Mapping the potential, an illustrative model for estimating the cost savings supported by mentoring-based throughcare programmes

August 2025

1.0 Introduction

In 2021, the Fraser of Allander Institute began a three-year partnership with The Wise Group, a social enterprise in Scotland, to evaluate New Routes — a voluntary throughcare service delivered in prisons.

Over the past few years, we have published reports (2022 and 2024) examining the programme's effectiveness in supporting individuals on their rehabilitation journey using descriptive statistics based on customer data.

Our original aim was to assess the mechanisms through which New Routes influences outcomes, particularly by comparing The Wise Group's customer data with broader prison population data to estimate the programme's causal impact on reoffending and the associated public cost savings.

However, issues in accessing comparative data have made a full impact evaluation infeasible. As a result, this discussion paper provides the final output of this partnership and takes an illustrative approach, estimating the potential costs tied to the outcomes the programme seeks to avert.

In recent months, we engaged with a range of stakeholders — including Wise Group staff, advocacy organisations, and frontline support services — to understand both the societal costs of unmet needs and the ways New Routes works to shift individual outcomes.

Because of data limitations, this paper does not attempt to measure the causal impact of New Routes on reoffending or secondary outcomes. Rather, it provides a narrative around the potential benefits of mentoring-based support based.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of economic evaluations of programmes like New Routes, including our approach to this research.
- Section 3 provides a summary of the key benefits of mentoring and New Routes from our stakeholder interviews. This includes case studies from our illustrative cost exercise on the potential costs related to homelessness and substance abuse where individuals are not supported.
- Section 4 provides a summary of this research.

2. Evaluation Context and Methodology

2.1 Why is evaluation important?

Robust evaluations of programmes like New Routes are very important and can help multiple stakeholder groups recognise the impact and value of policy and programmes that seek to address certain societal issues. This includes the benefits to policymakers to make better evidence-based decisions on future policy and programme design.

However, evaluations also benefit those organisations developing programmes that seek to tackle societal issues. Better evidence and understanding of impact can lead to better programme design and inform the value for money components of services. Demonstrating impact is a crucial function for many third sector organisations seeking to address certain societal issues, particularly where services may be externally funded and require justifications on the value for money of services.

Our experience working with several organisations delivering services like New Routes has highlighted that at present there is no consistent approach to evaluating the effects of programmes as preventative means for certain issues or the impacts they have on individual's lives. This is often borne from a lack of available data, or expertise and knowledge on how to robustly evaluate programmes of this nature.

This research does not seek to provide a definitive method for evaluating the impact of mentoring-based throughcare, and the estimates included purely for illustrative purposes. However, our aim is to add to the literature on what is appropriate and robust for evaluating the economic impacts of programmes like New Routes. We hope this provides a useful resource for organisations looking to deliver services like New Routes when they come to answer key questions on their impact and value.

2.2 Methods for evaluating policy.

There are various methods for evaluating policy effectively, all of which bring their own relevance, strengths and drawbacks relative to what is being evaluated. This includes evaluation of programmes created in response to a specific societal issue or policy area, with the need to effectively understand how they impact identified outcomes.

The goal of any impact evaluation is to provide the best evidence on the potential impacts of the policy or programme, given the nature of what is provided and the data that is collected or available. This means that where an evaluation is conducted, there is a differing degree of reliability that is placed on the evidence provided, something that is crucial for effectively developing policy or programmes that seek to address certain issues.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and UK Government funded the "What Works Centre for Local Growth"[1] with the aim of providing a framework for which policymakers can evaluate the evidence on the effects of a policy. Over the years, The Fraser of Allander Institute has referenced and adapted this framework, as shown in Figure 1 to highlight the differing types and credibility of research methods.

Broadly, evidence is split into both quantitative and qualitative types, and both need to be used together to provide the best quality evidence on impact. Qualitative evidence on its own, such

[1] See What Works for Local Growth

as surveys or interview questions, whilst insightful often ranks lower in terms of reliability within economic evaluations. This is because, whilst individuals participating may have been impacted by the policy or programme in scope, or hold an expert opinion on it, they still hold a subjective judgement.

