

# TRANSFORMING JUSTICE SERVICES THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE: PEER COMMISSIONING



## WHO ARE USER VOICE?

**USER VOICE EXISTS TO REDUCE THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM: TO VICTIMS, THOSE IN THE SYSTEM AND THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND TO THE PUBLIC PURSE.**

We believe that **the justice system can and must fundamentally change**, so that those caught up in it can be accountable, repair harm, and productively contribute to their communities.

We believe that **everyone has the potential to contribute their skills**, working together to create a safer and healthier society, **given the right influences, opportunities, circumstances and support.**

Our delivery work, in partnership with the Government, NHS, academics, service providers, and commissioners in the prison system and across communities, consists of our innovative research, our independent Prison Councils and effectively influencing to improve both policy and practice.

We amplify the lived experience voice of people with convictions to drive real change. 80% of our staff have convictions - we understand first-hand the challenges of court, prison, probation, addiction, mental health issues, and homelessness

**We use this insight to collaborate authentically with people impacted by the justice system**, creating meaningful social impact. Employing people with convictions breaks the cycle of offending, leading to lasting social change.

Our staff are role models - living examples of how those in the system can get out of it, can re-enter society and secure stable jobs and lives.

User Voice is currently working in 40 prisons across England, with 100 lived experience volunteers, reaching over 1,000 people in the system every month, giving us the largest organisational range in terms of lived experience insights.

As part of this work User Voice has spent many years enabling those with lived experience of justice services to support and contribute to the commissioning and procurement process of criminal justice services.



“the qualification gave us a certain level of confidence for us to go ahead and do this. And confidence when you’ve been in prison is on quite a short supply when you come out.”

PEER — ”  
COMMISSIONER

# THE CASE FOR PEER COMMISSIONING

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN ENGLAND AND WALES IS CURRENTLY UNDER SIGNIFICANT STRAIN, FACING RISING DEMAND IN THE CONTEXT OF LIMITED RESOURCES.

According to a July 2024 report by the Institute for Government, key components of the justice system, including police, courts, prisons, and probation services are struggling to manage increasing pressures and performance issues.

Additionally, the Bar Council's 2024 report highlighted a stark funding gap, noting a 22.4% drop in real-terms spending per person from 2009/10 to 2022/23, despite overall government spending increasing by 10%.

This resource scarcity demands that justice services become more efficient, effective, and closely aligned with user needs. Yet, when people with direct lived experience of the justice system are excluded from commissioning processes, services often fail to meet these crucial criteria.

This exclusion from commissioning often results in misaligned services, reduced user satisfaction, wasted resources, and stagnant or outdated delivery models. Regulatory compliance and trust are also compromised when service-user insights are not embedded in procurement.

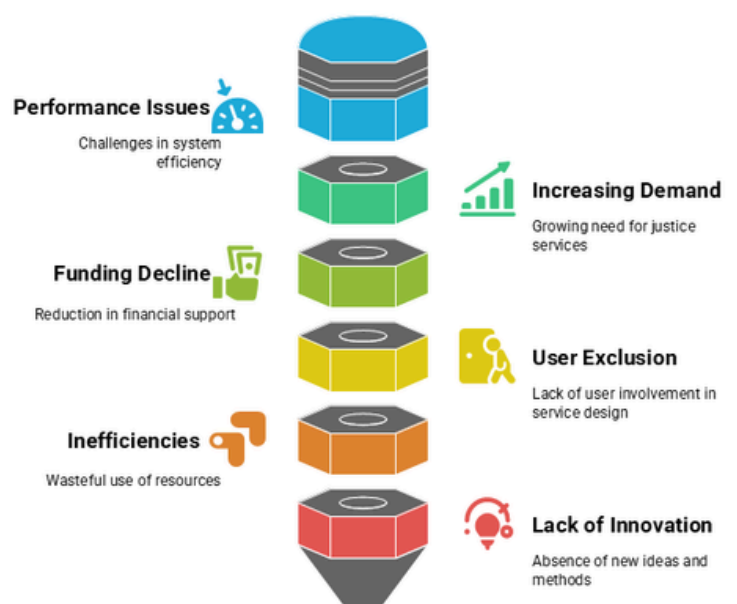
Peer Commissioning directly addresses these challenges by meaningfully involving people with lived experience. This involvement ensures that commissioned services are relevant, efficient, innovative, and responsive to actual rather than assumed needs, ultimately benefiting all stakeholders: service users, providers, and commissioners.



