

# TACKLING INJUSTICE, CHANGING LIVES

STRATEGIC PLAN  
**2021-2026**

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"Unlock gives people with criminal records a voice, it gives us hope."

# FOREWORD

On behalf of the trustee board and executive team, I am excited to share our strategic plan for 2021 – 2026.

In developing this strategy, we wanted to ensure that the views and experiences of individuals with criminal records were at the heart of our thinking. This strategy is the product of careful deliberation on what we heard and sets out an ambitious plan to tackle some of the long-standing problems faced by people with criminal records.



There are now more than 11 million people in the UK with a criminal record, and many offences that show up on criminal record checks are minor – mistakes that people made decades ago when they were young. This is a barrier to employment, given 75% of employers discriminate against job applicants on the basis of a criminal record and 50% of employers say they would not recruit ‘offenders or ex-offenders’. A criminal record can further entrench racial inequality. Behind many of the negative attitudes in society to people with criminal records lie stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

In recent years we have made significant progress which has made a real difference to the lives of people with criminal records and we want to grow this capability. Our campaigning secured changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in 2014 which helped over 1.75 million people have their conviction become spent much sooner. The Ban the Box campaign, which Unlock co-founded in 2013, now has over 140 employers who commit to not asking about criminal records at job application stage. Most notably, in 2019 a Supreme Court ruling led to the government introducing changes to the filtering rules in late 2020. These rules set out which convictions and cautions show up on higher-level Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, and the changes mean that over 45,000 people a year will no longer have to disclose old or minor criminal records when applying for jobs that involve higher-level DBS checks. For the first time in our history, Unlock intervened in this case – and we are proud to have been part of this change that will help so many people.

However, there is much more to do to achieve our vision of a fair and inclusive society where people with criminal records are free from the stigma of their past. And as we strive to do more, we will stay true to our “ear to the ground, voice at the top” philosophy.

Providing information and advice to those with criminal records is key to Unlock – it not only provides crucial support to individuals when they need it, but it also helps us to identify new and systemic issues that people are facing. We will continue to deliver this practical support, provided at scale through our successful peer volunteer scheme and dedicated staff team, and further develop our use of digital channels – increasing the reach, accessibility and impact of our work.

It is the insights which individuals give us that inspire us and drive our work to achieve systemic change. We will do more to fix the root causes of the stigma, prejudice and discrimination people face by growing our focus on campaigning, using the law and building empirical evidence through research to achieve positive changes to laws, policies and practices.

Given our ambition and our determination to achieve a fair and inclusive society, we must not become complacent that because we are doing something, we are doing enough. The prejudice faced by people with criminal records is wide ranging and has intensified. We’re determined to tackle this injustice and advocate for change so that people with criminal records don’t face stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Because everyone deserves the chance to build a good life.

**MARK ROWE**  
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

# OUR PURPOSE

PASSION LED

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We are a national independent advocacy charity that supports, speaks up and campaigns for people facing stigma, prejudice and discrimination because of their criminal record. We believe that everyone should be able to move on from their past and contribute fully to society. That's why we provide information, give advice and take on cases to help people overcome the obstacles they are facing because of their criminal record. Many people feel like they are serving a second sentence of stigma and discrimination. This injustice is why we collect evidence, speak out and campaign for change so that policies, practices and attitudes allow people the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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## OUR VISION

Our vision is of a fair and inclusive society where people with criminal records are free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

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## OUR MISSION

The reason we exist

Our mission is to advocate for people with criminal records so they can move on positively in their lives. We:

- Support people with criminal records to navigate their way through challenges
- Campaign for changes to legislation, policies and practices of government, employers and others
- Research, present evidence and raise awareness of the systemic issues faced by people with criminal records

# CONTEXT

PHOTO @jonathanrados on Unsplash.com

## A criminal record affects a large number of people

There are now over 11 million people in the UK with a criminal record.<sup>(ref1)</sup> The vast majority of them have put their mistakes behind them and are living law-abiding lives. Yet, for many, their criminal record anchors them to their past and gets in the way of them fully contributing to society.

