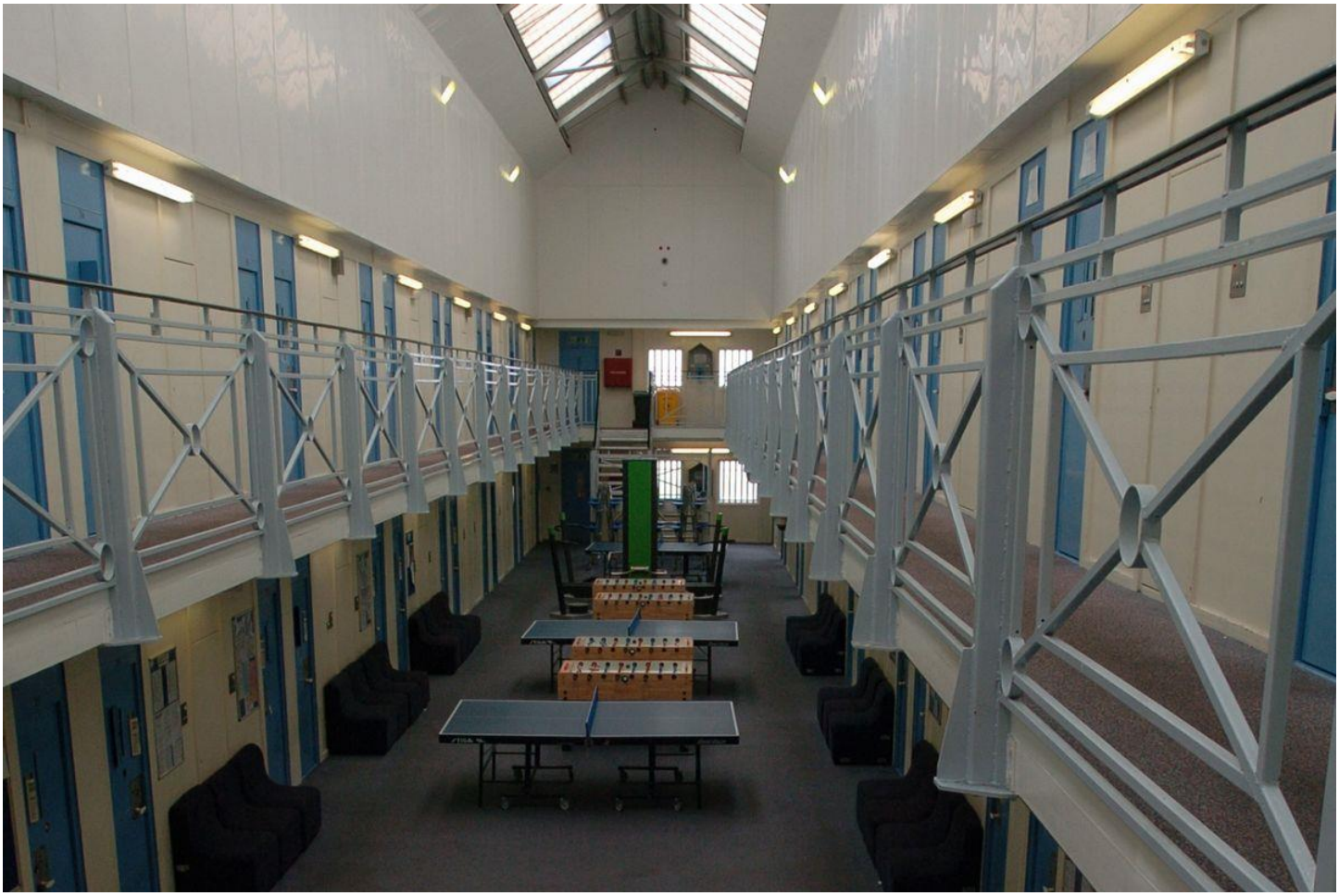

Figure 1 HMP Northumberland

WHAT WE CO-DESIGNED

Three practical tools emerged from the project, developed with stakeholders rather than imposed on them:

- The Prisoner Passport: a hybrid physical folder combining redacted DPS data with an enhanced ETP-style document, containing verified certificates, health summaries, medication lists, appointment calendars, a disclosure letter template, and a local services map. Designed to be handed over on release day and carried by the individual.
- The Employer Confidence Handbook: a set of practical one-page guides on disclosure timing, GDPR-compliant handling, risk-assessment templates, and direct third-sector support contacts, co-produced by employers during the workshops.
- The Information Bridge Worker model: a proposed staffing model embedding lived-experience workers at prison reception and release hubs, supporting passport completion, disclosure coaching, and warm handovers into community services.
- None of these tools were implemented or piloted during the three-month test-and-learn phase; the work remained at the co-design and consultation stage. They are ready for development, implementation and evaluation in a funded second phase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Actions (2026)

- Mandate a standard physical Prisoner Passport as discharge documentation at every prison, beginning with HMP Durham and HMP Northumberland. Contents should include verified certificates, health summaries, medication lists, appointment calendars, a local services map, and a disclosure letter template. HMPPS should lead a formal design and consultation phase.
- Pilot third-sector Information Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland's reception and release hubs. These workers (four individuals suggested) would support passport completion, disclosure coaching, and warm handovers to community services. The Oswin Project is currently active within HMP Northumberland and is well placed to lead this.
- Adopt and distribute the co-produced Employer Confidence Handbook across all North East probation areas and employer networks. This directly addresses the moderate risk perception identified in workshops (mean 3.0/5) and provides practical tools to convert 'grey-area' cases into employment opportunities.
- Explore formal observer or contributor status for vetted third-sector Bridge Workers in MAPPA Level 2 and Level 3 meetings on a case-by-case basis, using existing information-sharing frameworks.

Year Two Investment Recommendations

- Scale the Prisoner Passport and Bridge Worker model to 60–80 high-risk leavers, including a higher proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals. This would require four additional Bridge Worker posts at approximately £50,000 per post (including on-costs), a total investment of £200,000. Using the Oswin Project's 96% non-reoffending rate as a benchmark, the projected public-value saving is estimated at £2.1m–£2.9m for this cohort alone.
- Formalise third-sector observer and contributor status in MAPPA Level 2/3 meetings through GDPR-compliant Memoranda of Understanding between North East MSA, Northumbria Police, probation services, HMPPS, and vetted third-sector organisations.
- Commission an independent cost-benefit evaluation of the Oswin Project's wrap-around mentoring model, using the 96% non-reoffending rate as a baseline and comparing it against the £37,000–£50,000 annual societal cost per reoffender.

Longer-Term Policy Recommendations

- Develop differentiated inspection frameworks for remand prisons such as HMP Durham. Applying the same performance standards as longer-stay training prisons creates unrealistic expectations and diverts resources away from the rapid, relationship-led support that high-turnover populations need.
- Reinstate embedded pre-release planning: community probation officers and third-sector workers should be placed inside prisons 12 weeks before release to conduct joint planning and co-produce resettlement documentation. This directly restores a proven practice lost after the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms.
- Fund Scandinavian-style 'import teams': community health, employment, and housing providers entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release to begin building the relational scaffolding that prison leavers consistently identified as the most important protective factor against recall.

Figure 2 HMP Deerbolt

Figure 3 Cafe 16 at HMP Northumberland

CONCLUSION

This test-and-learn project provides a robust evidence base for human-centred, third-sector-led approaches that complement rather than compete with statutory systems. Employment is the strongest protective factor against reoffending, yet only 17% of people leaving prison secure work within a year and almost 50% are returned to custody; the data divide, and the lack of relational support, are primary reasons why.

The solution is not a new system. It is better coordination of existing ones, anchored in trusted relationships. The Oswin Project's track record, and the breadth of stakeholder support gathered during this project, positions the North East to lead a national conversation on what effective, evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice.

This work also directly supports the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's (2025) emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and improved through-the-gate support and aligns with North East MSA's devolution priorities around economic inclusion and upstream prevention.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT

THIS RESEARCH HAS IDENTIFIED A CLEAR RATIONAL FOR INVESTMENT IN BETTER SUPPORT FOR PRISONERS SUBJECT TO MAPPA ARRANGEMENTS ON RELEASE. THREE PRIORITY AREAS ARE IDENTIFIED EACH WITH A CLEAR PATHWAY TO DELIVER.

There is clear evidence that 'business as usual' will not address the systemic issues with reoffending. Pathways to employment have been shown to reduce the rates of reoffending. However, for an ex-offender to find employment a number of other support mechanisms need to be in place. This research has sought to explore how these routes, and the information required to facilitate them, can be developed with the ex-offender at the heart.

17%
Find work within 6 weeks of release

29.9%
North East reoffending average

96%
Oswin non-reoffending rate

£50k
Annual societal cost per reoffender

As part of this project, three co-designed tools were created: a Prisoner Passport, an Information Bridge Worker, and an Employer Confidence Handbook. These solutions emerged from three months of research across five distinct stakeholder groups. They are not innovative ideas. They restore and adapt what demonstrably worked before the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reform and what continues to work in Scandinavian systems where recidivism rates are around half of UK averages.

This research demonstrates that a £200,000 investment, as recommended in this report, would save between £2.1 million and £2.9 million annually in costs associated with reoffending: each person who reoffends costs the public on average £50,000 per year, not once, but repeatedly, as long as the cycle continues.

This is not an argument for further research or further consultation. The evidence is sufficient. The stakeholder consensus is clear. What is now required is action.

1

A Proven, Urgent Failure

The data divide is relational and technical and its costs are measurable

2

Three Ready Solutions

Co-designed tools grounded in proven practice, ready to implement now

3

An Overwhelming Investment Case

£200k invested returns an estimated £2.1m–£2.9m in the first year

PILLAR 1: A PROVEN, URGENT AND COSTLY FAILURE

THE DATA DIVIDE IS RELATIONAL, NOT TECHNICAL

Every year in England and Wales, approximately 55,000 people are released from prison. In the North East, where unemployment and economic inactivity have over decades persistently exceeded the national average, only 17 per cent of individuals find work within six weeks of release. The regional reoffending rate regularly fluctuates above the national average. These are not inevitable statistics. They are the predictable outcome of a specific, identifiable failure: the collapse of the relational infrastructure and data sharing mechanisms that once connected prison to community.