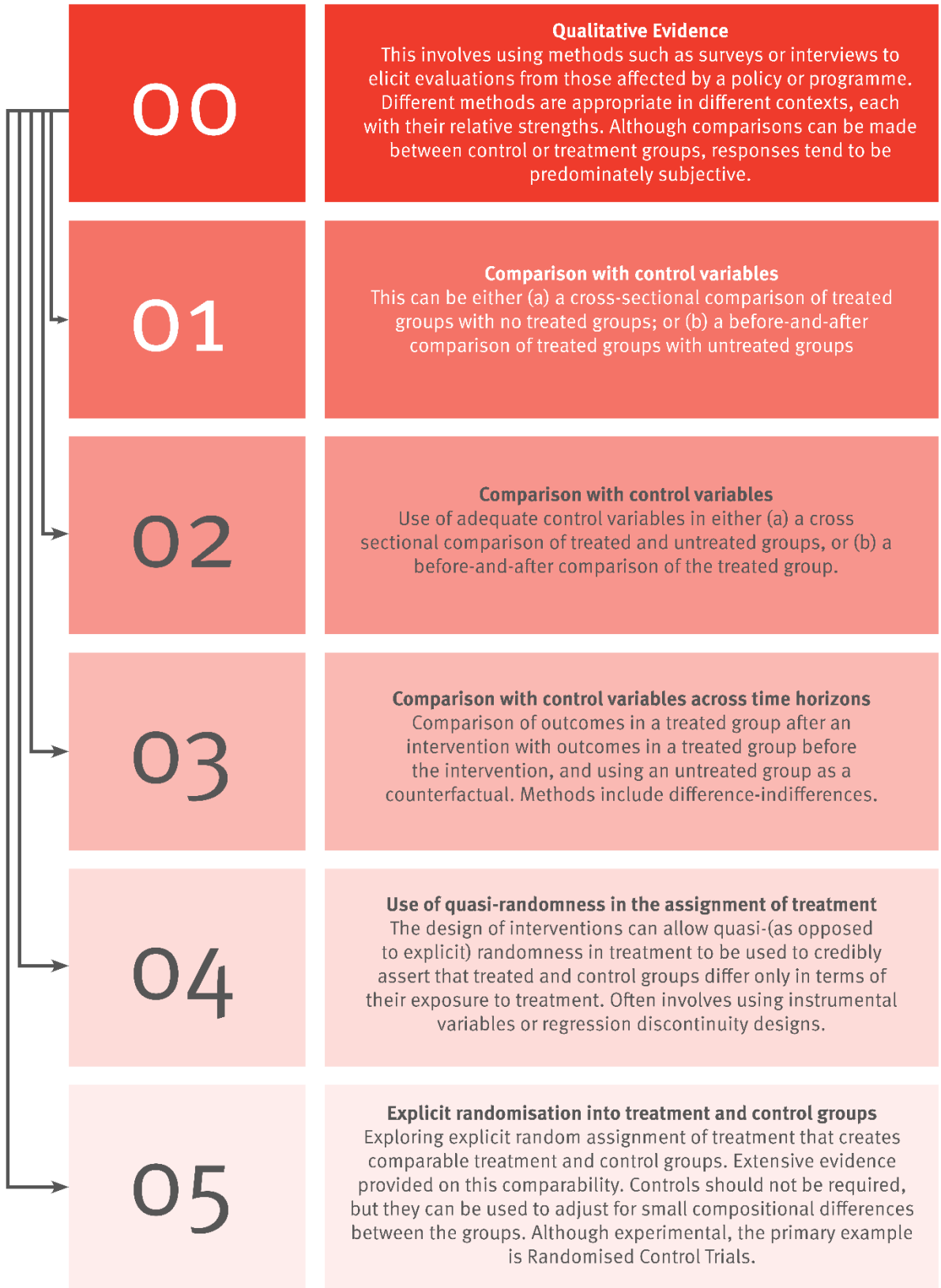
Qualitative evidence provides valuable insight, particularly when looking to understand what an individual's experience or perspective on a policy or programme is, how it affects them or those using the programme, or the mechanism in which it seeks to address certain issues.

However, to determine impact, methods that include robust quantitative analysis are required. These methods tend to use data sources, available publicly or within a secure environment, and typically use econometric methods to determine and estimate a causal impact of policies or programmes by comparing an intervention group to a control group, tracking changes over time. The chosen econometric method usually depends on what is appropriate given the policy or programme in scope, and the data that is available.

The use of quantitative analysis still brings differing degrees of reliability, as shown in Figure 1. The five-point scale provides insight on evidence from evaluations that seek to estimate the effect of economic policies, on average, on the outcomes for those affected by the policy.

The most useful impact evaluations will include elements of both quantitative and qualitative evidence, to establish what happened, and why. This type of approach is often referred to as a 'mixed methods' approach, and this is the approach we hoped to take with evaluating the New Routes programme.

Figure 1: Adapted scoring guide for economic evaluations



Source: What works Centre for Local Economic Growth, Fraser of Allander Institute

As we highlight in the following section, we have only been able to rely on qualitative evidence for our approach, which has taken the form of a series of stakeholders holding an informed opinion across the criminal justice landscape.

Using qualitative data as the evidence base for our analysis therefore means that it sits with the bottom spine of our economic evaluation framework, meaning that, on its own, it cannot reliably be used to robustly evaluate the economic impact of mentoring based throughcare, or New Routes specifically.

Despite this, there is still valuable insight to be gained from qualitative evidence, particularly in the absence of available quantitative data. We can utilise stakeholders' insight to form a better understanding of experiences and opinions on what the benefits of New Routes are and the support it provides.

However, these needs are rarely isolated — with most individuals facing a complex, interconnected web of challenges.

Box 1: What was New Routes and who does it support?

New Routes was a voluntary throughcare service available to short-term male prisoners in 14 of Scotland's 15 prisons. It provided guidance and mentoring to support reintegration into the community and reduce reoffending.

Participants received one-to-one support over 12 months, beginning approximately six months before and continuing six months after release.

Delivered as a Public Social Partnership (PSP) and funded by the Scottish Government, the programme was led by The Wise Group alongside partners including Sacro, Apex, SAMH, and Families Outside.

This partnership enabled a national approach, delivered at a local level, to ensure that when individuals left prison, regardless of the local authority they are liberated to, support was available.

Initially (2013–2019), New Routes served short-term male prisoners aged 16–24.

In 2019, eligibility expanded to include all short-term male prisoners, significantly increasing caseloads. As of April 2025, the service stopped accepting new referrals, replaced by a broader voluntary throughcare offer for male and female prisoners, including those on remand.

Through our interviews, common insight shared highlighted that individuals within the prison system often deal with several needs, something that was identified as a contributing factor to an individual's potential to reoffend.

Between January 2018 and February 2024, over 4,000 individuals exited the New Routes programmes.