## It's not just those who have been to prison

The total cost of reoffending is up to £18 billion a year <sup>(ref2)</sup> and 75% of individuals leaving prison make a new claim to an out-of-work benefit within two years of release.<sup>(ref3)</sup> We regularly hear from people who say "the real sentence started after I was released from prison".

But over 90% of people with a criminal record have not been to prison.<sup>(ref 4)</sup> A third of men and one in nine women have a criminal record by age 53. <sup>(ref5)</sup> Ministry of Justice research found that three-quarters of those convicted before the age of 53 had only been convicted once. <sup>(ref6)</sup>

## The injustice of a second sentence

People with criminal records can find themselves locked out of society and continually punished for things they've served their sentence for. This injustice can be seen in the numbers of people unemployed many years after being convicted. Around a third of people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance have received a conviction or caution in the last 10 years. <sup>(ref7)</sup> Unlock's work is founded on the principle that people who have already been punished by the criminal justice system should not face further 'punishment' or exclusion from aspects of civil society.

## A criminal record is crippling for employment

Fair access to employment benefits everyone in society; according to Ministry of Justice research, the most important factor identified in stopping reoffending was 'having a job.' <sup>(ref8)</sup> However, 75% of employers discriminate against applicants on the basis of a criminal record <sup>(ref9)</sup> and DWP/YouGov research showed that 50% of employers say they would not recruit 'offenders or ex-offenders'.<sup>(ref10)</sup> Feeling shame or embarrassment about their earlier transgressions, people will often avoid applying for jobs which require criminal record checks. There is clear evidence from the United States that reform of criminal record checks gets people off welfare and into work.<sup>(ref11)</sup>

A criminal record acquired in youth can be a life sentence. A person can change quickly, but their criminal record does not: young adults in particular can find a criminal record holding them back at a key period in their working lives and well into adulthood. In the last five years, over a million criminal records were disclosed on standard or enhanced DBS checks, even though the offences were from over 30 years ago and the records were received by people when under the age of 25.

## A criminal record can further entrench racial inequality

Ethnicity can impact on the type of criminal record someone receives. Data since 2009 shows white people have had a consistently lower average custodial sentence length for indictable offences than all other ethnic groups. <sup>(ref12)</sup> Black teenage boys are more likely to be charged

# CONTEXT

with murder than manslaughter and more likely to receive a higher or maximum sentence than white boys. One in four black teenage boys guilty of manslaughter were given maximum jail terms, while white children found guilty of the same crime were sentenced to no more than 10 years, with the majority getting less than four. <sup>(ref13)</sup> Our research shows that people feel the criminal records disclosure regime disproportionately impacts certain Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. The disclosure regime exacerbates problems faced by people already treated more harshly at all stages in the criminal justice system. Ways to minimise – or delay – the use of criminal records may benefit BAME groups in particular, but would result in a much fairer system for everyone.

## The prejudice is wide-ranging and has intensified

When the current system of criminal background checks was introduced in 2002, around 1.2 million checks were processed. There are now over six million checks a year, of which over four million are at a higher level, meaning that spent convictions can be disclosed. <sup>(ref14)</sup> Since the launch of the Police National Computer in 1974, criminal records have evolved from being used merely for crime detection purposes, to becoming a means of categorising people as potentially ‘unsuitable’, ‘risky’ or even ‘undeserving’.

## Despite some recent positive improvements to the criminal records system a criminal record can still have a pervasive impact:

### Insurance

Insurance cover is often refused or subject to unjustified increased premiums. Insurance companies regularly take into account convictions that have no relevance to the insurance sought. Insurers fail to follow industry good practice and are often misleading in the questions or assumptions they have, suggesting that people with spent convictions need to disclose these.