It is important to be clear about where that failure sits, because not all information sharing between criminal justice agencies is broken. For the purposes of risk management and public protection, well-established systems exist and function effectively. The police use a range of tools, including ViSOR (the Violent and Sex Offender Register), the Police National Computer and many forces use RMS tools like NicheRMS to track and share intelligence on high-risk individuals. Probation services operate NDelius, a national case management system that records licence conditions, appointments, and supervision activity. OASys (the Offender Assessment System) provides structured risk and needs assessments that follow an individual from custody into community supervision. MAPPA brings police, probation, and prison services together through regular multi-agency meetings at three escalating levels, with clear protocols for sharing risk-relevant information. These systems were designed to keep the public safe, and within that remit they broadly work. The gap is not in risk management. It is in everything else.

The problem is that each of these systems was built to serve the needs of its own agency, not to support the person moving between them. Prison health services may record clinical information in SystmOne, a system widely used in custodial settings, but that record does not automatically transfer to a community GP. Probation can see licence conditions and risk flags on NDelius but may have no visibility of the qualifications someone completed in custody or the employment placement they held inside. The police hold intelligence relevant to public protection but have no mechanism for sharing positive information, such as sustained engagement with rehabilitative programmes, with employers or housing providers. Before 2014, probation trusts ran embedded resettlement teams inside prisons. Probation officers built relationships in the weeks before release, assembled physical resettlement packs, and coordinated multi-agency handovers. The Transforming Rehabilitation reforms broke that infrastructure apart: probation was split between the National Probation Service and privately-run Community Rehabilitation Companies, the embedded pre-release role was largely lost, and the coordinated handover became nobody's specific responsibility. The system was partially reunified in 2021, but the relational infrastructure that once made information flow has not been rebuilt. Beyond the statutory agencies, third-sector organisations and employers sit entirely outside all of these systems. They receive referrals with limited context, often learning about someone's needs only when the person discloses them directly.

Information about prison leavers, their qualifications, health records, employment history and upcoming appointments, exists within statutory systems. Digital record keeping in prison is distributed between three tools, the new DPS, virtual campus and NOMIS. These record qualifications, risk assessments, work history and other key data throughout a person's time in custody. The Education Training Portfolio (ETP) is a physical folder containing certificates, designed to travel with the individual. Both systems have significant practical limitations. Information from DPS or NOMIS cannot be downloaded or printed by the prisoner and becomes completely inaccessible the moment they leave the prison estate. Community services and employers cannot access it. The ETP folder is often under-resourced and incomplete: it may contain some certificates but typically lacks health summaries, medication information, appointment details or practical information about local services. Staff told us that the folder had once been a more comprehensive tool, but funding cuts had progressively reduced its scope.

CENTRAL FINDING

The data divide is not a technology problem. The information exists. The systems exist. The failure is relational and cultural: the absence of trusted human connections to make that information usable when it is most crucial — the day someone walks out of prison.

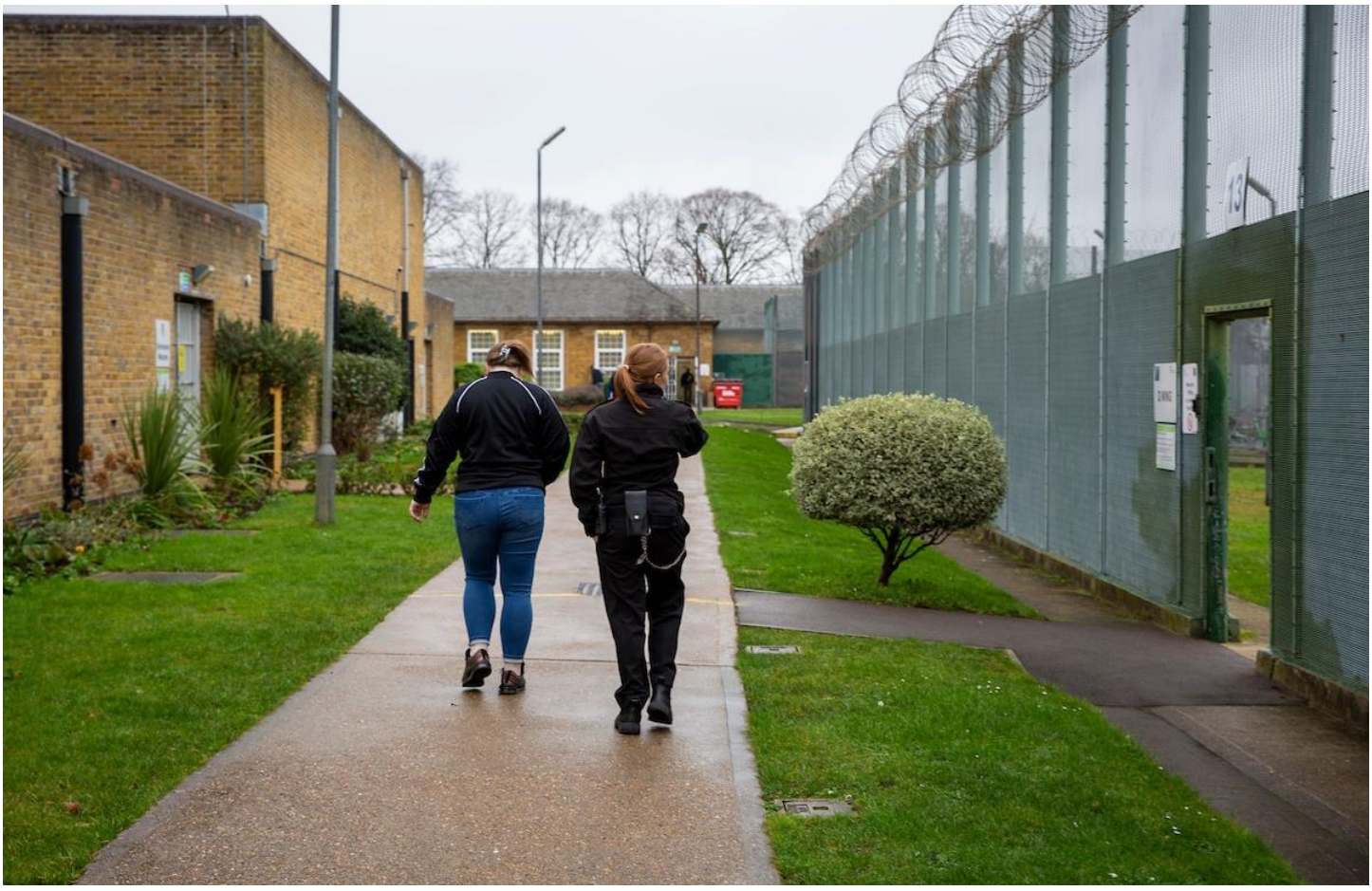

Figure 4 HMP Low Newton

Figure 5 HMP Durham

CASE STUDY: THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM AT HMP DURHAM

HMP Durham is a remand prison with extremely high throughput, approximately 450 releases and transfers per month. Many are at very short notice: bail decisions, sentence completions and transfer orders that give staff little or no time to organise documentation, let alone build the kind of pre-release relationships that might make a difference.

> We transfer and release about 450 men a month. We don't have them here long.

HMP Durham, Head of Education, Skills and Work

The high remand volumes and short stays mean that most individuals leaving HMP Durham have had no sustained engagement with education, skills or employment workers. Staff are candid about the gap between what the systems are designed to do and what happens in practice: data that should travel with a person becomes a closed archive the moment the prison gate opens.

FIVE SPECIFIC BREAKDOWN POINTS IN THE RELEASE PROCESS

Research with HMP Durham staff identified five points where information is most commonly lost or made unusable:

- Digital lock-out: DPS records are effectively archived the moment someone is released. There is no mechanism for community services to access them, or for the individual to retrieve their own data — even though that data may represent months or years of documented qualifications, work experience and risk-relevant history. A contributing factor is institutional risk aversion around data protection: prisons are cautious about sharing information across system boundaries, and without clear governance frameworks, that caution defaults to non-sharing. The Prisoner Passport process directly addresses this by establishing a consent-based, co-produced record that the individual owns and controls, removing the data protection barrier by placing the person, not the institution, at the centre of information transfer.
- The documentation gap: The ETP folder rarely contains health information, medication lists, GP registration details or appointment calendars. People leave knowing they have appointments but not when, where or with whom. They know they are on medication but may not know the name, dosage or where to collect it in the community.
- Short-stay settings: Remand prisoners may spend only days or weeks in a prison before transfer or release, making meaningful pre-release preparation structurally impossible under current arrangements.
- Inspection mismatch: HMP Durham staff described being inspected against the same performance standards as longer-stay training prisons — a structural misalignment that diverts resources toward meeting targets designed for a different kind of establishment, at the expense of the rapid, relationship-led work that a high-turnover remand population requires.
- The cold handover: Even when documents are partially in place, there is typically no supported introduction to community services. People arrive at probation appointments, GP surgeries and Jobcentres as strangers, with no previous contact established, at precisely the moment when they are most vulnerable and most likely to disengage.

THE HEALTHCARE GAP AND DRUG-RELATED RECALL

HMP Durham staff identified drug misuse as the single greatest challenge in their establishment. The volume of people passing through compounds an already difficult clinical situation: stabilising someone on a medication programme takes time that the remand environment simply does not allow for. People are frequently released mid-programme, before medication regimes have stabilised and before community healthcare services have been notified, let alone engaged.

The seven-to-fourteen-day gap in prescription continuity in the community creates an immediate crisis for individuals who may have only recently achieved stability. This is not a problem unique to Durham. It is a structural consequence of designing healthcare handovers around administrative processes rather than clinical needs. The Prisoner Passport addresses this directly by including a medication summary on headed prison health paper, with the repeat prescription sent ahead to a community pharmacy before release. This simple intervention requires only coordination and planning, not new systems.

RISK, OWNERSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

RISK, OWNERSHIP, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from the research was a pattern in how risk is constructed and communicated across agencies. Put simply: the organisation that holds primary responsibility for managing an individual is the organisation that expresses the most risk about them. This is not a minor procedural observation. It shapes every aspect of how people leaving prison are understood, discussed, and supported, or not supported, across the system.

HOW RISK TRAVELS THROUGH THE SYSTEM

When someone is in custody, the prison holds responsibility. Risk is framed through the lens of institutional security: compliance with regime, adjudications, behaviour on the wing, engagement with sentence planning. That framing serves a purpose inside the prison, but it creates a particular narrative about the individual. By the time that narrative is passed to probation at the point of release, it has already been shaped by the priorities and anxieties of the institution that produced it. Positive information, such as sustained engagement with employment programmes, completion of qualifications, or months of stable behaviour, tends to be recorded but not emphasised. It sits in the system as data rather than as part of the story that travels with the person.