After identifying an individual's needs, mentors assign a series of outcomes for them to work towards and assess their progress towards these outcomes at subsequent baseline assessments.

Our previous reports, published in 2022 and 2024, provides an in-depth analysis of individuals journeys with the service for multiple cohorts over several years.

On average, participants identified with at least six areas of need, spanning housing, employment, finance, mental and physical health, and substance use.

2.3 Challenges in Evaluating Mentoring Programmes

One of the key limitations in evaluating the New Routes service is the finite nature of the data collected. The Wise Group gathers information only during a participant's time on the programme, with no follow-up once they exit. This significantly limits the ability to assess long-term outcomes, including reoffending. As a result, reliance on external or publicly available data becomes essential for understanding what happens to individuals after leaving prison and after their time on the programme.

However, the lack of accessible and detailed data presents a major barrier to robust evaluation—not just for New Routes, but for many programmes delivered by third sector organisations or public social partnerships. These programmes often focus on preventative, upstream, outcomes that contribute to long-term aims (such as reducing reoffending) This creates a dual outcome framework:

- Primary, long-term, outcomes, such as reducing reoffending or improving social reintegration, represent long-term societal goals.
- Preventative, short- & medium-term outcomes, such as stable housing or engagement with support services, reflect short- and medium-term changes that mentoring can directly influence.

Ideally, an evaluation will be able to capture both.

2.4 Our approach

We faced two key data limitations.

1. We could not look at the longer-term outcomes for New Routes customers to verify whether they reoffended
2. We were unable to construct a control group to verify whether the changes we observed in the group who were part of the New Routes programme had different outcomes to those who were not part of the programme.

More information on this, and our unsuccessful attempts to access the data, are in in Box 2.

Given these limitations, we chose a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from participants in the New Routes programme with qualitative insights from stakeholders experienced in working with both programme participants and others outside it using the Delphi Method.

The Delphi Method involves multiple rounds of surveying an expert panel, with feedback provided after each round to identify consensus or divergence. For our programme, New Routes, this method could help to explore whether mentoring influences various outcomes, and if so, estimate how and why those changes occur. To minimise bias, most panel members must be external to the programme. Key contributors to our study include frontline professionals—such as housing officers and substance abuse advocates—who interact directly with individual's post-release. Their insights are essential in identifying outcome differences linked to mentoring.

However, because these experts focus on specific areas (e.g., housing, substance use), they can only speak to outcomes relevant to their field. This specialisation limited the effectiveness of the Delphi Method in achieving broad consensus across diverse outcome areas. Despite

these limitations, expert input remained valuable—particularly given the limited available evidence on how mentoring drives change.

We also sought broader insights—specifically, the challenges faced by individuals leaving prison with complex needs. This involved exploring key touchpoints between the individual, their mentor, and wider support services to better understand how mentoring might drive change.

These qualitative findings were then paired with publicly available secondary data on the costs associated with individuals being homeless and dealing with substance abuse issues.

The two key data sources used were:

- Crisis UK[2] estimates on the cost of an individual sleeping rough for 12 months vs the cost of a successful intervention.
- Scottish Government[3] estimates of the costs associated with individuals dealing with substance abuse, with and without treatment.

This allows us to link stakeholder insights to quantitative evidence, building a narrative around the perceived value of mentoring-based throughcare.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted that outcomes are strongly linked to the level of an individual's needs, meaning those with the most severe needs (e.g. no housing, addiction) likely face the highest risk of poorer outcomes upon leaving prison.

Throughout an individual's time on the New Routes service, they are assessed at several points against a number of need categories. These include:

- Housing
- Employment
- Finance
- Relationships
- Substance Abuse
- Mental and Physical Health
- Attitude and Behaviour
- Education and Training
- Social and Leisure

For our analysis we focus on the highest-need individuals (baseline scores of 1 or 2) to align assumptions with those most at risk.

New Routes is also used as a case example of mentoring support, recognising that similar services were discussed and exist across Scotland.

Although not a formal economic evaluation, this approach offers some useful insight on how support provided by mentors may help to alleviate cost bearing social issues.

The objectives of this paper are, therefore, as follows:

1. Identify key challenges faced by individuals leaving prison, based on stakeholder insights.

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[2] See Crisis UK

[3] See Scottish Government

2. Understand the outcomes in the absence of support, and how mentoring may mitigate these through specific mechanisms.
3. Explore publicly available data on the costs associated with key societal issues.
4. Connect these costs to the support provided by mentoring, to illustrate potential value.

2.4 Limitations

It is important to restate the limitation so our approach.

This analysis cannot attempt to measure the causal impact of New Routes on reoffending or preventative outcomes. Rather, it provides a narrative around the likely benefits of mentoring-based support based on evidence from stakeholders involved in the criminal justice system, combined with quantitative estimates that show the potential preventative cost savings.

While cost estimates are included, they are ***illustrative*** and not definitive evidence of causal impact. The aim is to show how support may reduce the risk of costly outcomes when no intervention is in place.

Robust evaluation would require detailed outcome data—currently limited—on both reoffending and wider societal issues related to the identified needs categories above. Progress in data access and tracking is essential for evaluating programmes like New Routes, where many benefits are hard to quantify.

Future programme design should integrate data collection from the start, ensuring that relevant outcomes are tracked over time alongside a control group. This would allow policymakers to make evidence-based decisions on the value of mentoring services in supporting individuals post-release and in reducing societal costs.