### Access to education

In 2018 UCAS removed the ‘criminal convictions’ box for applicants to non-regulated courses at university. But most universities continue to collect this information and we regularly hear from people who find that old and minor criminal records cause problems when applying to university, particularly in accessing courses like social work and healthcare.

### Becoming a trustee or senior manager of a charity

The Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016 prevents charities from recruiting trustees and senior managers with certain criminal records. Amendments in 2018 extend the framework to cover senior staff and extend the trustee disqualification framework to cover people on the sex offenders register (even when the conviction is spent).

### Housing

Since 2011 social housing providers have had the right to apply blanket bans to applicants with criminal convictions. Many providers ask on application and apply some form of exclusion for those who declare a conviction.

### Information on the internet

Media reports online can lead to information about criminal offences remaining publicly accessible for many years, undermining the purpose of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

### Travel

Visa requirements and confusing travel restrictions can deter or prevent travel.

# CONTEXT



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## It doesn't stop when a criminal record becomes spent

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 established an important legal principle that, after a specified period of time, most criminal records could become 'spent' meaning that they could not lawfully be taken into account in most circumstances. However, over four decades since the legislation's introduction, its impact has been gradually eroded. Reducing the time periods after which criminal records become spent has been a priority for Unlock. The ever-increasing numbers of 'exemptions' limit the protections of the Act and the status of having a criminal record which is now 'spent' risks becoming meaningless if it means that people can continue to be discriminated against in a wide range of areas.

## Many people are not allowed to be 'legally rehabilitated'

People who have served their sentence shouldn't keep being punished indefinitely. Yet under our current system, anyone sentenced to more than four years in prison can never become 'legally rehabilitated'. Over 8,000 people a year receive a sentence that cannot become spent. <sup>(Ref:15)</sup> That can mean a lifetime of discrimination in employment, higher insurance premiums and difficulties finding housing. Exclusions by sentence or offence type create injustice and embed the idea that some people are inherently incapable of rehabilitation. We do not believe that to be the case.

# CONTEXT



## There have been some positive developments, but there is much more to do

We are proud to have played a key part in recent years in bringing about positive changes that have benefited people with criminal records:

# 1

**Changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act** passed in 2012 and introduced in 2014, reduced the disclosure period for most jobs for hundreds of thousands of people, and also meant those sentences between 30 months and four years could become spent. But it kept a large proportion of people excluded because of the length or type of their sentence, and failed to tackle the underlying issues with the legislation in today's society.

# 2

**The Ban the Box campaign**, which Unlock co-founded in 2013, now has over 140 employers that commit to not asking about criminal records at application stage. But research we did in 2018 showed that three quarters of national employers continue to ask at this point.

# 3

**The introduction of filtering rules in 2013** meant people with some single convictions and cautions no longer had them show up on standard or enhanced checks. Around 120,000 standard or enhanced checks a year no longer disclose criminal records as a result of filtering. But the rules were unnecessarily rigid and meant that many people still had old and minor criminal records disclosed.

# 4

**A Supreme Court ruling in 2019**, following the first legal intervention in Unlock's history, led to the government introducing changes to the filtering rules in late 2020 which will benefit around 45,000 people a year. But many convictions and cautions still show up on higher-level DBS checks for many years, sometimes forever.

There is much more to do to achieve our mission of a fair and inclusive society where people with criminal records are free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

# HOW WE WORK

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## Independence

We believe it is important that we hold government, agencies and others to account. We also believe it is important that people with criminal records trust us. That's why we're independent; Unlock neither seeks nor accepts government funding and this is crucial to our model of working. While we aim to work constructively with government and other partners wherever possible, we are also at liberty to take a critical stance on policies which unfairly restrict opportunities for people with criminal records.