Once an individual is released, responsibility transfers to probation. At that point, probation becomes the agency that will be scrutinised if something goes wrong. And this is where the dynamic becomes most visible. The probation officer is now the professional whose name is on the file. If the individual commits a Serious Further Offence, it is the probation officer's risk assessment, their decision-making, their record-keeping that will be examined in a Serious Case Review. The weight of that accountability is enormous, and it produces a rational but corrosive effect: risk is expressed upwards. Assessments tend towards caution. Restrictions are maintained for longer than may be proportionate. Positive progress is acknowledged but treated with wariness rather than used as evidence for relaxing conditions. For the individual, this can feel like being punished for someone else's fear of being blamed.

The police occupy a different position again. Their role in MAPPA is primarily about public protection, intelligence, and enforcement. They are less likely to "own" the day-to-day management of the person, but they carry the institutional memory of the offence, sometimes across decades, and they bring that memory into multi-agency discussions. Police contributions to MAPPA meetings tend to be framed around what someone has done rather than what they are doing now. This is not negligence: it is a function of the police role. But it means that in a room where probation is already expressing caution because of accountability, and the prison has passed on a narrative shaped by security concerns, there is often no voice in the room whose primary function is to present the case for progress.

WHAT SENIOR MAPPA PROFESSIONALS TOLD US

Two senior figures with direct MAPPA experience spoke at length with our research team: Deborah Alderson, former Chief Inspector of Northumbria Police and co-developer of the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) model, and Winton Keenen, former Chief Constable of Northumbria Police and current Oswin Project trustee.

Both described MAPPA as "demand-rich and capacity-poor." The volume of cases, particularly at Levels 2 and 3, means that meetings are often dominated by administrative risk management and public protection compliance, leaving little space for the rehabilitation-focused planning that would support long-term desistance. The system, in Keenen's words, is better designed to manage risk than to reduce it. Keenen described the bureaucracy surrounding MAPPA as functioning as both shield and sword: it protects agencies from scrutiny when things go wrong, but it also prevents the kind of relational, responsive decision-making that effective rehabilitation requires. The accountability framework is designed to catch under-assessment of risk. It has no equivalent mechanism for catching over-assessment. Nobody has ever faced a Serious Case Review for being too restrictive.

> How people apply the statutory framework can be entirely different according to people's values. It's that culture and mindset element.

Deborah Alderson, retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police

Alderson drew on her experience developing the MATAC model to demonstrate that a perpetrator-focused, multi-agency approach to reducing risk can produce dramatically better outcomes than traditional risk management alone. The MATAC model, which embedded outreach workers to contact perpetrators and help them access appropriate agencies, achieved sustained reoffending reductions of between 65 and 72 per cent across all offence types tracked, maintained consistently since 2014. Alderson's central argument applies equally to MAPPA: risk reduction is not achieved by surveillance alone, but by engagement and trusted relationships with workers known to the individual. The statutory framework contains, in her words, significant wiggle room for this kind of approach. The question is whether agencies choose to use it, and the professional incentives overwhelmingly push them not to, because the consequences of being wrong in one direction are far greater than the consequences of being wrong in the other.

RISK AS INSTITUTIONAL PRODUCT

What we heard from professionals and from people under supervision confirmed a deeper pattern: risk is not a fixed, objective property of an individual. It is a product of institutional relationships, accountability structures, and professional culture. The same person can be described in markedly different terms depending on which agency is speaking and what consequences that agency faces if something goes wrong. In custody, the prison may describe someone as a model prisoner: compliant, engaged, low-risk within the institution. Three weeks later, the same person's probation officer may describe them as high-risk in the community, not because anything has changed about the individual, but because the accountability has shifted. The prison no longer carries the consequence. Probation does.

WHAT PEOPLE UNDER SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

For the individuals subject to MAPPA, this pattern has real consequences. Several participants described a frustrating disconnect between their own experience of progress and the system's willingness to recognise it. Participant E had not missed a single appointment, had complied with every condition, and had followed every rule at his hostel for eight weeks. He was still on a 7pm to 9pm curfew. Participant D questioned the coherence of a system that classified him as the highest risk to the public while simultaneously preparing to release him onto the streets unsupported. These are not complaints about being supervised. They are complaints about a system in which the assessment of risk has become detached from the reality of the person being assessed, driven instead by the institutional needs of the agency doing the assessing.

THE COST OF OVER-CAUTION

None of this is to suggest that risk management is unnecessary. MAPPA exists for good reason, and the professionals we spoke to were clear-eyed about the genuine dangers some individuals pose. The problem is not that risk is assessed. The problem is that risk is the only lens through which the system consistently views people, and that the incentive structures surrounding risk assessment push relentlessly in one direction. A system that only counts the cost of under-caution, and never counts the cost of over-caution, will always tend towards restriction. And restriction, beyond a certain point, does not reduce risk. It increases it, by cutting people off from the employment, relationships, and stability that the evidence consistently shows are the strongest protective factors against reoffending. Alderson's MATAC results demonstrate this concretely: a model built on engagement and relationship rather than surveillance alone achieved reductions in reoffending that traditional risk management has never matched.

CENTRAL FINDING

The criminal justice system is better designed to manage institutions exposure to risk, protecting agencies from blame, than to manage individual risk, reducing the likelihood that a specific person will reoffend. Risk assessment follows accountability rather than following the person: whichever agency currently "owns" an individual expresses the most risk about them, not because the person has changed but because the consequences of getting it wrong have shifted.

WHAT PRISON LEAVERS TOLD US

We spoke in depth with 18 people who had recently left prison. Five of those conversations were detailed follow-up interviews, conducted several weeks after initial contact, with individuals under MAPPA supervision. Their accounts form the empirical heart of this report and directly inform every recommendation we make.

THE CLIFF-EDGE

Everyone we interviewed described the first weeks after release as overwhelming. The word that came up most often, from people who had never met each other and who described very different circumstances was 'battle'. The structured environment of custody, for all its problems, is replaced by a sudden and total freedom that many people find destabilising rather than liberating. The routines, the meals, the enforced timetable, even the social world of the prison, all disappear at once. What replaces them is an immediate encounter with a set of bureaucratic systems, housing, benefits, health, probation that each operate in their own silo and share almost no information with each other.

- 15 of 18 participants identified housing instability as their primary barrier. Without a fixed address, people cannot register with a GP, receive benefit payments, access employment support or demonstrate licence compliance. Housing insecurity cascades into every other area.
- 14 of 18 left prison with incomplete usable records, forcing them to repeatedly explain their situation to every new service they encountered This was described as ‘exhausting’ and often lead to disengagement from services that might otherwise have given valuable support.
- 12 of 18 identified boredom, isolation and the absence of meaningful daily structure as the key triggers for potential recall, not drugs, not old associates, but emptiness.
- 17 of 18 credited third-sector relational support as the single most significant factor in their resettlement, contrasting its flexibility and continuity with the more bureaucratic, time-limited nature of statutory supervision.

> The only thing that I haven't got is my housing. That's it. That's no change.

Participant B — who had used his time in a Category D prison to organise his bank account, ID and driving licence before release, yet remained without stable housing months later

THE EMOTIONAL WEIGHT OF MAPPA SUPERVISION

For those on MAPPA or strict licence conditions, the weight of supervision added its own psychological dimension. People described probation as simultaneously supportive and burdensome. The structure was valued: appointments gave shape to otherwise shapeless days. But the feeling of being constantly monitored, even when fully compliant, was demoralising and several participants said this was a source of continual stress that made it harder, not easier, to focus on building a stable life.

> I'm still on a 7 till 9 curfew, after eight weeks of being in the community now, where I haven't been a minute late for anything. I've abided by all the rules. It's just getting a bit frustrating, because I'm trying to get my life back.

Participant E

The system, in their experience, was calibrated to detect failure but not to recognise success. Perfect compliance, week after week, produced no change in the conditions of their license. Several participants noted that the emotional effort of constantly proving compliance, while managing practical barriers and limited support created a continual sense of battling the system rather than being helped by it.

THE STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION OF THE THIRD SECTOR FROM MAPPA

All 15 organisations at the dedicated third-sector engagement day reported experiencing the same information gaps as the clients they support. They receive prison leavers with incomplete documentation, no formal link to MAPPA processes and no clear information about risk levels, license conditions or specific support needs. They are expected to provide intensive, effective support without the contextual information that would make it effective.

At times Third-sector organisations only discover they are working with a MAPPA-managed individual when something goes wrong: a missed appointment triggers a recall, or a housing incident leads to police involvement. Only then does importance of the missing information about license conditions and MAPPA status appear to become relevant — but it arrives too late to prevent the crisis.

> We do exceptional work with ex-offenders and have proven success in reducing reoffending, yet we are not part of the reporting bodies at MAPPA meetings.