As well as this, supporting better data collection for those services providing external support to individuals on services like New Routes can also help to provide stronger evaluation of impact on preventative outcomes. This includes services like Local Authority Housing Support, services, who can help to provide improved insight on the effects of the programme to meet the identified secondary outcomes, such as the number of individuals in temporary accommodation and thus prevented from homelessness.

Box 2: A need for better data to improve evaluation.

Our initial expectations were that we would be able to conduct a more thorough evaluation of the programme's primary aim: reducing reoffending.

The New Routes programme and the data held by the Wise Group provided us with an intervention group. We planned to monitor the pre 2019 cohort, with an age cut off of 24.

In order to conduct a robust evaluation, a control group must be established i.e. a group of individuals with some characteristics and demographics, facing similar issues and also serving short term sentences who would be eligible for, but do not receive support from New Routes for a reason outwith their control. In this instance, the pre 2019 age cut off of 24 provided this reason.

The Wise Group could provide the unique reference (the Scottish Prison Number) for the intervention group. We approached the Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish Government for assistance in conducting the evaluation. We required data on who from the intervention group re-entered prison, along with data to help us construct a control group.

This was a complex request, given the sensitive nature of the data, but not unusual for evaluations of publicly funded programmes. However, despite discussions over a number of years, with many alternative approaches considered, we could not progress. From what we can understand, resource constraints were the major factor along with a lack of prioritisation of available resources on evaluation. Our offer of funding a secondment into the Scottish Government to help with these issues was not possible due to headcount restrictions imposed by the Scottish Government at the time.

This experience has been disappointing and concerning. New Routes was publicly funded, yet even with external resources being offered, there has been no evaluation of whether the scheme met its primary purpose. Despite this, an expanded throughcare contract was recommissioned in 2024.

A lack of due process around valuation is a common issue facing many programmes operated by third sector organisations. Usually, third sector organisations are left to evaluate their own programmes without input or support from the government.

Our hope is that progress will be made to improve access to the appropriate data, to allow for more robust and timely evaluation of programmes. In particular, for programmes like New Routes, where many of the benefits are difficult to quantify.

This includes providing guidance to organisations looking to create programmes that aim to alleviate social issues and thus create social value.

Data collection and evaluation must be built into the creation of these programmes, to ensure that when programmes are required to be evaluated, the appropriate outcomes are tracked for the duration of the programme and beyond.

This ensures that where decisions are made by policymakers, the appropriate evidence on the value of the service relative to its cost is considered, to determine if programmes are achieving their desired outcomes for individuals who utilise them.

3.0 The benefits of mentoring based through care: insight from our interviews.

We engaged with several stakeholders in the justice system, identifying individuals and organisations with an informed perspective on the outcomes of individuals within the criminal justice system.

This included individuals providing front line support to individuals both within and being liberated from the prison system; those working in senior leadership positions for advocacy bodies; and representatives from across the prison landscape.

These interviews followed a structured process, to gain consistent insights across a range of key areas of interest related to our research.

Our interviews highlighted 4 key benefits of mentoring based throughcare and the New Routes service:

1. The relationship between the individual and mentor
2. The liberation gate meeting
3. The connection to support services.
4. Faster resolution of issues and joining up between services.

We highlight each of these in turn.

3.1 The relationship between mentor and the individual

Stakeholder interviews revealed the challenges faced by individuals in prison — often shaped by early adversity like poverty, instability, and lack of supportive relationships. As a result, trust in both people and systems is often limited.

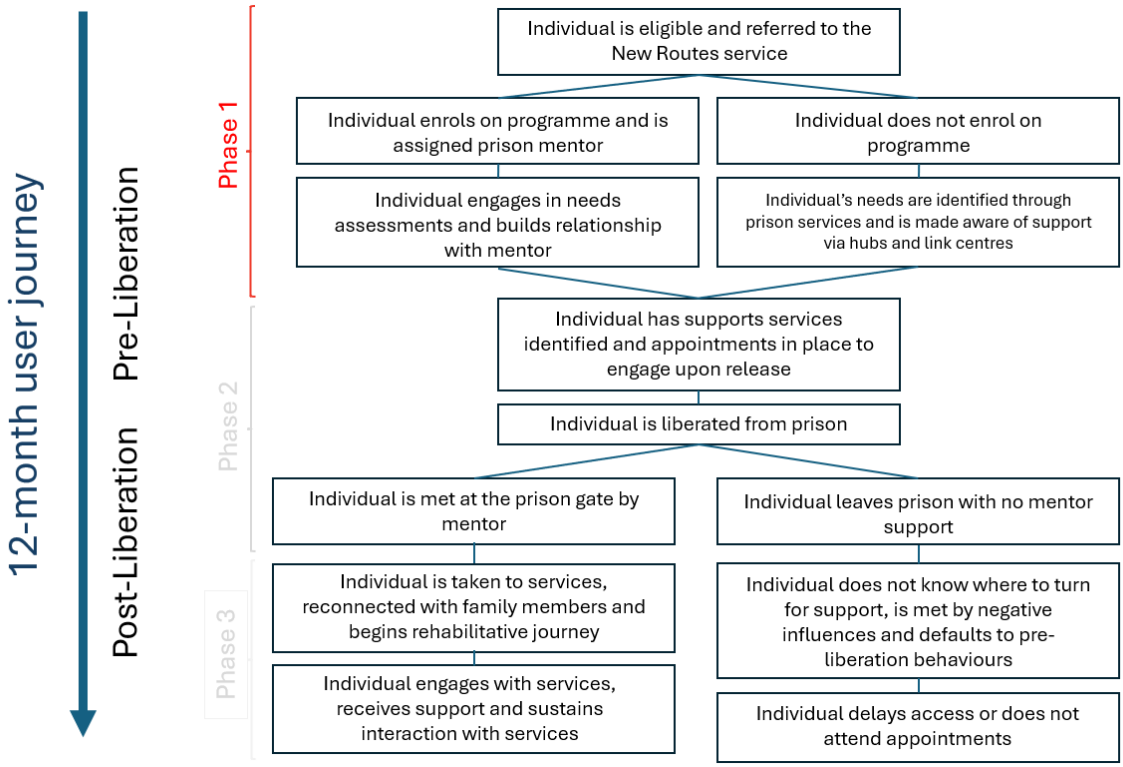
Between 2018–2023, around 5,000 people engaged with the New Routes service.