**"The peer commissioners had the ability to set a scenario question to be part of the bidders' presentations and formed part of the evaluation scoring. This scenario was based on their lived experience, it not only brought it to life in a way that professionals commissioning the service could not but also included the reality of what a quality answer would be due to their experience of a real-life scenario."**

COMMISSIONER — ”

## ENHANCING JUSTICE SERVICES



## THE CASE FOR PEER COMMISSIONING

When service users are not involved in procurement, justice services often become less efficient. The reasons for this include:

- Less evidence that services address actual needs, leading to misalignment and wasted resources.
- Engagement and satisfaction levels drop, resulting in reduced adoption rates and valuable innovative ideas from service users being missed, causing services to stagnate and become outdated.
- Non-involvement leading to higher costs and inefficiencies, as services may require increased support to address unforeseen issues and ineffective implementation.
- The quality of services being impacted by potential gaps and suboptimal performance when user feedback is not incorporated.
- Regulatory compliance and trust issues can also arise, as some sectors require user involvement in procurement processes.

Involving service users in procurement therefore builds trust and credibility, ensuring services are better designed and meet user needs leading to more tailored, innovative solutions which are more likely to have traction with their intended audiences.

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**“For me, a big change is that I’m now able to throw myself into things that I wouldn’t have been able to do before. Before I would look at a project and say ‘ahh I’m not interested in this’ or ‘I’m not knowledgeable enough, I won’t be able to contribute to this’ but now I feel like I can throw myself into things knowing that I will be able to learn it and contribute instead of just avoiding a good opportunity. It’s having the confidence and self-esteem to do that now whereas before the project I didn’t think my voice mattered or that anyone would listen.”**

PEER COMMISSIONER

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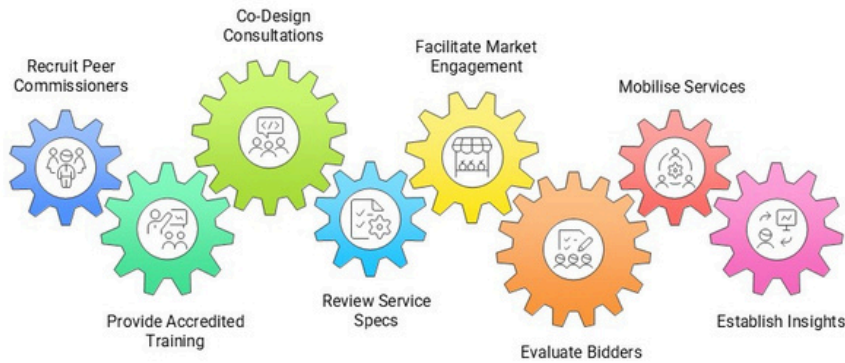
**“Amazing, unreal a brilliant experience getting to know individuals and combining our skills and experiences to produce a positive outcome.”**

PEER COMMISSIONER

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# HOW USER VOICE IMPLEMENTS PEER COMMISSIONING

ENGAGING LIVED EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS IS VITAL TO ITS SUCCESS, ALONG WITH THE SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION OF COMMISSIONERS. USER VOICE EMPLOYS A STRUCTURED AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO PEER COMMISSIONING:



**Recruitment and Training:** We recruit Peer Commissioners directly from existing service users and providers, ensuring authentic experience and diverse perspectives. Peer Commissioners receive comprehensive Level 1 accredited training covering service review, procurement processes, and evaluation methodologies.

**Needs Assessment and Review:** Peer Commissioners thoroughly assess current service provision, local needs, and national policy contexts. They identify gaps and formulate relevant, informed questions for prospective service providers.

**Procurement and Evaluation:** Peer Commissioners actively participate in shaping service specifications, evaluating provider proposals, and scoring bid responses. They also select representatives for recruitment panels, bringing lived experience into critical decision-making stages, including selecting representatives for bidder interviews.

**Continuous Improvement:** Post-procurement, User Voice works closely with commissioners and successful providers to embed ongoing lived-experience insights, establishing continuous feedback loops to refine services, maintain relevance, and improve outcomes sustainably.



**“All the peer commissioners had a real understanding and acceptance of safeguarding needs in certain cases. I can honestly say, this would not have been an approach in the service contract if it were not for their request of inclusion and using their own lived experience to evidence why it was important.”**

**COMMISSIONER — ”**



**“The real value of the work that User Voice said they’d be able to support us with was the qualification ... It wasn’t just that they were doing this bit of work and see you later with nothing to take from it other than a memory and an experience.”**


**COMMISSIONER — ”**

# THE BENEFITS OF PEER COMMISSIONING AS DONE BY USER VOICE


Service providers can improve and innovate their services based on user feedback, building trust and enhancing satisfaction.



**Greater Engagement & Satisfaction:** Higher engagement and satisfaction, resulting in higher adoption and effectiveness.