Third-sector engagement day participant

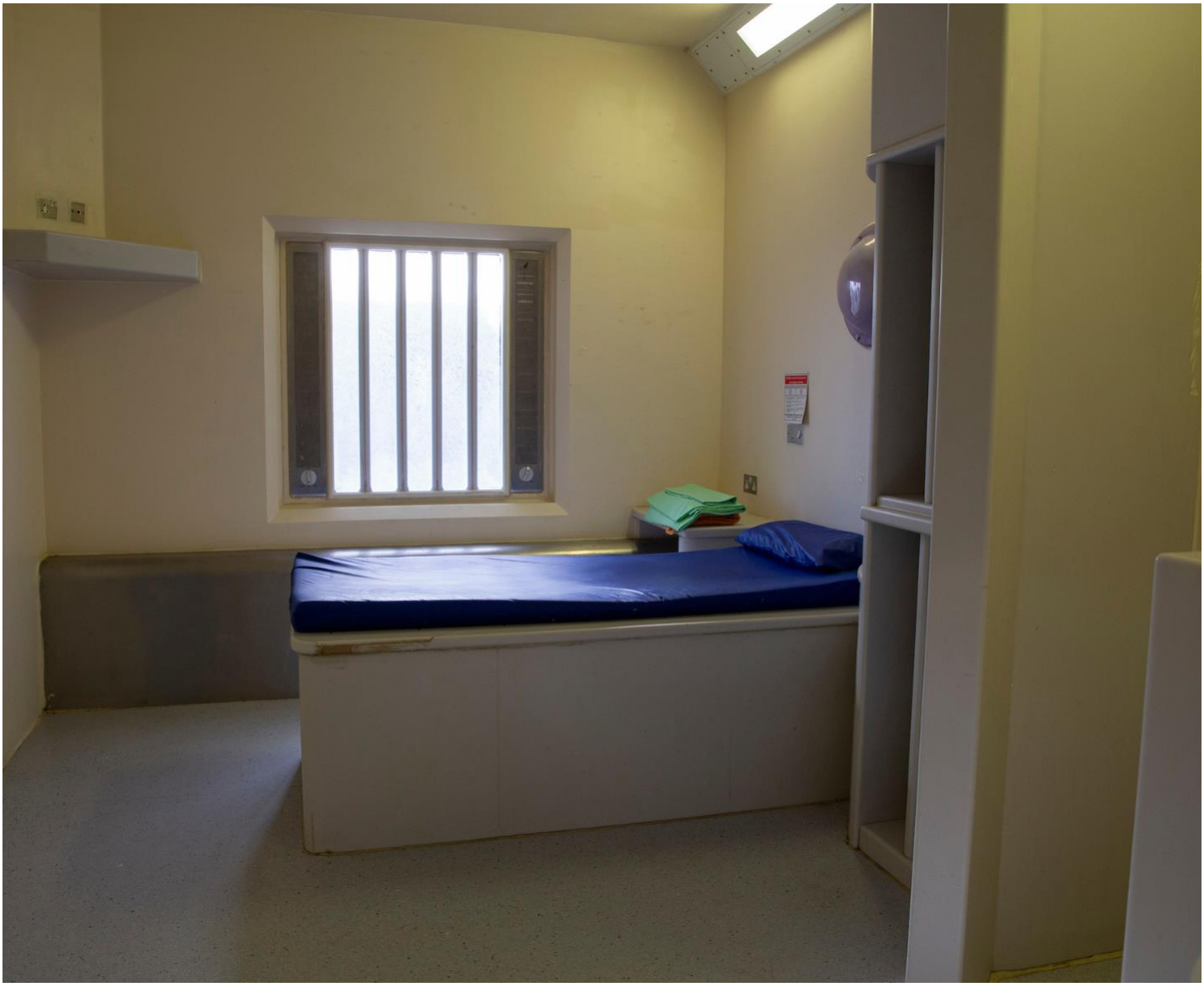

Figure 6 Prison Healthcare

A STRUCTURAL PARADOX

MAPPA is designed to manage risk but by excluding the organisations most capable of reducing that risk from the information they require results in the current arrangements increasing it. Senior professionals including former Chief Constable Winton Keenen and former Chief Inspector Deborah Alderson — confirmed that the barriers to third-sector involvement are cultural and procedural, not statutory. The 'wiggle room' already exists within the framework. What is missing is the willingness to use it.

PILLAR 2: THREE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS, READY NOW

CO-DESIGNED WITH STAKEHOLDERS, GROUNDED IN PROVEN PRACTICE

None of the three tools developed during this project are original ideas. They restore and adapt practices that demonstrably worked before the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, and that continue to work in Scandinavian systems. They are also directly informed by international best practice: the Norwegian import model, Swedish continuous probation contact and Danish employment broker approaches all informed the design process, and the detailed evidence base is set out in Appendix C. What is new is the scope and design, shaped directly by what 18 participants consistently told us was missing when they walked out of the prison gate.

TOOL 1: THE PRISONER PASSPORT

A simple physical format was chosen deliberately. HMP Durham staff confirmed that many people leave without a working mobile phone, meaning digital solutions are not adequate for the immediate release period. What people need, in the words of one staff member, is 'something physical, like maps', a document they can hold, refer to and hand across a desk. Something that demonstrates clearly, that they are prepared and that someone has taken their resettlement seriously.

The Prisoner Passport, titled "Change of Plan," is a practical A4 workbook designed to travel with a person from custody into the community. The workbook is part reference guide, part planner, and part personal record, structured so that the individual fills it in themselves, with support from staff, before they leave. It covers:

- A release to-do list and appointment planner bringing every post-release meeting into a single page
- Probation officer details alongside a directory of every North East probation office
- Housing arrangements for night one, with contacts for council housing and homelessness teams across the region and national services including Shelter, Crisis, and Changing Lives
- A detailed healthcare section including step-by-step GP registration guidance, an explicit statement that no ID or proof of address is required, a table explaining which NHS service to use for which need, emergency dental contacts, sexual health services, and a quick-reference box of key numbers
- An identification guide setting out options from CitizenCard (£18) to provisional driving licence (£34) to passport (£88.50), with step-by-step instructions for each
- A money and bank accounts section identifying specific providers that accept people with no fixed address or limited ID, including HSBC's No Fixed Abode scheme, app-based accounts, and the North East Credit Union
- Employment history, training and qualifications, volunteering experience, and a skills self-assessment, functioning as a portable CV that can be taken directly to an employer or Jobcentre adviser

- A volunteering section that specifically names prison-based roles such as Samaritans Listener, Shannon Trust Mentor, and Violence Reduction Peer Mentor, and explains how to present them as transferable skills
- A disclosure statement section with structured guidance on when disclosure is legally required, how to build a statement using the three-part model recommended by Nacro and Unlock, and practical advice on delivering it face to face
- A curated list of employers known to recruit people with convictions, including Timpsons, DHL, Greggs, Co-op, and Halfords, alongside specialist recruitment charities
- Recovery support services across the North East with phone numbers and addresses
- Free debt advice services and guidance on the most common types of debt people face after release
- A support network page, a goals section, and contact details for key charities and support organisations across the region

The design principle throughout is that no single section is sufficient on its own. What makes the passport effective is the combination: practical information, personal records, and forward planning in a single document that the individual owns and controls. Everything in it was identified by participants as something they either did not have on release or had to spend weeks piecing together from scratch.

USING THE PASSPORT

The proposed usage process begins twelve weeks before release, with a joint review of DPS and ETP records by the prison employment lead and, where an Information Bridge Worker is in place, by the third-sector worker already known to the individual. At eight weeks pre-release, the individual contributes their own input on disclosure preferences, key contacts, and specific support needs. On release day, the completed passport leaves the prison in the possession of its owner.

That is the ideal. The passport was designed, however, for the reality that this process frequently does not happen. Short sentences, unplanned releases, staffing shortages, and the sheer volume of people moving through local prisons, mean that individuals can leave custody with little or no structured pre-release preparation. The workbook accounts for this. It's plain language, step-by-step instructions, and pre-populated reference information mean that a person can pick it up on the day of release, or even after release, and begin filling it in without professional support. If the 12-week process happens, the passport is significantly richer. If it does not, the passport still functions.

The passport was also designed to be organisation neutral. It is not tied to the Oswin Project, to any single referral pathway, or to any third sector provider. Any professional or volunteer supporting a prison leaver can use it as a starting point: a way of understanding what someone already has in place, identifying what is missing, and building a relationship around practical next steps rather than starting from a blank page. The aim was to create something that belongs to the individual, not to the service.

CENTRAL FINDING

14 of 18 participants left prison without complete, usable records. The Prisoner Passport directly addresses this. No new systems are required, only coordination, printing resource and a commitment to handing the document to every person on release day.

TOOL 2: THE INFORMATION BRIDGE WORKER MODEL

The Passport works best when it is produced with someone, not for them. That is the role of the Information Bridge Worker. To be most effective this role should be undertaken by the third sector: a lived-experience worker embedded in the prison's reception and release hub, who builds a relationship with the individual in the weeks before release, helps complete the Passport, provides disclosure coaching and makes a warm personal introduction to community services on release day.

The Bridge Worker model is envisaged as a third-sector role, commissioned and managed by organisations such as the Oswin Project with the relational infrastructure, lived-experience workforce and existing prison relationships required to make it effective. It is a restoration of something that existed before 2014, when embedded probation officers performed a similar function. The key difference is that Bridge Workers bring lived experience of the criminal justice system, creating a specific kind of trust and credibility that statutory workers, however skilled and well-intentioned, cannot always replicate. A Bridge Worker who has been through the gate themselves understands, in a way that cannot be taught from an instruction manual, what the person in front of them is facing.

- Relational continuity: Bridge Workers begin building a relationship inside the prison, in the weeks before release, then accompany the individual into the community, attending appointments, helping them present their disclosure letter to an employer, ensuring the Passport contact sheet is used rather than filed away.
- MAPPA integration: For individuals under MAPPA supervision, Bridge Workers would participate in pre-release planning meetings under formal observer status, ensuring the individual's support needs are represented alongside their risk profile, and receiving, in return, the licence condition information necessary to provide safe, effective post-release support.
- The 'Inside Job' variant: training and employing people nearing release to help produce Passports for others creating employment pathways, building administrative and organisational skills that transfer directly to the labour market. This would reduce the unit cost of Passport production and generate a self-sustaining community of practice in the prison. This initiative deserves serious development.

> I think it's the support now. I'm getting a lot of support off Junction 42.

Participant A — citing third-sector relational support as the most significant factor in their stability, above probation contact, GP support and housing

Seventeen of the eighteen people we interviewed credited third-sector relational support as a key protective factor in their resettlement. The consistency of this finding across very different individuals, in very different circumstances, with very different conviction histories, is striking. People used diverse words and described different organisations, but the underlying experience were the same: a flexible, persistent, non-judgemental humane presence that statutory services, however well-intentioned, could not consistently provide.

TOOL 3: THE EMPLOYER CONFIDENCE HANDBOOK

Employer reluctance to hire people with convictions is one of the most significant — and, crucially, one of the most tractable barriers to economic inactivity among prison leavers. It is manageable because, as our research shows, the reluctance is not rooted in prejudice. It is rooted in uncertainty and the absence of practical support. We held an employers workshop with participants from large and small employers, social care, housing associations and customer service sectors, using realistic fictional scenarios and a RAG (Red Amber Green) coding approach to capture actual decision-making rather than abstract attitudes.

What employers think

The headline finding was striking. When asked 'How risky is it for you to hire an ex-offender?', the mean response across all participants was exactly 3.0 out of 5. No participant scored 1 or 5. The distribution clustered around the middle — employers acknowledging real uncertainty while remaining open. The word-cloud exercise told a similar story: dominant descriptors were 'Trusting', 'Opportunity' and 'Second chances'. Risk-aware language was present but almost always qualified by positive sentiment.