- On average, each identified with 6 out of 10 possible needs.
- 80% reported poor relationships, often due to family estrangement or social isolation.

Across all interviews, mentors were identified as the key component of New Routes, with trust between mentor and mentee emerging as a benefit of the service. Without a mentor, individuals were said to be less likely to engage with services or share the challenges they required help with. These mentors can help to rebuild confidence and hope; challenge negative self-perceptions; and break down barriers to engagement.

This trust-building phase is shown as Phase 1 in Figure 2. Once established, it helps mentors to identify needs and coordinate meaningful support — from securing essentials like a phone or bank account to connecting with support services. Many mentors were also said to have lived experience of prison, with their shared background perceived as something that helps to builds trust quickly and get individuals to engage with services.

Figure 2: Potential pathways pre and post liberation (best case scenario with mentor relative to worst case scenario with no mentor)



Source: Fraser of Allander, The Wise Group

3.2 The liberation gate meeting

Across all stakeholder interviews, one insight stood out consistently: the prison liberation gate meeting is a key mechanism through which mentoring, and New Routes may help to change outcomes for individuals.

It was widely agreed that having a mentor present at the prison gate can increase the likelihood of a positive post-release trajectory compared to those released without support. While services like community hubs and link centres are often available — and appointments may be arranged in advance — the burden typically falls on the individual to access these supports on their own. This presents a major challenge, particularly as many individuals were said to have low literacy or numeracy skills and may struggle to understand or retain the information provided before release. In some cases, people leave prison not knowing where to turn.

Even when appointments are scheduled, we heard that there is a high risk of disengagement. Individuals may delay attending, fall back into familiar patterns of behaviour, or encounter harmful influences immediately upon release. This can quickly escalate — from missed opportunities for early intervention to crises such as substance misuse, hospitalisation, or, in extreme cases, death.

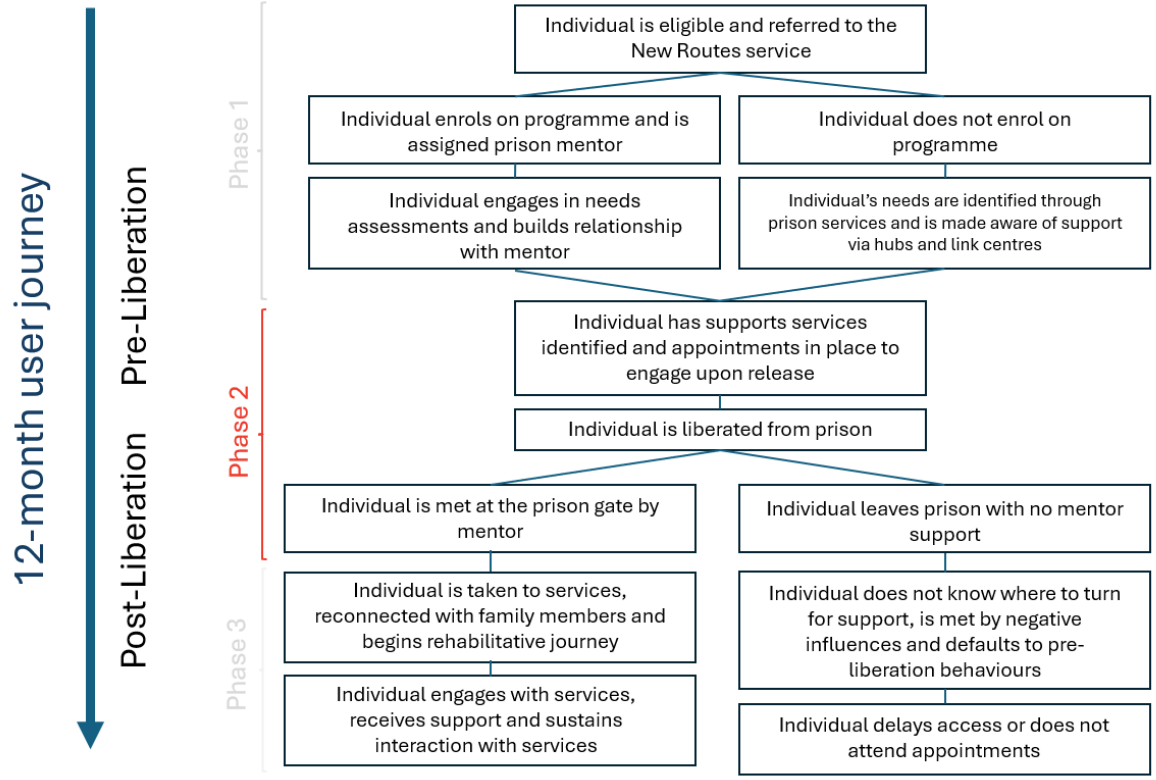
We heard that the presence of a mentor at the gate aims to disrupt this pattern. It was perceived as signalling continuity, stability, and immediate support. Mentors not only meet individuals upon release but also accompany them to pre-arranged appointments and ensure that support is in place from day one. This early intervention was highlighted as reducing the likelihood of

individuals entering a reactive system — one that only engages after their situation has worsened — and instead creates a foundation for stability and reintegration.