Speaking truth to power is what we do. As a result, the people for whom we exist, our supporters, and our funders, can be sure that our sole motivation is to improve the life chances of people with criminal records. Our power comes from our knowledge of what's happening to people with criminal records, publishing reports, persuading the unwilling, encouraging good practices and exposing those which are unacceptable. We're politically independent - but we are not neutral about our agenda of change to criminal records.

## Involve and include people with criminal records

We believe that personal experience is intrinsically valuable, so we recruit people with criminal records throughout the organisation (and particularly as staff and volunteers to deliver our frontline support). Peer experience offers a bridge of understanding, awareness and empathy to people who sometimes find it hard to talk about the issues they face. We also aim for a trustee board where half of the members have a criminal record. We proactively involve and support people to contribute to our advocacy, campaigns and policy work, because people with criminal records are in a unique position to know best about the problems that they face.

Being a beneficiary-led and delivered charity ensures that we have legitimacy. But people with criminal records are diverse and no one individual can speak for an entire group, so we will not have 'token' leaders. In a world where lived experience is at risk of becoming cheap currency, our mission is bigger than the experiences of any one person. We will stay away from individual identification and self-promotion, instead focusing on challenging the discrimination and structural barriers faced by people with criminal records.

# HOW WE WORK

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## Ear to the ground, voice at the top

We listen and engage every day with people who face difficulties as a result of their criminal record. We have a proven track record of identifying issues, finding solutions and putting them into practice. We influence policy and create systemic change, continually punching above our weight to achieve large-scale outcomes with employers, service providers, advice agencies and government. Too often, policies and systems divide and disempower people; and politicians and organisations hoard rather than share power. We will create platforms and build confidence and capacity for individuals to take more power and to influence.

## Think big. Act big. Stay small.

We are a small charity with big ambitions. We will constantly adapt our work so that we better meet the needs of the people we exist for. To do this, we need to make tough choices; we can't do everything. Longer term, it is important that we are able to ensure that the organisation's core work continues, which means working efficiently and effectively.

## Work in partnership

We collaborate and build strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations to maximise our impact. If we are to achieve real change, we also need to work with people and organisations that are different to Unlock, and develop partnerships that influence the way they think and behave.

# OUR VALUES

Our values are what make us unique as an organisation. They show what we care about, help us to make decisions and sit at the heart of everything we do.

SEE THE GOOD

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## We are positive and optimistic

We never stop believing in a better future where people are not defined by their criminal record. Nobody has a perfect past. We believe everybody deserves the chance to build a good life. We celebrate what we are proud of now, we learn from our mistakes, and we always strive to do better.

## We are inclusive and collaborative

We work with and for people with criminal records. They are at the heart of everything we do. We don't exclude anyone because of their past. We do not do things to people; we work with and alongside people. Unlock was founded by people with criminal records and we continue to ensure that we recruit staff, volunteers and trustees who have them. But expertise is not exclusive in this way. We treat everyone fairly so everyone feels welcome and valued, challenging discrimination, stereotypes and unfairness wherever we see it. We are conscious that our team is not as diverse as it could and should be, and we are committed to improving diversity and inclusion in our workplace.

## We are authentic and built on trust

We act with integrity, always striving to do the right thing in the right way, delivering on our promises and being open to challenge. People rely on us. We are caring, compassionate and supportive. We make decisions that are based on evidence. We are respected by policy makers to bring knowledge, experience, evidence and expertise to the table.

## We are pragmatic and make things happen

We provide practical support to individuals, and we are pushing for real change. We are grounded in principles. We take ownership, act responsibly and get things done.

## We are courageous and tenacious

We stand up for what's right. We are brave, passionate and resilient. We know we won't succeed every time, but we always give our all. We challenge ourselves. We will never give up.

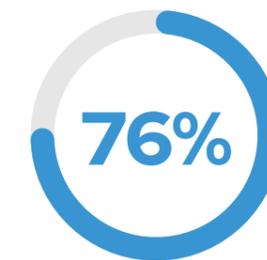
# APPROACH TO THIS STRATEGY

The priorities set out in this strategy have been guided by what people with criminal records have suggested we should focus on. Although the Covid-19 pandemic meant we had to get creative in how we did this, we were still able to engage with over 200 individuals to get their input into our future priorities, nearly 80% of whom were people with criminal records, and the remaining 20% were family, friends and professionals supporting them.