WHAT EMPLOYERS TOLD US

The mean risk score was 3.0 out of 5. The most common descriptors were 'Trusting', 'Opportunity' and 'Second chances'. Employers are not hostile. They are uncertain and under-supported.

What moves employers from amber to green

Two factors consistently moved employers from hesitation to willingness. First, clear rehabilitation evidence: time elapsed since the offence, demonstrated behaviour change, completed programmes and strong references. Second, third-sector support: the availability of a named contact who could answer questions, provide disclosure coaching and be a first call if concerns arose. Employers were consistently explicit that they did not want to manage licence conditions or become amateur risk assessors. They wanted a partner who would carry that responsibility beside them.

A case study exercise reinforced this. Employers were presented with three fictional individuals, each with a different offence history, set of circumstances, and level of support in place, and asked to discuss whether they would consider hiring them and what would need to be true for them to say yes. The conversations were striking for how quickly they moved past the nature of the offence and toward practical questions: how long ago did it happen, what has changed since, who is supporting this person, and what do I need to know versus what I do not need to know. The exercise demonstrated that most employers are not categorically opposed to hiring people with convictions. What stops them is uncertainty, and what resolves that uncertainty is not more information about the offence but more confidence in the support structure around the individual.

> This shows I don't need the full offence history. Just the bits that affect the job. That makes it much more manageable.

Employer workshop participant, during the probation role-play exercise

I trust him. She thinks he's marvellous.

Mark Bridgeman, North East employer, describing a permanent hire from The Oswin Project who now works full-time on his estate and cares for his elderly mother half a day a week – he has befriended her and maintains her house and garden rather than caring for her – that has very different connotations

THE CO-PRODUCED HANDBOOK

The Employer Confidence Handbook, titled "No, They Won't Nick the Stationery: 10 Things to Think About When Hiring People with Convictions," was not written in advance. It was built through the workshop exercises and group conversations about what information and support would make a difference to hiring decisions. Written specifically for small businesses without HR departments or in-house legal teams, it covers:

- The scale of criminal records in context: one in four working-age adults have some form of record, and more than half of all convictions are for summary motoring offences
- The commercial case for hiring, including evidence on retention, performance, and public attitudes
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in plain language: what "spent" and "unspent" mean, how long rehabilitation periods last, and which convictions can never become spent
- The four levels of DBS check, when each is required, and the fact that requesting a higher-level check than the role is eligible for is a criminal offence
- How to restructure an application process so that conviction questions come after interview rather than on page one
- A practical framework for handling disclosure: what to ask, what not to ask, how to respond to over-disclosure, and how to keep the conversation professional
- Risk assessment reframed as structured common sense, built around a single question: is this specific conviction relevant to this specific role?
- Employers' obligations under UK GDPR when processing criminal offence data, including storage, access, retention, and what to do if a colleague's conviction becomes known in the workplace
- Onboarding guidance covering licence conditions, tagging curfews, and accepting character references from probation officers or support workers where traditional references are unavailable
- A directory of organisations providing free employer support, including the New Futures Network, Nacro, Offploy, and Unlock
- Ready-to-use templates: a recruitment policy, a data handling policy, a blank risk assessment form, two worked examples showing how the form is completed in practice, and a manager's checklist covering every stage from pre-interview to post-hire

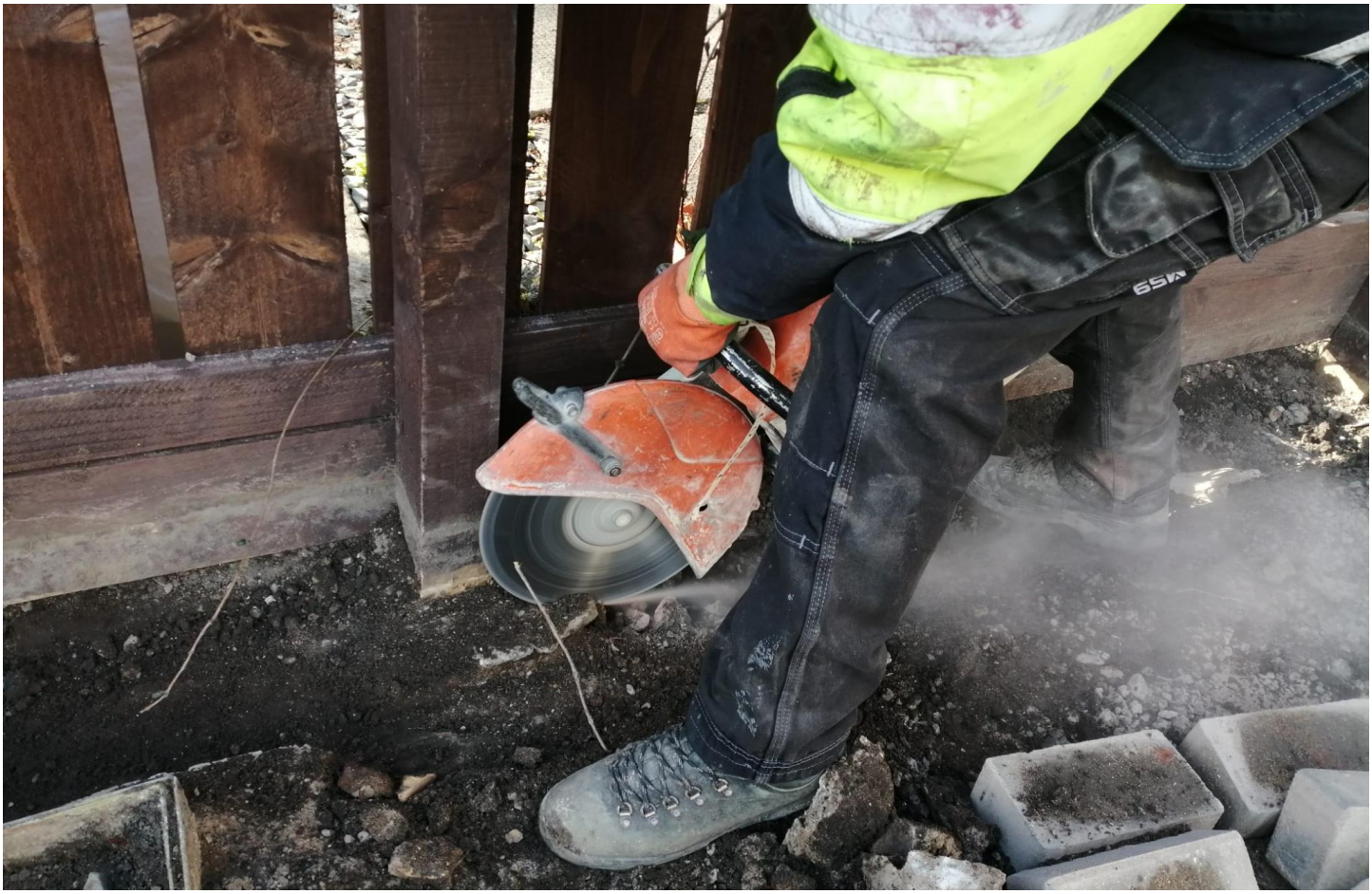

Figure 7 Inside & Out Team The Oswin Project

TWO PAGE LEAFLET

Alongside the handbook, a two-page quick guide titled "Hard-Working. Loyal. Hired." was produced as a standalone leaflet for employers who want the essentials without reading a full document. It covers:

- Key statistics on the scale of criminal records in the UK workforce and employer experience of hiring people with convictions
- The business case in four panels: lower recruitment costs, access to untapped talent, loyalty evidenced by employers including Timpson, Greene King, and Halfords, and available tax incentives
- A plain-language summary of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and what "spent" means in practice
- Five practical steps for getting started: reviewing application forms, training hiring managers, conducting individual risk assessments, partnering with specialist organisations, and considering a ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence) placement
- A jargon buster defining the key terms employers are most likely to encounter
- Contact details for the New Futures Network, Nacro, The Oswin Project, and Unlock
- The leaflet was designed to be left with employers after the confidence day or handed out at networking events, giving them enough to act on without requiring them to commit to the full handbook first.