There was full consensus across all interviews of the positive impact of being met at the prison gate. All agreed that this meeting starts an individual on a more positive path relative to someone where no gate meeting takes place.

Between 2018 and 2024, 52% of those on the New Routes programme requested someone to collect them at the prison gate. In most cases, this was a mentor, although individuals could also choose to be met by family members or others in their support network.

Figure 3: Potential pathways pre and post liberation (best case scenario with mentor relative to worst case scenario with no mentor)



Source: Fraser of Allander Institute, The Wise Group

3.3 Connection to Support Services

A key insight from our stakeholder interviews was that New Routes — and mentoring more broadly — is not a direct solution to complex societal issues. Rather, it serves as a critical vehicle for connecting vulnerable individuals to the services they need to begin addressing their challenges.

As discussed earlier, this means that often mentoring services seek to address their primary outcomes by targeting preventative outcomes.

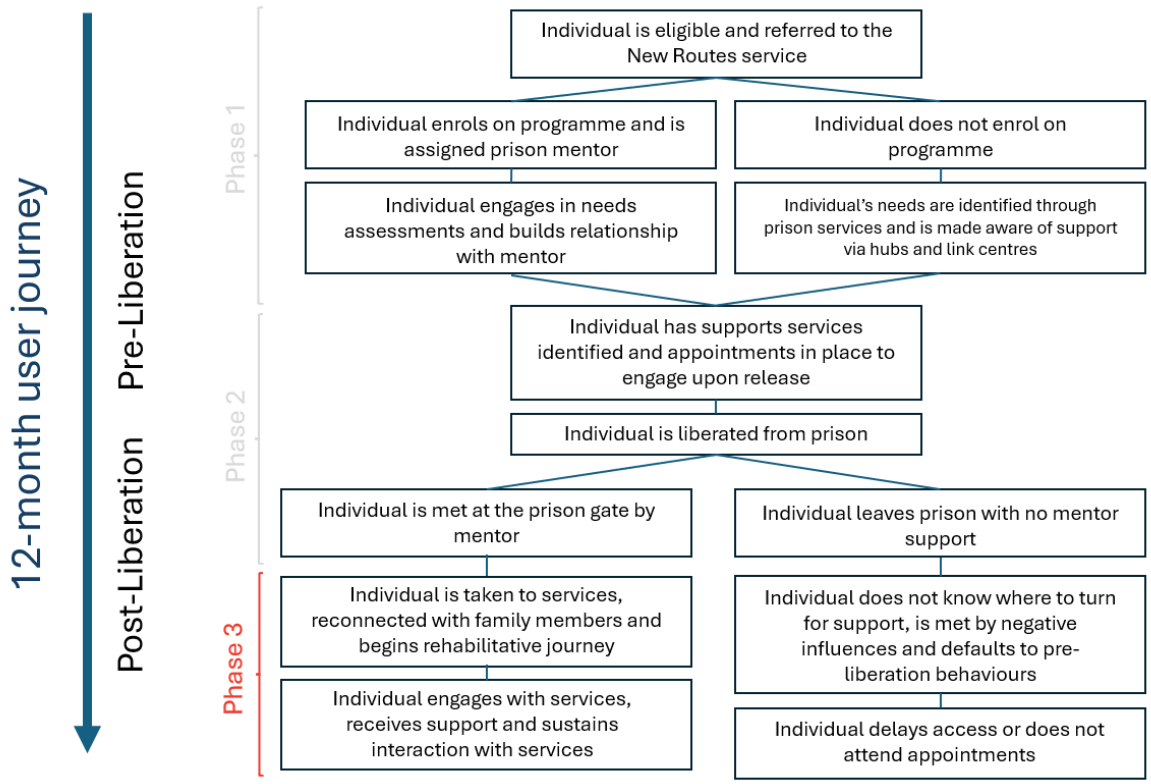
It is this connection, and the ongoing support to sustain engagement with services, which aims to help individuals progress toward more positive outcomes. In doing so, mentoring can contribute indirectly to alleviating broader societal problems such as homelessness, substance misuse, as well as reducing reoffending.

Two consistent themes emerged from interviews: first, that the mentor's intervention can play a pivotal role in motivating individuals to seek help; and second, that timing is essential. Providing support in the days after release from prison gives individuals the best chance to address their needs before they fall through the cracks.

We heard that this was because many leave prison with limited understanding of what help is available or how to access it. This is compounded by the fact that most individuals in the system have multiple, overlapping needs — often spanning housing, health, substance use, and financial insecurity.

The combination of timely intervention and meaningful connection to services was highlighted as the core mechanism through which services like New Routes supports rehabilitation. As Figure 4 illustrates, this structured support pathway stands as the best-case scenario in contrast to the uncertain journey of those released without a mentor in the worst case.