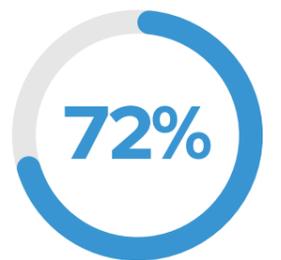
## WHAT SHOULD WE FOCUS ON?



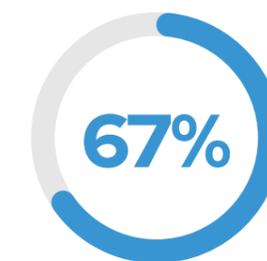
Lobby and campaign government to change the criminal records disclosure system



Provide up to date information for individuals



Support and challenge employers



Carry out research and produce evidence



Help organisations that support individuals

# APPROACH TO THIS STRATEGY

In looking at how we could be more effective in helping people, the most commonly cited themes were:

**Helping people more (developing our helpline, carrying out more case work)**

**Addressing policy/practice as a way of helping people**

**Continuing our approach of online information as well as specific advice where needed**

**Advice to be delivered by people with a criminal record and primarily by volunteers**

And in looking at how we could be more effective in achieving systemic change, the most commonly cited areas were:

**Continuing to push for changes to the criminal records disclosure system**

**Getting involved in more strategic litigation to force change**

**Doing more research to provide evidence of the issues**

**Raising awareness of the need for change**

In all of our work, we avoid the kind of negative labelling that can often underpin stigma and prejudice. That's why for many years we stayed clear of referring to "offenders" or "ex-offenders", and instead used phrases such as "people with convictions". Having consulted with individuals on this, we have decided to shift to referring to "people with criminal records". This is what the greatest number of people felt was the most inclusive way of referring to the people that Unlock represents – whilst still recognising that people are human beings first and foremost.

In our vision, we talk about a society free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Stigma is the negative stereotype that comes from ignorance and prejudgement. Stigma then becomes prejudice, and discrimination is the behaviour that results from this prejudice and negative stereotype. Our vision refers to all three because we believe that it is important to tackle each of them; but they are interconnected and together reflect the sum of the challenge we strive to overcome.

In going about our work, we need to act as agents of change. We will strengthen our ability to deliver on our mission, using our experience to drive progress. We will work in mature partnership with the government and its agencies when this is the most effective way of achieving change. We will also hold them to account when policies and practices fall short, bringing challenge based on evidence.

If we fail to make change happen, we fail the people we exist for, keeping them stuck in a system where stigma and discrimination persist. Being an agent of change often means being more outspoken and challenging – we need to allow authentic voices to be heard, loud and clear. Campaigning is one method, when there is something identifiable that can be changed in a fixed period of time, and where the campaign is winnable. But we understand that everything we do can be seen as contributing to change, not only when we run a campaign. We can also influence change in quieter ways, working behind the scenes.

# APPROACH TO THIS STRATEGY

Using these areas as the basis of our plan, we will build on what makes us unique as a charity. We will also be ambitious about how we develop further. That's why this new strategy contains more digital, case work, legal cases, influencing policy and research. The ambition in this plan reflects the views that came through strongly in our survey of the need to focus on pushing for widespread and long-lasting change:



*Unlock is a lifeline. An amazing resource, somewhere to feel like you're not alone, but also someone to fight for better rights for those with criminal convictions.*



*Unlock offers a safe trusted vehicle through which the rights of people with criminal convictions can be upheld. Unlock provides accessible advice, guidance and solutions that support people to live their lives.*



*It's my first "go to" website when I've needed information or support. It's helped me feel a little more accepted in society and a little less out on a limb.*



*Your strengths are persistency, understanding people's issues, and I think the way Unlock helps people and fights for change is very efficient.*



*Unlock is great at providing information and support. It's brilliant to see Unlock lobbying government more and the recent initiative to help people contact their MP was great to see - you should definitely be doing more of this.*



*It gives people with criminal records a voice, it also gives us hope.*



*Unlock is a unique and invaluable resource. For me it has literally been a lifeline.*

# OUR AMBITION WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

Rooted in the experiences of people with criminal records, the change we seek is long-lasting, systemic and large scale.



