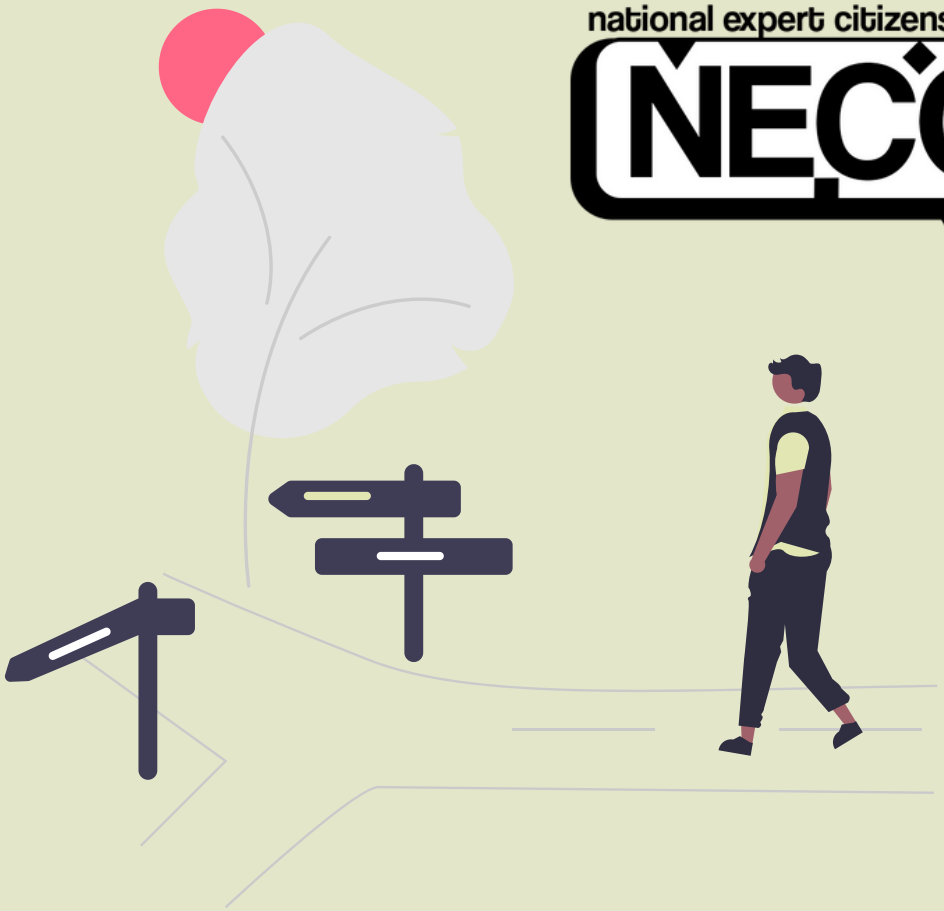
national expert citizens group

NECG.



Findings from the NECG National Meeting September 2025

November 2025

revolving doors

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

COMMUNITY FUND

Introduction

This handbook was written following the September 2025 meeting of the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG). NECG and Changing Futures members came together with civil servants, service providers and justice staff, taking lead from innovative practice from Nottingham Changing Futures and the West Midlands Offending to Recovery scheme.

We explored how diversion from the criminal justice system can be a positive solution for 'the revolving door group' trapped in the cycle of crisis and crime.

A key aim of the day was to support the development of stronger connections between the police and support services to enable positive diversions that will reduce reoffending and enable recovery.

Who are we?

The NECG consists of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage who represent the 15 Changing Futures areas.

The Changing Futures programme is a £91.8 million joint funded initiative between Government and The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK. The programme funds local organisations working in partnership to better support those who experience multiple disadvantage.

The NECG is coordinated and supported by national justice charity Revolving Doors to ensure it has an independent voice, is led by skilled members and can achieve its aims.

It meets to discuss issues in their local areas, compare these at regional meetings and then present findings and recommendations at a quarterly national meeting. Each quarterly cycle focuses on a different strategic priority.

The aim of the NECG is to ensure people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage shape system change by coproducing accessible services, designed to best meet their needs.

Why does the NECG believe diversion is needed?

“Diversion doesn’t happen just once, you may need multiple interventions, you may need multiple interactions with a single individual, and they may need it more than once to be completely ready to recover”.

- NECG member

We know that for the ‘revolving door’ cohort traditional enforcement approaches are not effective.

The Sentencing Review outlines a move away from short sentences to support and treatment in the community. Many people committing repeat low-level offences are stuck in a cycle of crisis, driven by unmet needs like addiction, homelessness, or mental ill health — diversion can be a more effective intervention point than prosecution.