Figure 4: Potential pathways pre and post liberation (best case scenario with mentor relative to worst case scenario with no mentor)



Source: Fraser of Allander Institute, The Wise Group

3.4 Faster resolution of issues and joining up between services

Beyond the connection to services, throughout our interview process, representatives from support services also highlighted the benefits for them by having a mentor present. These included the improvements to efficiency and speed at which services can move individuals through the process to get them the support they need.

For example, insight was shared on the role a mentor has to play as a key point of contact for individuals engaging with services, with communication between services and service users often a barrier.

4.0 Exploring the counterfactual

Support service representatives also provided valuable insight on the different, more negative, outcomes that can prevail where individuals do not have support. These included:

- Individuals being left homeless and sleeping rough with no secure housing.
- Individuals relapsing on substance abuse issues.
- Individuals do not access eligible benefits and do not have access to finance.

We can't evidence the causal change in likelihoods of meeting these outcomes due to participation in New Routes but we can look some of the costs associated with these outcomes, and therefore potential preventative costs from avoiding these outcomes, i.e. the differential cost between outcomes in the best case and worst-case scenarios.

Sourcing related cost evidence is a key part of this illustrative approach, and limited data is available on preventative costs. We have focussed on two areas, homelessness and substance misuse where we could find published cost data, and where the underlying methodologies account for different factors. However, haven't verified the accuracy of these estimates. Here we provide case studies looking at the potential preventive costs associated with preventing these outcomes.

Case Study 1: Reducing homelessness.

Between 2018 and 2024, around 80% of people starting on the New Routes programme flagged a housing need of either 1 or 2. The programme uses a four-point scale to assess housing situations, where 1 indicates the most urgent crisis and 4 signals stable accommodation, shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Wise Group Housing Need Scoring

Need	*Description*
1	Severe impact, no place to stay—crisis intervention needed
2	Temporary accommodation that doesn't meet needs
3	Secure for now, but long-term sustainability is unclear
4	Secure, sustainable accommodation

Source: The Wise Group

There exists a body of evidence pointing to the high costs—both social and economic—of homelessness. This includes increased health care usage, and a higher likelihood for individuals struggling with homelessness being involved in minor criminal activity or anti-social behaviour.

The Department for Communities and Local Government conducted a meta-analysis of research that aims to capture the cost of homelessness, published in 2012[4]. At that time, their summary concluded that whilst each of the studies reviewed had a number of methodological limitations and concerned different groups of homeless people, the annual cost to government from homeless was between £24,000 and £30,000 per annum.

More recent research since this has highlighted similar costs per individuals struggling with homelessness.

[4] See Department for Communities and Local Government

This includes:

- Crisis UK, estimating in 2015 that the cost of a single man in his 30s sleeping rough for a year was around £20,128. When adjusted to more recent prices, that number climbs to around £23,640 per person. These costs are based on factors like hospital stays, A&E visits, arrests, anti-social behaviour, and high-intensity accommodation services.

- Estimates provided by The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, which estimated costs between £9,000 and £40,000 over 48 months for a different vignettes of homeless individuals.

For this analysis, we use the Crisis UK estimates, inflated to reflect current prices, as part of our illustrative exercise to demonstrate the costs associated with homelessness.

Illustrative Analysis

We provide an illustrative estimate of the cost in if the New Routes 2018-2024 cohort who had a housing need of 1 or 2 received no mentor support and as a result, were sleeping rough in the year 2024.

Not everyone without secure housing becomes homeless or sleep rough. Additionally, we can assume that some of the 2018-2024 cohort in a worst-case scenario may have returned to prison and hence will no longer be homeless. To account for this, we vary the proportion of the cohort who may end up sleeping rough in the year 2024.

Number of customers with need score of 1 or 2 between 2018 - 2024:		**799**
Crisis UK estimate of cost of a man in his 30s sleeping rough in 2024 prices:		**£23,640**
Assume 100% are sleeping rough in the year 2024:	(799*100%*£23,640)	**£18,900,000**
Assume 50% are sleeping rough in the year 2024:	(799*50%*£23,640)	**£9,400,000**
Assume 10% are sleeping rough in the year 2024:	(799*10%*£23,640)	**£1,900,000**

Source: Wise Group, Scottish Government, FAI Calculations

Beyond Housing Need: Benefits Access and Local Authority Costs

Our interviews with frontline services also highlighted another potential cost saving associated with mentoring support.

This insight highlighted that where individuals do not have mentoring support, connection to other services is not always set up, making the process of post-liberation support inefficient.

For example, we heard that in cases where an individual is being liberated from prison and has mentor support, the appropriate applications will be in place upon release for eligible benefits such as Universal Credit. This means that when an individual is liberated, they can access their eligible benefits and thus have an immediate source of finance upon leaving prison. However, where an individual does not have support, then these applications may not be in place and thus individuals may have to wait a further 5 weeks to access their benefits like Universal Credit, as per evidence.

Representatives from front line services shared that where an individual must wait for access to benefits, however, and requires housing support, then often the local authority must bear the

cost of any temporary accommodation until benefits are received. One local authority reported that short-term hostel accommodation costs around £215 per week. Therefore, where an individual may wait up to 5 weeks for access to their Universal Credit payments, each individual could incur £1,075 in unpaid rent during this period owed to the local authority.

If we look again at the high-risk individuals (need scores 1 or 2), this could result in a local authority burden of up to £143,000 *(1,075*799/6 years)* per annum assuming they all required temporary accommodation and had no mentor support to help with benefit applications.

Even though this money may eventually be reimbursed, individuals often find themselves in rent arrears as a result, which can lead to stress, stigma, and long-term instability—making rehabilitation that much harder.