PHOTO @garrettsears on Unsplash.com

In delivering our ambition, we will concentrate on six priorities:

1

**To be a powerful voice in pushing for change to legislation, policies and practices.**

The criminal records disclosure system is not fit for purpose; it's time for a fresh start. Finding and keeping meaningful employment remains the biggest practical obstacle that people face, and our work to support and challenge employers has been effective in creating long-lasting changes to recruitment practices. Our emerging work with universities is building a foundation for promoting fair access to higher education.

2

**To be effective in using the law and working with others to bring about legislative, policy and social change through strategic litigation.**

Our intervention in a Supreme Court case shows we can add real and unique value. There is a strong appetite for it amongst the people we exist for - and it provides a mechanism for change that can be responsive to emerging issues.

3

**To be recognised for research that contributes to the evidence base and supports us to achieve change at a policy and systemic level.**

There is a lack of research that provides us with robust evidence to inform our policy work. This is a constant barrier when seeking changes. Formalising our evidence base through rigorous analysis and additional empirical research will better support the communication and realisation of our objectives.

4

**To be the leading, trusted, 'go to' place for people with criminal records looking for information, advice and support.**

We know that many people who come to us for information are unaware of their rights and are looking for a detailed understanding of complex issues, so we want to step-up our efforts to develop comprehensive information on the full range of areas of life that are impacted by a criminal record. However, we also know that too much information can be hard to follow, so we want to develop our digital service so that people can easily find what they need.

5

**To continue providing individual advice and advocacy support that will help people challenge stigma and discrimination they are facing.**

Our helpline is a crucial source of support for people. We want to make sure that we have highly trained advisors available to provide support to the thousands of people that contact us every year, developing a multi-channel approach to deliver this efficiently and effectively. We also want to make sure that we have the capacity and skills to provide tailored, individual-level advocacy to help those who might otherwise give up in challenging the unfair treatment that they have faced.

6

**To continue to be well-governed, efficiently run and cost-effective.**

Unlock has a strong record of successfully raising funds from trusts and foundations, whose grants comprise the majority of our income. We must continue to demonstrate that both our charity and its funds are properly managed in order to maintain their support and encourage new funders to invest in our work. Unrestricted income provides us with the means to work flexibly and responsively, seizing opportunities to act where our input can make a difference. Unrestricted funds may be received through grants, but we will maintain and develop Unlock's earned and donor income streams, and also reach out to philanthropic donors.

# OUR AMBITION WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

Building on this strategic plan, we will develop a multi-year business plan which will help us to achieve our ambition and priorities. The six priorities above lead us to six strategic objectives that will enable us to meet our ambitions for the next five years:



## 1

**Advocate and campaign, building on our areas of strength, going deeper into the policy and systemic issues that significantly affect people.**

### We will:

#### A

Push for a root-and-branch review of the criminal records disclosure system, with the aim of reducing how long records are disclosed for. We will advocate for changes so that convictions become 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act sooner and that all convictions are capable of becoming spent. We want to see a distinct approach to records acquired in childhood and a more nuanced approach to disclosing records acquired in early adulthood. We will also campaign for further reforms to the filtering rules, which set out which convictions and cautions show up on higher-level DBS checks. We want to see the government reduce the list of offences ineligible for filtering, set filtering time periods based on evidence, review the lifelong disclosure of adult cautions for offences not filterable and introduce a review mechanism for individuals whose criminal record is not automatically filtered.

