

Sodexo and MIDAS co-host event exploring how local businesses can employ more ex-offenders

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[Sodexo UK & Ireland](#), which operates HMP Forest Bank, hosted a roundtable event yesterday in partnership with MIDAS, Greater Manchester's inward investment agency, exploring how businesses across the region can improve employment outcomes for people with criminal convictions.

The event, hosted at Sodexo client site Bruntwood SciTech on Oxford Road, brought together the Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester, Kate Green, and senior leaders from a range of regional employers across the private and public sectors, as well as social enterprises. The roundtable created space for open and honest conversation about the challenges businesses face when recruiting people with convictions and how these could be addressed.

Discussions centred on how to improve employment outcomes for individuals with convictions by exploring what's working well, identifying common barriers, and considering the types of support employers need to succeed. The conversation highlighted the value of joined-up efforts between prisons, probation services, employers, employment support organisations and the convening power of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Key themes included the importance of early and sustained collaboration across sectors, more transparent communication on candidate job-readiness, and better alignment between vacancies and the individual's skills, circumstances, and location. Common barriers identified included DBS checks, stigma and housing instability. Employers also highlighted a need for clearer recruitment guidance, peer learning

opportunities, and appropriate language that supports positive reintegration.

Sodexo launched its [Starting Fresh programme](#) to drive more career opportunities for ex-offenders in March 2023, after research it commissioned revealed that while 62% of UK private sector businesses faced recruitment challenges, a third had not considered hiring people with criminal convictions.

Leveraging Sodexo's experience as an operator of six prisons across the UK, Starting Fresh not only advocates for recruiting ex-offenders but provides practical solutions for organisations, enabling them to proactively recruit candidates from their local prison, once they are close to their release date or eligible for Release on Temporary Leave.

Through Starting Fresh, significantly more employers have learned that they can hold recruitment days at their local prison – at no cost – and even arrange visits to prison education and training facilities to meet people attaining relevant skills and qualifications during their sentence. Many nationwide businesses have engaged with Starting Fresh and recruited people in this way, including Marriott Hotels, Superdrug and Burger King.

Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester for Safer and Stronger Communities, said: "Helping people with convictions into work is a key priority for Greater Manchester. It aligns with our growth ambitions and our commitment to building a fairer, more prosperous economy.

"We know that employment is one of the biggest factors in reducing reoffending, so employing someone with criminal convictions long term is a win for individuals, a win for employers, and a win for our region. I'm proud that Greater Manchester is leading the way in driving these conversations, bringing together forward-thinking businesses that challenge outdated perceptions and step up to support rehabilitation and long-term opportunity."

Tony Simpson, COO of Justice at Sodexo UK & Ireland, added: "Getting a job can be life-changing for someone with criminal convictions. It reduces reoffending, supports families, and strengthens communities. Programmes like Starting Fresh and employers like those in the room are crucial to breaking down the stigma and opening doors to second chances. I would like to thank all the businesses who attended for their time, openness, and commitment to making a difference."

Sodexo has a significant footprint in Greater Manchester. In addition to its head office near MediaCityUK, the majority of Sodexo's local workforce delivers frontline services providing sustainable food and valued experiences across HMP Forest Bank, schools, healthcare and corporate settings

The company has also been a proud Supporter of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter since June 2022, making it one of the Charter's largest employers.