**Adaptability:** Services continuously adapt to changing user needs, increasing relevance and impact.



**Enhanced Relationships:** relationships between service providers and users, fostering trust and collaboration.


## SERVICE PROVIDERS

Involving service users helps commissioners make better decisions by understanding community needs, ensuring services are tailored and transparent.


## COMMISSIONERS



**Regulatory Compliance:** Active user involvement ensures adherence to regulatory standards



**Credibility & Trust:** User insight builds trust and emphasises user need



**Service Quality:** Direct feedback improves service, efficiency and performance

Service users feel empowered and engaged, leading to services that better meet their needs and higher overall satisfaction.

## PEER COMMISSIONERS



**Personal Growth:** development of skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving.



**Empowerment:** via meaningful involvement in decision-making processes that directly affect their community.



**Networking:** by connecting with other professionals and stakeholders in their field, expanding networks and opening enhanced opportunities for employment



**Contribution to Community:** by playing a crucial role in shaping services that meet the needs of their communities, developing a deep sense of fulfilment and purpose.

# EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Since 2016, User Voice has successfully embedded lived experience into the procurement of various criminal justice services, directly influencing outcomes for tens of thousands of individuals across England.

Key examples include collaborations with NHS London, South West NHS England, and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), demonstrating significant improvements in service alignment, efficiency, and user satisfaction.



Our most recent commission with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, which was focused on peer commissioning of Restorative Justice Services, enabled service users to have a say on the services that are commissioned to help them rehabilitate and recover, ultimately reducing crime and protecting the public.

Peer Commissioners played a key role in the procurement of restorative justice services, worth £900,000, which was awarded to not for profit community interest company Restorative Solutions, who will support victims to engage directly with offenders wherever appropriate to try and achieve closure and prevent reoffending, it also resulted in the Authority embedding resources supporting lived experience approaches. In addition learning from this project will inform the Mayor's next Commissioning Strategy.

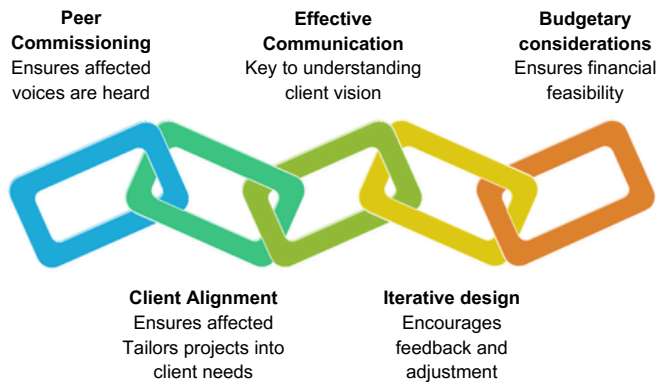
When asked about the implications our most recent Peer Commissioning project could have across the wider commissioning landscape, the West Yorkshire Mayor stated:

“ We would hope that this will give them the foundations to make sure that they're involving lived experience in a non-tokenistic way - that they're doing in a real, kind of co-design, co-commissioned way.”

MAYOR OF WEST YORKSHIRE  
TRACEY BRABIN

# WORKING TOGETHER TO EMBED PEER COMMISSIONING

## NEXT STEPS



Peer Commissioning represents a transformative approach to justice service procurement, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by the system are heard and integrated into the decision-making process.

Our goal is to ensure that each project aligns with the unique requirements and financial considerations of our clients. By working closely with you, we aim to create tailored solutions that not only meet your expectations but also fit within your budgetary constraints.

We believe that effective communication is key to understanding your vision and objectives. Our team will engage in detailed discussions to gather insights about your specific needs, preferences, and any limitations you may have. This collaborative process allows us to explore various options and design a project that reflects your goals while remaining financially feasible.

Throughout the project design phase, we will present different strategies and ideas, encouraging your input and feedback.

This iterative approach ensures that the final design is a true representation of your aspirations. We are committed to being flexible and responsive, adjusting as necessary to accommodate your evolving needs.

In conclusion, we are dedicated to working together with you to design a project that suits your individual needs and budget. Our collaborative efforts will ensure that the final outcome is a true reflection of your vision.

“I would definitely recommend being a peer commissioner, especially for those that want to find a pathway to employment. I think in many different ways it builds up your sense of self value, your confidence and also gives you some of the tools you need to work in our society. Things had moved on while I was away, you know it changed you know and got more kind of complicated, being on the project helped that...”

PEER COMMISSIONER

We would be really pleased to meet with you to discuss your needs and to go through aligned costs with you.

If you are interested in talking to User Voice about our Peer Commissioning please contact Brendan Doyle, COO at [bdoyle@uservice.org](mailto:bdoyle@uservice.org).



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