#### B

Challenge the increase in use of unnecessary DBS checks, and in particular stop unlawful higher-level checks.

#### C

Work at both a deeper and broader level to influence employer policies and embed fair recruitment practices.

#### D

Build on our work to promote fair access to higher education.

#### E

Be responsive to issues as they emerge.

## 2

**Increase our use of the law and strategic litigation as a tactic for achieving change.**

### We will:

#### A

Develop a legal strategy with a plan for how we will deliver it.

#### B

Identify and prioritise key areas where legal cases could help to achieve wider systemic change.

#### C

Seek to collaborate with others in this work.

# OUR AMBITION WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

## 3

**Increase the research and evidence base to support our work to achieve change at a policy and systemic level.**

### We will:

#### A

Develop a research strategy with a plan for how we will deliver it, including the process by which problems become formalised, the criteria for deciding our approach to certain issues, and mechanisms for identifying areas for research and the appropriate way to conduct it.

#### B

Effectively integrate the issues, experiences and perspectives of people with criminal records into our approach to research.

## 4

**Reach more people by helping them to self-serve digitally.**

### We will:

#### A

Implement our digital strategy developed in 2020 so that digital enables us to increase the reach, accessibility and impact of our work.

#### B

Re-develop our websites using user-centred design principles.

#### C

Develop and implement innovative tools to help people.

#### D

Develop the way we provide training to organisations to enable us to reach more practitioners.

# OUR AMBITION WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

## 5

**Strengthen our capacity to support people more.**

**We will:**

**A**

Strengthen our multi-channel support to maintain highest possible standards.

**B**

Ensure we have the resources to effectively advise those that need to contact us.

**C**

Expand our case work and individual advocacy support.

## 6

**Maintain good governance and develop Unlock's sustainability and resilience.**

**We will:**

**A**

Translate our priorities into fully funded and resourced delivery, with a fundraising strategy to support it.

**B**

Develop unrestricted funding streams including support from donors and philanthropists, and by growing earned income.

**C**

Continue to measure ourselves against the Charity Governance Code to guide an active and effective Board.

**D**

Ensure that we maintain a focus on increasing diversity and inclusion, with the aim of being representative of all sections of society.

The priorities set out here are only the start. We know that, led by the experiences of people with criminal records and driven by the passion and dedication of so many individuals and organisations that support our work, we have a real chance to achieve a society where people with criminal records are free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

# OUR OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

This strategy, and the objectives within it, focus Unlock towards our core goal: to have a positive impact on the lives of people with criminal records, so they can move on positively in their lives. By developing a multi-year business plan to deliver this strategy, we will make sure that we continue to keep our eyes on the overall impact of our work, aligning each project and deliverable, however big or small, to our purpose. We will focus on outcomes to give us clarity about what we're trying to do, help us track our progress towards long-term impact, and enable us to improve.

We will monitor and measure our frontline activities that support individuals. We will carry out regular follow-up exercises and feedback opportunities to learn what changed as a result of individuals' engagement with us and what we could do better. This allows us to evidence the impact of our front-line work and informs the development of our support channels so they can evolve to most effectively meet people's needs.

Monitoring common problems and issues that our users tell us about also allows us to identify new or persistent issues where advocacy at policy and practice level is needed to have a wider and ongoing impact beyond individual cases.

We know that advocacy and campaigning to bring about systemic change can require time and dogged determination to achieve success. Nevertheless, milestones along the way can be recorded to evidence progress - whether that be increased awareness, issues we raise being looked at by government departments and others, or a series of incremental 'wins'. For example: more employers adopting 'Ban the Box', universities adopting our 'pledge' and parliamentarians, Select Committees and government departments working on the issues that we raise.