People experiencing multiple disadvantage need support, not punishment, to break the cycle. Successful diversion for people trapped in the revolving door can reduce long-term demand on police, courts, and prisons, leading to better outcomes for individuals and the system.

Key principles for effective diversion programmes:

- Whole system approaches – collaboration is key.
- Importance of data – know your cohort.
- Divert as early as possible.
- Diversion is not a one off – be persistent.
- Give people hope and opportunities.
- Peer support.
- Designed with lived experience.

Learning from Nottingham's approach

"It's really important for services to be led by what people need. With Matt's role an officer will call him up and say someone wants X or Y, then he knows the network and the criteria and can do that linking up."

- National Meeting attendee

Nottingham Changing Futures is building on the success of Nottinghamshire Police's pioneering Operation Brandberg to develop a more comprehensive approach to diversion at point of arrest. This is an opportunity to strengthen access to support for people in contact with police with underlying experiences of multiple disadvantage.

Their approach is based on the following practice and principles:

- Police referring to Changing Futures Navigators who can enable people to access the support and service they require. Accessing peer support is crucial.
- 'Embedded' Changing Futures workers in the criminal justice system. This has been effective in the probation service and in 2026 there will be an embedded worker in the police who will 'problem solve' and coordinate their diversion approach.
- Providing training and a 'toolbox' for police officers so they have the knowledge and confidence to make diversion referrals.

For more information about Nottinghamshire's diversion work, listen to Episode 5 of the NECG's Weaving the Web podcast:

Our conversation features Chris Pearson, Chief Inspector at Nottinghamshire Police; Bobby Lowen, Programme Director at Changing Futures Nottingham and Matthew Hunt - whose role as Changing Futures' Severe and Multiple Disadvantage Practitioner embedded within the Nottinghamshire Probation Trust is the first of its kind.

Listen now

Learning from Offending 2 Recovery (West Midlands)

“A security guard referred me to Offending 2 Rehab and he saved my life. They’re the ones on the street every day who know who the worst reoffenders are. The big retailers put money into the scheme. Everything is available. There are new injections, new treatments – Offending 2 Recovery is where it all started, with PC Toogood. He saw all the shoplifting and junkies and thought that if we address the root causes we prevent crime.

- NECG member

The programme seeks to reduce retail offending and associated criminality by diverting people who are offending due to addiction to drugs and/or alcohol, into treatment programmes or residential rehab.

Clients are identified through a combination of assessing crime statistics, intelligence from partner agencies and retailer intelligence. There is ongoing support throughout their treatment as well as aftercare and community support.

The approach is built on a close partnership between the police and drug treatment workers.

For more information click on the following link:

“Offending to Recovery was developed in Birmingham back in 2018 by PC Stuart Toogood. The experienced officer was sick and tired of arresting the same people again and again only for them to go to prison, get released, and reoffend as soon as they came out because their addiction to drugs and the issues which caused that, had never been tackled. ”

Find out more

Ideas and discussions from the day

“From lived and learned experience to shared experience”

- NECG member

The following ideas were discussed in the workshops and explore challenges and ways to practically implement diversion programmes.

- **A change in culture** so police can see diversion referrals as a ‘positive action’. Home Office targets for the police need to be adjusted to recognise and encourage diversion.

- **Training for police officers** led by people with lived experience to help develop empathy, understanding and culture change.

- **Access to quality drug treatment** is at the heart of diversion approaches. People need choice and support from people with lived experience to provide hope and prove recovery is possible.

- **Access to Buvidal** - long-acting injectable buprenorphine, a form of opioid substitution treatment that involves a monthly injection – was a key part of the Offending to Recovery Programme. For this to be effective people also need ‘wrap around support’ that provides social, emotional and practical support.

- **People need more than services.** For diversion programmes to work they need to provide people with hope, to inspire and create opportunities to make friends and to enjoy life. This requires a focus on strengths and access to a wider network of community groups.

What next?

The session concluded by discussing the following questions:

- What is the vision for diversion in your area?
- What are your long-term ambition and next steps?
- Who are your key partners?
- What support do you want from the NECG and Revolving Doors?

We want these discussions to continue!

The NECG are continuing to support Changing Futures areas to explore these questions and develop their diversion approaches.

Please contact sean.mullen@revolving-doors.org.uk to find out more.

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Revolving Doors is a national charity working to break the cycle of crisis and crime. We advocate for a system that addresses the drivers of contact with the criminal justice system, including trauma, poverty and discrimination. We bring independent research, policy expertise and lived experience together to champion long-term solutions for justice reform.

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