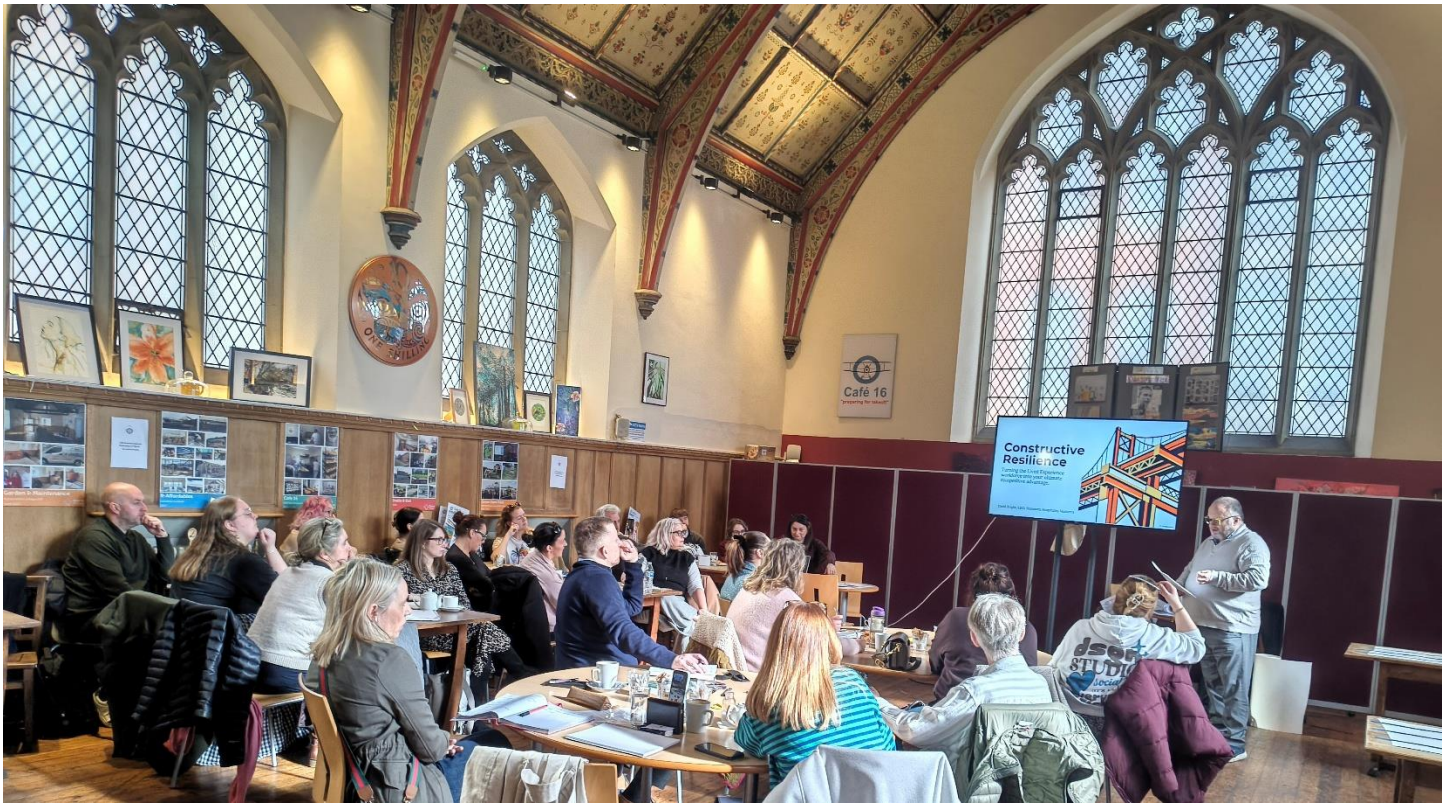

Figure 8 Third Sector Day March 2026

THE THIRD SECTOR DAY

A dedicated engagement day brought together voluntary and community organisations from across the North East. The structure mirrored the employer confidence day: facilitated group discussions exploring the organisations' experience of supporting prison leavers, the barriers they encounter, and what would need to change for them to do that work more effectively.

The central finding was a unanimous frustration with the exclusion of third-sector organisations from MAPPA processes. Every organisation at the event raised this without prompting. Voluntary organisations are routinely expected to provide intensive, relational support to people subject to MAPPA, but they have no formal role in the framework that governs those individuals' lives. They receive referrals without knowing the risk management plan. They cannot contribute what they know about someone's progress to the people making decisions about them. They may be unaware that a job they have found for someone falls within an exclusion zone, or that a session they have arranged conflicts with a supervision appointment. One participant put it directly:

"We do exceptional work with ex-offenders and have proven success in reducing reoffending, yet we are not part of the reporting bodies at MAPPA meetings."

This exclusion does not only frustrate the organisations involved. It actively weakens risk management. The relational trust that third-sector workers build with MAPPA-managed individuals is exactly the kind of intelligence that statutory agencies need but cannot generate through compliance-based supervision alone. It is currently being wasted. Several organisations described running parallel processes to statutory services, duplicating assessments and gathering information that had already been collected elsewhere but was not shared.

The discussions confirmed the case for the Information Bridge Worker role, which would provide a formal mechanism for voluntary organisations to contribute to MAPPA processes with appropriate vetting and information-sharing agreements.

THE THIRD SECTOR GUIDE

A nine-page guide titled "Bridging the Data Divide: What We Found, What MAPPA Is, and Why It Matters to Your Work" was produced as a companion document for voluntary organisations unfamiliar with MAPPA or new to working with prison leavers, it covers:

- The data divide: what it is, where it comes from, and why the 2014 Transforming Rehabilitation reforms made it worse
- What MAPPA is: the three levels, the three categories of offender, and what supervision means in practice for someone subject to it
- What MAPPA means for third-sector organisations: the constraints that people may be living under, why they may not be able to tell you about them, and the information vacuum that voluntary organisations currently operate in
- What senior MAPPA professionals told us about the system's structural problems, including capacity pressures, personality-driven inconsistencies, and the risk-averse culture that prioritises institutional protection over rehabilitation
- What people living under MAPPA supervision described: the weight of compliance, the frustration of restrictions that do not reflect progress, and the role that third-sector support plays in filling the gap that statutory supervision cannot
- What employers told us: that reluctance is real but not fixed, and that structured disclosure support and an ongoing third-sector contact are the two things most likely to move an employer from hesitation to yes

PILLAR 3: AN OVERWHELMING INVESTMENT CASE

THE FINANCIAL ARGUMENT AND THE NORTH EAST'S STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The financial case for a funded second phase rests on the Oswin Project's own track record, ninety-six per cent non-reoffending in the first year for low to high-risk service users, against a regional average of around 50 percent and on the well-established societal cost of each person who does reoffend. That cost is not a one-off: each recall, each reoffence, each prosecution draws on police, court, prison and community service budgets year after year, for as long as the cycle continues.

The return on a £200,000 investment

£200k	£2.1m–2.9m	£37–50k	10:1+
Year Two investment (4 Bridge Worker posts, including on-costs)	*projected saving for 60–80 high-risk prison leavers*	*annual societal cost per reoffender avoided*	*estimated return on investment*

Using the Oswin Project's non-reoffending rate as the benchmark, or even a conservative seventy per cent, across sixty to eighty high-risk individuals, the projected public saving exceeds £2 million in the first year alone. The net return, after the full cost of the investment, remains strongly positive even with pessimistic assumptions. The risk of not investing is equally measurable: each person who reoffends costs the public £37,000 to £50,000, not once, but repeatedly, year after year, as long as the cycle continues.

These figures draw on the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's (2025) economic analysis, which explicitly identifies the failure of current resettlement arrangements as a driver of reoffending and of the substantial human and economic costs that flow from it. They are not speculative projections. They are grounded in the Oswin Project's sustained track record over more than a 12 years of operation.

Why The Oswin Project is uniquely placed to lead this

The Oswin Project brings a combination of assets that no statutory or academic partner could replicate. Seventy per cent of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system, not as a diversity credential, but as the operational foundation of its effectiveness. That track record is unusual and significant.

- The Oswin Project already operates inside HMP Northumberland through a range of enterprises, a cafe, a gardens programme and a bike repair workshop providing real work experience, real responsibility and a real employment record that individuals can point to/talk about/show when they sit across from a potential employer after release.
- Existing relationships with HMP Northumberland, probation services, police and MAPPA leads gave the research team access and credibility that an academic or statutory team could not replicate.

- The first phase of this project built the multi-stakeholder network spanning fifteen third-sector organisations, employers, probation, police, HMPPS and two senior MAPPA professionals — that is essential for the second phase. That network cannot be bought. It was/has to be earned.
- The ethics protocols, data infrastructure and methodological approach developed the first phase are ready to deploy immediately. There is no setup cost for a second phase, only the cost of delivery.

The North East's strategic positioning

The North East has specific advantages that make it the right place to test and develop this model at scale. NORTH EAST MSA's devolution settlement creates both the political will and the convening power to bring statutory agencies, employers and the third sector around a shared agenda in a way that is harder to achieve at national level.
MAPPA caseloads in the region are among the highest per capita in the country, creating added pressure on statutory services and particular need for the third-sector capacity this project aims to build. Post-industrial economic decline has left large parts of the region with limited employment opportunities, principally in sectors accessible to people with criminal convictions — making the employer confidence work especially valuable in this area.

The Gauke Review calls for exactly the rehabilitation-focused, through-the-gate investment that this project has been developing. The DWP Trailblazer programme exists to test and scale what works. The evidence from this project, from the Scandinavian models and from pre-2014 probation practice, converges on the same set of answers. Year Two is how the North East turns that convergence into lasting change.

Figure 9 HMP Holme House

RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Actions — 2026

1. Deploy a standard Prisoner Passport at HMP Northumberland, HMP Durham, and HMP Deerbolt

- Three prisons, three distinct populations: Durham is high-turnover remand; Northumberland is a Category C training prison; Deerbolt is a newly recatagorised Category C.
- No new systems required: the passport uses information already held in DPS, ETP records, and prison healthcare systems.
- What is needed: coordination, printing resource, staff time to support completion before release, and a commitment to handing the document over on release day.
- Template to be finalised in consultation with staff at all three prisons and people with lived experience of the release process, ready for deployment before end of 2026.

2. Pilot four Information Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland

- The Oswin Project to lead, supported by NORTH EAST MSA and HMPPS.
- Independent evaluation built in from the outset.
- Pilot should run for 12 months with a minimum cohort of 30 high-risk individuals, including a meaningful proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals.
- Training and employing people nearing release to help produce Passports for others — should be developed combined with the staffed model.

3. Distribute the Employer Confidence Handbook across all North East probation areas and employer networks

- The Handbook is ready to use now. It requires no further development and no additional funding.
- Statutory and Third Sector bodies could incorporate it into standard employer engagement work.
- NORTH EAST MSA should promote it through its business networks, supply chain programmes and major employer contacts.

4. Develop a MAPPA information pathway for vetted third-sector partners on a case-by-case basis

- No new legislation is required. Senior MAPPA professionals have confirmed the 'wiggle room' exists within the existing framework.
- Police and probation leads to identify a small number of appropriate cases and pilot.
- Independent evaluation of the pilot should inform a decision on formalising the approach through a Memoranda of Understanding.

YEAR TWO INVESTMENT 2026 – 2027

1. Scale to 60–80 high-risk leavers, including a substantially higher proportion of MAPPA-managed individuals

- Four Bridge Worker posts at approximately £50,000 per post including on-costs = £200,000 total investment.
- Projected saving: £2.1m–£2.9m in the first year. The return on investment is not marginal it is overwhelming.
- Independent evaluation tracking reoffending rates, employment outcomes, housing stability and public service demand over 12 months.

2. Formalise third-sector contributor status in MAPPA

- GDPR-compliant Memoranda of Understanding between NORTH EAST MSA, Northumbria Police, probation services, HMPPS and vetted third-sector organisations.
- The Alderson MATAC model provides an existing and tested template for the governance framework required.
- Roles, responsibilities, information access and accountability structures to be clearly defined before formalisation.

3. Develop the 'Inside Job' model within HMP Northumberland

- Train and employ people nearing release to help produce Passports for others.
- Creates an employment pathway and builds administrative skills that transfer directly to the labour market.
- Reduces unit cost of Passport production and generates a self-sustaining community training in the prison.

LONGER-TERM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop differentiated inspection frameworks for remand prisons

- HMIP and Ofsted currently apply the same performance standards to HMP Durham as to longer-stay training prisons — creating impossible expectations and diverting resources from the rapid, relationship-led support remand populations need.
- Separate standards should incentivise outcomes remand facilities can realistically achieve timely Passport completion, supportive handovers, healthcare continuity at point of release.