We have two overarching outcomes to our work, one at an individual-level and one at a systemic-level:

## 1

**People have knowledge, skills, confidence and support to overcome the disadvantages related to their criminal record.**

Two of the strategic objectives of this plan will help us get there - we will reach more people by helping them to self-serve digitally, and we will strengthen our capacity to support people more. Together, this will enable people with criminal records to be aware of their rights, know where to turn for advice, and be able to challenge the stigma and discrimination they are facing.

## 2

**People with criminal records are free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination as a result of government, employers and others having policies, practices and attitudes that support their fair treatment.**

Three of the strategic objectives of this plan will help us achieve these changes. We will be a powerful voice in pushing for change to legislation, policies and practices, using strategic litigation to bring about change, and increasing the research and evidence base to support us to achieve change at a policy and systemic level.

# OUR OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

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To achieve and underpin our two overarching outcomes, our third outcome is that Unlock is effective, efficient and professional in its work and operations, ensuring we have systems to achieve maximum impact. Developing Unlock's sustainability, resilience and good governance is one of the six strategic objectives of this strategy. On top of this, we will continue to:

## 1

### **Invest in our people**

*– this includes the development of our board, staff and volunteers.*

We will make sure that the organisation has sufficient capacity to deliver this strategy. We will work effectively as a team to embed and demonstrate our values and our approach across the organisation.

## 2

### **Increase our visibility**

*– this includes growing our media presence, where it is useful for delivering this strategy. We will build on our successful social media presence, developing our strategy further. We will strengthen and align our brand to our values and key messages.*

With positive progress on each of these outcomes, people with criminal records will be better able to move on positively in their lives.

# OUR PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2021-26

## PRIORITY 1

People have knowledge, skills, confidence and support to overcome the disadvantages related to their criminal record.

### WE WILL

- Reach more people by helping them to self-serve digitally
- Implement our digital strategy
- Redevelop our websites
- Develop and implement innovative tools to help people
- Develop our digital training for professionals

### WE WILL

- Strengthen our capacity to support people more
- Strengthen our multi-channel support to maintain highest possible standards
- Ensure we have the resources to effectively advise those that need to contact us
- Expand our case work and individual advocacy support

## PRIORITY 2

People with criminal records are free from stigma, prejudice and discrimination as a result of government, employers and others having policies, practices and attitudes that support their fair treatment.

### WE WILL

- Advocate and campaign, building on our areas of strength, going deeper into the policy and systemic issues that significantly affect people
- Push for a root and branch review of the criminal records disclosure system
- Challenge the increase in use of unnecessary DBS checks, and stop unlawful higher-level checks
- Influence employer policies and embed fair recruitment practices
- Build on our work to promote fair access to higher education

### WE WILL

- Increase our use of the law and strategic litigation as a tactic for achieving change
- Develop a legal strategy with a plan for how we will deliver it
- Identify and prioritise key areas where legal cases could help to achieve wider systemic change
- Seek to collaborate with others in this work

### WE WILL

- Increase the research and evidence base to support our work to achieve change at a policy and systemic level
- Develop a research strategy with a plan for how we will deliver it
- Effectively integrate the experiences and perspectives of people with criminal records into our approach to research

## PRIORITY 3

Unlock continues to be effective, efficient and professional in its work and operations, ensuring we have systems to achieve maximum impact.

### WE WILL

- Maintain good governance and develop Unlock's sustainability and resilience
- Translate our priorities into fully funded and resourced delivery
- Develop unrestricted funding streams including support from donors and philanthropists, and by growing earned income
- Continue to measure ourselves against the Charity Governance Code
- Ensure that we maintain a focus on increasing diversity and inclusion, with the aim of being representative of all sections of society

# 1

# 2

# 3



[unlock.org.uk](https://www.unlock.org.uk)



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References in this strategy can be found in full on our website at [www.unlock.org.uk/references](https://www.unlock.org.uk/references)

Unlock is a registered charity no. 1079046 and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales no. 3791535.  
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