

Trust by Design: Building Cross-Sector Trust into ECP3

The UK economic crime system collaborates through formal partnerships, data-sharing arrangements, joint taskforces, and public-private forums. But this collaboration has a ceiling. Where deeper collaboration happens – candid assessments of what is not working, genuine joint problem-solving rather than coordinated action within carefully defended boundaries – it is often despite rather than because of the system itself.

ECP1 and ECP2 have not cracked this. Arguably they did not try to. ECP3 is an opportunity to design differently. On 10 June 2026, the Latimer Network convened senior cross-sector leaders from government, law enforcement, regulators, the financial services industry, legal and accountancy professions, and civil society at PA Consulting to explore where trust is genuinely strong, where it is weak, and what it would take to move from collaboration that manages the current system to collaboration that transforms it. This note synthesises what emerged. It is unattributed and intended as an input to ECP3.

"Trust is an outcome, not a precondition. We need far less than we think to start. Take a small risk; it is met; trust builds; take a slightly bigger risk. That is the trust loop."

What enables cross-sector trust?

A consistent theme emerged throughout the workshop: personal relationships are where trust starts, but institutional structures are where it scales. The structural enablers are the gold – they are reproducible.

Structure and leadership

- **High-level, sustained commitment** is the starting point. Longevity of tenure matters: people being in post long enough to understand and believe in what they do.
- **The power of the evangelist.** The role of the system being to elevate, rather than squash, such people.
- **Long-term vision.** JMLIT did not deliver overnight – it proved itself over years.
- **Genuine consultation, not broadcast.** ECP1 went through extensive drafting with a broad coalition. The output was a shared vision, not a plan handed down.
- **Mutual benefit must be real.** Organisations need something to give and something to gain.
- **Agreed rules and shared objectives.** These are foundational conditions, alongside credibility, reputation, feeling included and heard.

Culture and relationships

- **Psychological safety through levelled power dynamics.** Power and trust are tied: trust is partly how you make a power imbalance survivable.
- **Shared experience reduces perceived risk.** Cross-sector movement of individuals builds the mutual understanding that makes collaboration possible.
- **Personal accountability and humility.** Trust is built by individuals willing to attach their name to risk decisions – not hiding behind institutional position.
- **Willingness to show vulnerability.** Protecting a relationship is itself a trust-building act.
- **Positive experience and credibility.** These reduce the perceived risk of future collaboration.

Example – JMLIT: Brought together previously disconnected parts of the ecosystem – a real risk at the time. Institutional trust (mechanisms and gateways, NCA facilitation) and individual judgement combined to allow people to speak quietly with each other and enable rapid decision-making even where risks are real. This paved the way for Data Fusion, which is based on even greater trust.

Where and why is trust fragile?

The most striking finding from the workshop was how often structural and regulatory constraints are misread as personal unwillingness – and how much energy the system wastes managing that misattribution.

Systemic misalignment

- **Divergent definitions erode confidence.** When sectors use different labels, or the same words to mean different things, trust is unreliable.
- **Regulatory risk aversion is often structural, not personal.** Data protection constraints and inconsistent legal gateways drive cautious behaviour. Firms may have the capability to act but lack a system-sanctioned pathway.
- **Corporate liability exposure** leads firms to cautious, sometimes inhibiting behaviour. Risk is displaced rather than resolved: de-risking moves the problem rather than addressing it.
- **The SARs system is not delivering.** It incentivises institutional self-protection rather than collective problem-solving.

Political and cultural barriers

- **Assumptions and prejudices persist** without sufficient counter-pressure. Professional cultures can drive caution that is misread externally as a lack of trust or goodwill.
- **Power imbalances silence people.** The first disclosure in any room sets the ceiling for candour: if no one goes first, no one goes at all.
- **'Pet projects' distort system design.** Initiatives that reflect individual priorities rather than system needs, or are designed from a single vantage point, lead to short-termism and scepticism across partners.
- **Adversarial dynamics accumulate** and erode trust over time – the bank levy is a live example.

Example 1 – Enablers: Blanket use of 'enabler' to describe entire professions conflates the complicit minority with the vast majority acting in good faith, signalling suspicion rather than partnership. This poisons the well for cross-sector collaboration.

Example 2 – Human trafficking. Large banks can identify patterns from expenditure data. Mid-tier institutions will not run these typologies because of alert volume and fear that regulators will sanction them for having thousands of unreviewed results.

Four takeaways for ECP3

ECP3 offers a chance to do things differently – not by asserting that trust exists, but by building the conditions for it to develop.

1. **Design trust in from the start.** ECP3 should embed genuine cross-sector structures from the outset – not retrofit engagement later. This requires extensive consultation and broad coalition-building.
2. **Tell the story of both what has been achieved and how the threat has evolved.** Public-private partnership is in a much better place than it was ten years ago. ECP3 should celebrate that progress while recognising what more is needed in the context of the evolving threat. An evidence-based narrative is important for securing public confidence and important for sustaining partner good will.
3. **Create a safe space to innovate.** ECP3 should create regulator-aligned environments for controlled experimentation – removing the tension between doing the right thing and meeting regulatory expectations.
4. **Redesign incentives.** The elements of the system where participation is compelled feel very different to those where it is volunteered. ECP3 should consider directly: which existing incentives act as blockers of trust, and can they be redesigned?