2. Reinstate embedded pre-release planning

- Return to the pre-2014 practice of placing community probation officers and third-sector workers inside prisons 12 weeks before release.
- Begin at HMP Northumberland where the Oswin Project already has an established presence.
- 2014 practice was not abandoned because it stopped working. It was abandoned as a collateral consequence of structural reform. The evidence for its effectiveness is clear.

3. Fund Scandinavian-style import teams entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release

- Community health, employment and housing providers to co-produce resettlement documentation and begin building community relationships before release.
- Follows the Norwegian model, which achieves recidivism rates of 20–25% compared to England's typical rate of over 50%.
- The principle is not culturally specific to Norway. It is a practical, evidence-based investment in early relational continuity.

CONCLUSION

THE BOTTOM LINE

Employment is the strongest single protective factor against reoffending. Only 17 per cent of people leaving prison find work within six weeks. The data evidence is a primary reason why action is imperative. The solutions are known, practical and costed. The evidence base is robust, the stakeholder consensus is clear. The case for acting is overwhelming.

This three-month test-and-learn project has moved from mapping a problem to co-designing solutions, using evidence from five distinct stakeholder groups across three research strands, producing three practical tools. This has resulted in a clear consensus among statutory and third-sector partners on what must happen. That is a significant achievement over three months. It should herald a new beginning.

None of the three tools developed in first phase has been piloted. None has been independently evaluated. The Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the Employer Confidence Handbook are all proposals grounded in strong evidence and ready for implementation. But the evidence that will drive national policy change is the rigorously evaluated outcome data that DWP, HMPPS and NORTH EAST MSA need to make a compelling case for wider investment, that can only come from a funded second phase in which these tools are deployed and tested.

The solution is not a new system. It is better coordination of existing ones, anchored in trusted relationships. The Oswin Project's track record, and the breadth of stakeholder support gathered during this project, positions the North East to lead a national conversation on what effective, evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice. This work directly supports the Gauke Independent Sentencing Review's emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and aligns with NORTH EAST MSA's devolution priorities around economic inclusion and upstream prevention.
The evidence is sufficient. The tools are ready. The investment case is compelling. The question is whether the North East will have the perspicacity and courage to act on it.

The evidence is sufficient. The tools are ready. The investment case is compelling. The question is whether the North East will have the perspicacity and courage to act on it.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THE OSWIN PROJECT

The Oswin Project is a North East charity that supports people leaving prison to rebuild their lives through training, employment and most crucial mentoring which supports integration back into the community. Seventy per cent of its staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system. That is not incidental to its effectiveness, it is central to it.

The Project operates inside HMP Northumberland and in the community through a range of enterprises including a cafe, a gardens programme and a bike repair workshop. These are not token activities: they provide real work experience, real responsibility and a real employment record that individuals can talk about when they are interviewed by potential employers on release.

In the first year following release, 96 per cent of people the Oswin Project supports do not reoffend. The reoffending rate in the region can be as high as 50 per cent. That gap, sustained consistently over time, represents an estimated saving of on average £50,000 per person per year in avoided reoffending costs, fewer victims, lower demand on courts, police and prisons, and more people contributing to their communities and to the North East economy.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a test-and-learn research project, which means the team was not implementing interventions and measuring long-term outcomes, but mapping the problem, testing ideas with stakeholders, and producing practical tools and recommendations grounded in evidence. The three-month timeline was tight but deliberate: the DWP programme required rapid, action-oriented learning rather than extended observation.

A multi-method qualitative approach was used, combining semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops and facilitated group discussions. The analytical framework was reflexive thematic analysis — a systematic process of coding transcripts and workshop materials, then building and refining themes through iterative team discussion. This approach treats the researcher's position and perspective as something to be acknowledged and used, rather than managed away.

The research team were not neutral observers. They are practitioners embedded in the system they were studying. That gave them insight; it also required intellectual honesty about assumptions and a willingness to let the data challenge them. The research was conducted in accordance with an ethics protocol developed in consultation with Northumbria University, mirroring the procedures approved for the lead researcher's MSc Psychology thesis.

THE FULL DATASET

Group	Detail
Prison leavers	18 in-depth interviews, including five detailed follow-up interviews (Participants A–E) with individuals under MAPPA supervision, conducted several weeks after initial contact
Employers	Two full-day confidence workshops with 24 participants from social care, housing associations and customer service sectors, using realistic fictional scenarios and RAG coding
Third-sector organisations	One dedicated engagement day with 15 voluntary and community organisations representing housing, employment, mental health, substance misuse and family support
HMP Durham staff	Interviews with the Head of Education, Skills and Work and the Prison Employment Lead
Senior MAPPA professionals	In-depth discussions with Deborah Alderson (retired Chief Inspector, Northumbria Police, co-developer of MATAC) and Winton Keenen (retired Chief Constable, Northumbria Police, Oswin Project trustee)

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK AND PARTICIPANT ANONYMITY

All participants gave informed consent. Anonymity was maintained throughout people with lived experience who participated in detailed interviews are referred to as Participant A to E. Others are identified by role or, where they gave explicit consent to be named, by name.

The research maintained a trauma-informed approach throughout all interviews and workshops. Participant information sheets, consent forms, debrief materials and data storage schedules are held securely and available on request to NORTH EAST MSA and DWP.

WHAT THIS PROJECT DID AND DID NOT DO

It is important to be explicit about scope. This project developed three practical tools — the Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the Employer Confidence Handbook — to the co-design and consultation stage. None were implemented or piloted during the three-month phase. They are proposals grounded in extensive stakeholder consultation and ready for development and formal evaluation in a funded second phase. The evidence base this report presents is the foundation on which that evaluation should be built , not a substitute for it.

APPENDIX B: TRANSFORMING REHABILITATION AND THE ROOTS OF THE DATA DIVIDE

WHAT EXISTED BEFORE 2014

To understand the data divide, it helps to understand where it came from. Before 2014, England and Wales had 35 public probation trusts that received consistently strong inspection ratings. They delivered what practitioners still describe as 'end-to-end' offender management: probation officers embedded in prisons weeks before release, physical resettlement documents handed over on the day, and joint planning meetings that brought prison, health, housing and community services into the same room.

Physical 'resettlement wallets' contained verified qualifications, medication summaries, GP registration forms and disclosure letters. Multi-agency pre-release MAPPA meetings, typically held four to six weeks before release, achieved recall rates below 10 per cent in well-coordinated cases. The infrastructure was not perfect, but it was relational and it was largely effective.

WHAT THE 2014 REFORMS CHANGED

The Transforming Rehabilitation reforms of 2014 broke that model apart. The 35 trusts were replaced by a single National Probation Service for high-risk cases and 21 privately-run Community Rehabilitation Companies for lower-risk cases. A statutory 'Through the Gate' service was introduced to manage resettlement in the final 12 weeks of custody. The theory was that competition and specialisation would improve efficiency. The reality, as documented by repeated inspection findings, was a systematic loss of the relational infrastructure that made resettlement work.

What was lost	Consequence
Embedded probation officers in prisons pre-release	Cold handovers became standard; community services met people as strangers
Physical resettlement wallets	Documentation gaps became structural rather than exceptional
Pre-release multi-agency planning meetings	MAPPA and community services lost early sight of release dates and support needs
Continuous probation officer relationships	Through the Gate staff rotated — officers had no prior knowledge of the individual
End-to-end offender management	The person was handed between separate systems with no shared accountability for outcomes

WHAT THE INSPECTORATE FOUND

HM Inspectorate of Probation found, repeatedly, that Through the Gate services 'made little or no difference' to resettlement outcomes. Physical release packs largely disappeared. Pre-release planning meetings became inconsistent. Recall rates rose to between 16 and 26 per cent. By 2021, only 40 per cent of Through the Gate plans adequately addressed the three most basic resettlement needs together: accommodation, finance and employment.

Health continuity suffered significantly: the seven-to-fourteen-day medication gap re-emerged, and only 30 per cent of prisoners with identified mental health or substance misuse needs had those needs effectively flagged and transferred to community services.

THE 2021 REUNIFICATION AND WHAT IT DID NOT RESTORE

The reunification of probation in 2021 reversed some of the structural damage: Community Rehabilitation Companies were abolished, and probation was returned to public control. But the relational infrastructure the trusted connections between prison and community that had taken years to build — could not simply be switched back on. The practitioners who had built those relationships had moved on. The institutional memory had dissipated. The data divide this project set out to address is, in large part, a consequence of those ten years of fragmentation.

This matters because the solutions proposed in this report are not novel. They are restorations of things that worked, adapted for the current context. The Prisoner Passport, the Bridge Worker model and the embedded pre-release planning approach all have direct precedents in the pre-2014 probation system. The evidence for their effectiveness was accumulated over decades. It did not disappear when the system changed — it simply stopped being used.

APPENDIX C: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

WHAT SCANDINAVIAN SYSTEMS DO DIFFERENTLY — AND WHY IT MATTERS

The international picture is instructive and, for those who care about evidence-based policy, should be uncomfortable reading. Scandinavian countries achieve recidivism rates of between 20 and 25 per cent within two years of release, compared to the UK's typical rate of over 50 per cent within one year. The difference is not primarily digital, cultural or the result of less serious offending populations. It is relational and practical.

20–25%	**50%+**	**12–16 wks**	**65–72%**
Scandinavian two-year recidivism rate	*UK one-year reoffending rate*	*pre-release community engagement in Norway*	*reoffending reduction achieved by MATAC model*

NORWAY: THE IMPORT MODEL

Norway's Correctional Service operates what it calls an 'import model'. Rather than trying to create in-prison versions of community services, it brings community NAV (Jobcentre) advisers, health workers and housing officers into prisons 12 to 16 weeks before release. These workers begin building relationships with the individual, co-produce a physical resettlement folder that is handed over on release day, and are already known to the person when they walk out.

The Norwegian import model produces three outcomes that the UK system consistently fails to achieve: early relational continuity between prison and community; accessible physical documentation that the individual owns and controls; and community providers who are known to the person before they leave, rather than being strangers they encounter in crisis.

- Community NAV advisers enter the prison from 12 weeks pre-release and begin building an employment plan with the individual, integrated with their resettlement folder.
- Health workers ensure medication continuity is planned from within the prison — prescriptions are transferred to community pharmacies before release, not after.
- Housing officers attend pre-release planning meetings so that stable housing is in place — or as close to in place as possible — on release day, not weeks later.