Case Study 2: Addressing Substance Abuse issues.

Between 2018 and 2024, 2,700 individuals on New Routes were identified with having substance abuse needs. Of these individuals, 760 were identified as having severe needs at their pre-liberation assessment (i.e. a score of 1 or 2).

Table 2: Wise Group Substance Abuse Need Scoring

Need	*Description*
1	Severe quality of life impacts (including possibly severe health risks): e.g. use of hard drugs, extended duration of the addiction
2	There is substance abuse and there are significant quality of life impacts, but Customer is willing to address the addiction.
3	Progress towards overcoming addiction, but there are still quality of life impacts. Engaging with addiction agency
4	Issue does not apply – no substance abuse (either never any history of abuse or any past addiction no longer affect quality of life)

According to Scottish Government research in 2009, **problem drug use**—defined as requiring social and medical intervention—costs Scotland approximately **£3.35bn**, rising to **£3.48bn** when including recreational users.

Illustrative Analysis

We provide an illustrative estimate of the cost in if the New Routes 2018-2024 cohort who had a housing need of 1 or 2 received no mentor support and as a result, had problem drug use.

Number of customers with need score of 1 or 2 between 2018 - 2024:		**760**
Scottish Government estimate of cost of healthcare intervention in 2024 prices:		**£4,391**
Scottish Government estimate of cost to criminal justice system in 2024 prices:		**£18,578**
Cost in 2024 of healthcare intervention:	(760*£4,391)	**£3,300,000**
Cost in 2024 to criminal justice system:	(760*£18,578)	**£14,100,000**

Source: Scottish Government, Wise Group, FAI Calculations

The paper goes on to discuss further costs related to problem users drug use, which include:

- Social care costs of £111m related to costs of children and family interventions, children's panels and substance misuse services.
- Economic costs of £795m related to lost output due to premature deaths and absence from work.
- Costs to society of £1.7bn from problem users, highlighting costs such as social costs drug related deaths and those related to the victims of crime.

These estimates, however, are only provided at the aggregate level and not on a per user basis, therefore we do not include them within our modelling.

Our estimates above are not direct estimates of the impact of the New Routes programme but help to highlight the high costs related to persistent drug use in Scotland that New Routes seeks to reduce. Connection to services and supporting individuals to address their addiction

problems is therefore crucial, particularly for those being liberated from prison, to sustain the treatment, they receive whilst incarcerated.

The role of New Routes, therefore, and the mentor support, connecting individuals to the appropriate services to tackle their issues, and helping to sustain drug misuse treatment likely plays a key role in helping to address the significant costs associated to illicit drug consumption in Scotland.

5.0 Summary

This discussion paper serves as an illustrative exercise, providing an estimate of the potential costs associated with key issues affecting Scotland's male prison population.

Throughout, we have highlighted the current challenges in conducting robust economic evaluations of New Routes and similar support programmes.

There is a growing demand to better understand the impact of interventions designed to address complex social issues—both in terms of the outcomes for individuals and the potential cost savings to public services.

While this paper does not offer a full economic evaluation, it provides valuable insight into the benefits of the New Routes service. These insights are informed by a series of interviews with individuals knowledgeable about the programme and its impacts.

Our research also underscores the potential for preventative savings linked to two critical challenges faced by individuals leaving prison: homelessness and substance abuse.

We discuss how, in the absence of mentoring support, these issues may become more pronounced resulting in increased financial burdens for government and society.

These costs, including those associated with rough sleeping, and health and criminal justice expenditures related to untreated substance use, are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Summary of potential cost estimate by related outcome

Outcome	Potential Cost Scenarios
Reducing Homelessness	*£1.3m - £18.9m*
Cost to Local Authorities	*£0.06m - £0.86m*
Health related drug use costs – Not in Treatment	*£0.06m - £3.3m*
Health related drug use costs – In Treatment	*£0.02m - £1.7m*
Criminal Justice related drug use costs – Not in Treatment	*£0.3m - £14.1m*
Criminal Justice related drug use costs – In Treatment	*£0.031m - £7.2m*

Source: FAI Calculations

These estimates capture only the potential costs where evidence is available, recognising that many of the outcomes targeted by mentoring programmes are not easily quantifiable in financial terms.

For 2023-24, £1.83m was allocated to New Routes, as part of a wider support fund of £3.8m for services[5]. Whilst our cost estimates are illustrative, they highlight the potential for mentoring based services to reduce many cost bearing societal issues relative to the cost of delivering these programmes each year.

It is important to reiterate that our analysis does not attribute cost savings directly to New Routes. Rather, it highlights the substantial costs associated with negative outcomes—such as homelessness and substance misuse—that individuals may be more likely to experience without support and connection to services, as suggested by insights from our stakeholder interviews.

[5] See Community Justice Scotland

To robustly estimate any causal reduction in costs, further analysis would be required to determine the programme's specific impact on key outcomes, such as the extent to which it prevents homelessness. This would involve identifying how many individuals avoided such outcomes as a direct result of participation in New Routes.

Nevertheless, mentoring-based throughcare plays a key role in addressing these challenges, particularly by helping individuals access essential services upon release from prison. We hope this paper helps to illuminate both the complexities involved in conducting rigorous evaluations and the critical need for improved data collection to support those delivering and assessing programmes of this kind.

As New Routes has now concluded and replaced by a new national voluntary throughcare programme for Scotland's prison population, this paper also offers timely reflections on how future evaluations might be structured to effectively demonstrate the impact of the new programme.