The resettlement folder, co-produced with the individual, contains verified employment history, health information, benefit entitlements and appointment schedules.

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SWEDEN: CONTINUOUS PROBATION CONTACT

Sweden's approach is built around embedded probation officers who maintain continuous contact from sentencing through to community supervision. Rather than handing individuals between different staff at different stages, the same officer follows the case from beginning to end. This continuity of relationship, supported by paper-based planning tools designed to survive the transition from prison to community, is credited with producing Sweden's comparatively low recidivism rates.

The Bridge Worker model proposed in this project incorporates a similar principle of relational continuity: the same individual builds the relationship inside the prison, supports the Prisoner Passport process, is part of the handover on release day and accompanies the person into community services. The worker is not a new face at the gate. They are someone already known and trusted.

DENMARK: TRANSITION PLANS AND EMPLOYMENT BROKERS

Denmark uses 'transition plans' co-produced with community providers, which include verified skills certificates and dedicated employment brokers who work with both the individual and prospective employers. The employer engagement approach developed during this project — including the Employer Confidence Handbook and the disclosure coaching role of Bridge Workers — directly parallels the Danish employment broker model.

What Danish employment brokers provide is exactly what North East employers told our workshops they needed: a named contact who can answer questions, provide context on the individual's rehabilitation journey, and be a first call if concerns arise. The difference is that in Denmark this is a funded, embedded role. In the North East, it currently falls informally, inconsistently and inadequately on overstretched probation officers.

WHAT THESE SYSTEMS SHARE — AND WHAT THE NORTH EAST CAN LEARN

Shared feature	North East equivalent
Early relational investment — community workers entering prisons 12–16 weeks pre-release	Bridge Workers embedded in HMP Northumberland, beginning relationships in the weeks before release
Physical accessible documentation co-produced with the individual	The Prisoner Passport, designed to be held, carried and presented by the individual at the 12 week pre release point.
Community providers known to the person before they leave	Bridge Workers involved in handovers, accompanying individuals to appointments and ensuring the transition is supported
Integrated employer engagement with dedicated brokers	The Employer Confidence Handbook and Bridge Workers providing disclosure coaching and employer liaison, which could also include a pre-disclosure conversation with employers.
Continuous, unbroken relational contact from custody through community	The Oswin Project's 96% non-reoffending model, which maintains relationships through the periods most likely to trigger recall

Norway is not England. But the principles are not culturally specific. They are practical investments in early relational continuity that produce measurable, sustained reductions in reoffending wherever they have been properly funded and implemented. The evidence base is already built. The question is whether England is ready to learn from it.

APPENDIX D: THE NORTH EAST AND NORTH EAST MSA CONTEXT

THE REGIONAL PICTURE

The North East has a proud industrial heritage and a strong sense of community, but it also carries some of the most persistent structural disadvantages in England. Unemployment and economic inactivity rates have consistently exceeded the national average for decades. The communities to which most prison leavers return — in the post-industrial heartlands of County Durham, Wearside and the former mining villages of Northumberland — are often those with the fewest employment opportunities and the thinnest public service infrastructure. When someone leaves prison without a job, without stable housing and without a functioning support network, the chances of recall are high. The costs — to that individual, to their family and to the public — are enormous. Rural-urban transport barriers mean that even where employment exists, reaching it can be practically impossible without support. MAPPA caseloads in Northumberland are among the highest per capita in the country, creating particular pressure on statutory services.

NORTH EAST MSA'S DEVOLUTION OPPORTUNITY

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority's devolution settlement creates an important opportunity. NORTH EAST MSA has the convening power to bring statutory agencies, employers and the third sector around a shared agenda in a way that is hard to achieve at national level. The work described in this report is designed to support that agenda,
generating the evidence that NORTH EAST MSA needs to make a compelling case for continued and expanded investment.

The DWP Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme (2024–2026) is a national test-and-learn initiative. In the North East, Priority 3.4 focuses on ex-offenders, a group disproportionately affected by barriers to employment, housing, health continuity and information transfer that drive both economic inactivity and reoffending cycles.

THE GAUKE REVIEW AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NORTH EAST

The Gauke Independent Sentencing Review, published in 2025, calls for a renewed emphasis on rehabilitation-focused sentencing and significantly improved through-the-gate support. It explicitly identifies the failure of current resettlement arrangements as a driver of reoffending and of the human and economic costs that come from it. The Review highlights the substantial economic cost of reoffending — estimated at £37,000 to £50,000 per person per year — and points to the potential for well-designed, relational support models to deliver significant public savings.

In the North East, these national challenges are amplified by local conditions. The work described in this report is designed to position the region not as one that has a problem, but as one that has a solution — to demonstrate, with evidence, what effective evidence-based resettlement looks like in practice and to lead the national conversation that will follow.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH

Four themes emerged consistently across every strand of the research. They are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and they point in the same direction: toward a model of resettlement support that is relational rather than bureaucratic, third-sector-led rather than statutory-dominated, and grounded in proven practices.

Theme 1: The data divide is relational, not technical

The most important finding of this project is that the primary barrier to continuity of employment, health and skills information is not technology. It is trust. Information exists in the DPS and ETP systems. Digital records are maintained and updated. The problem is that no trusted human connection exists to translate that information into something usable on release, and no mechanism exists to make it accessible once the prison gate closes. Digital solutions alone will not close the data divide. A digital Prisoner Passport would be a useful long-term development, but it would address only the technical dimension of a problem that is fundamentally human. The Bridge Worker, the pre-release relationship, the warm handover, the familiar face at the probation appointment: these are not supplementary to the solution. They are the solution.

Theme 2: Lived-experience networks provide protective scaffolding statutory services cannot replicate at scale

Seventeen of eighteen people interviewed credited third-sector relational support as the key protective factor in their resettlement. The consistency of this finding — across very different individuals, circumstances and conviction histories — is striking. The Oswin Project's 96 per cent non-reoffending rate is not accidental. It is the outcome of a deliberate model in which lived-experience workers build genuine, sustained relationships with the highest-risk individuals and maintain those relationships through the periods most likely to trigger recall.

Theme 3: Third-sector organisations are uniquely positioned to support MAPPA-managed individuals

The third sector is currently excluded from MAPPA processes despite reducing reoffending among the population MAPPA is designed to manage. This is not a minor operational gap. It is a systemic contradiction at the heart of the current approach to risk management for the highest-risk individuals leaving custody. Third-sector organisations bring relational trust, flexibility to provide support outside office hours, and the lived-experience credibility to sustain engagement when formal options are exhausted.

Theme 4: Proven pre-2014 and Scandinavian practices remain viable and cost-effective

Much of what this project recommends is not new. Embedded pre-release planning, physical resettlement documentation, warm handovers from custody to community, and community providers entering prisons before release to build relationships: all of these existed in England and Wales before 2014. They were abandoned due to structural reform, not because they stopped working. The Scandinavian evidence shows that these approaches, implemented at scale and with sustained investment, produce dramatically better outcomes than the fragmented model that replaced them.

APPENDIX E: WHAT IS MAPPA?

UNDERSTANDING MAPPA

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are the statutory framework through which police, probation, and prison services work together to manage the risk posed by certain offenders living in the community. MAPPA is not a single organisation or programme. It is a set of legal arrangements, established under the Criminal Justice Act 2003, that sit across three statutory agencies known collectively as the Responsible Authority.

MAPPA applies to three categories of people. Category 1 covers registered sexual offenders. Category 2 covers violent offenders who have received a custodial sentence of twelve months or more. Category 3 covers other individuals who are assessed as posing a risk of serious harm to the public, regardless of their offence type. People can move between categories as circumstances change.

Within these categories, individuals are managed at one of three levels, determined not by offence type but by the degree of multi-agency coordination their case requires. At Level 1, which accounts for the large majority of cases, management sits primarily with a single agency, usually probation, under standard licence conditions. Level 2 involves active multi-agency management through regular panel meetings, used where the risk posed by an individual requires a coordinated plan across more than one agency. Level 3 is reserved for the most complex cases, bringing together senior representatives from multiple agencies to oversee intensive risk management. Practitioners also described an informal Level 4, used for exceptional situations such as counter-terrorism or foreign national offenders, which does not appear in the published framework but operates in practice.

For people subject to MAPPA, the framework shapes nearly every aspect of life after release. Management plans can include curfews, exclusion zones, restrictions on contact with named individuals, electronic monitoring, and conditions governing where someone may live and work. Breaching any condition can result in recall to prison. The practical effect is that someone leaving custody under MAPPA does not simply re-enter the community. They re-enter it within a tightly defined set of boundaries that are managed, monitored, and enforced by the statutory agencies responsible for their supervision.

WHY MAPPA MATTERS TO THIS PROJECT

This project gave particular attention to people managed under MAPPA for two reasons.
First, the information-sharing challenges that affect all prison leavers are significantly more acute for this group. MAPPA-managed individuals interact with more agencies, are subject to more conditions, and face more restrictions on employment and daily life. When information about their qualifications, health needs, or employment history fails to transfer from prison to community, the consequences are more immediate and more severe. A missed appointment, an unapproved workplace, or a misunderstood condition can result in recall, regardless of the person's own compliance or progress.

Second, the systems that manage risk for this group are well-established and broadly functional. ViSOR tracks intelligence on high-risk individuals across police forces. NDelius records licence conditions and supervision activity across probation. OASys provides structured risk assessments that follow an individual from custody into

community. MAPPA itself brings agencies together through structured, minuted meetings with clear protocols. For the purposes of public protection, these systems work. The gap is not in risk management. It is in everything else: the employment records, health information, training certificates, and appointment details that determine whether someone can actually rebuild a stable life under supervision. The data divide identified across this project is sharpest where the stakes are highest.

Third-sector organisations, including those providing employment support, housing, and mentoring, currently have no formal role within MAPPA. They may be providing intensive daily support to someone subject to a complex management plan, but they are not told what that plan contains, cannot contribute what they know about the person's progress, and may not understand why a placement or opportunity has been blocked. This creates a gap that serves nobody well, including the statutory agencies trying to manage risk.

APPENDIX F: EMPLOYERS HANDBOOK

APPENDIX G: EMPLOYERS LEAFLET

APPENDIX H: PRISONER PASSPORT

APPENDIX I: SUMMERY OF RESEARCH FOR THIRD SECTOR PARTNERS