Background Screening Buyer's Guide:

How to Choose The Right BPSS Partner

Learn how to assess providers, avoid hidden delays, and choose a screening partner that delivers value - not just a low rate card.

Market Insight: Background Screening

Why BPSS decisions now carry operational risk, not just compliance risk.

Background screening has quietly become a delivery-critical function across UK critical infrastructure. Investment cycles are intensifying. Programmes are larger. Mobilisation windows are tighter. At the same time, BPSS remains the most widely used screening package across regulated environments – from energy and utilities to transport, defence and nuclear. On paper, BPSS looks standardised. In practice, outcomes vary dramatically.

Today organisations are feeling the impact of:

- Skills shortages and competitive hiring markets
- Shorter lead times between offer and mobilisation
- Increased regulatory scrutiny
- Reduced tolerance for project delays

Candidate screening that once sat in the background now directly affects:
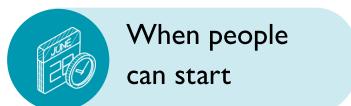
When people can start	How much internal effort HR and delivery teams must absorb	Whether projects stay on track

This guide exists to help decision-makers move beyond surface-level comparisons and understand what *really* affects BPSS outcomes in critical infrastructure environments. It is designed to support better conversations and inform decision making - not just about cost, but about risk, delivery confidence and operational impact.

> " The number on the rate card is only the beginning. What matters is how the provider gets you to the finish line, and what happens when they don't.

Jayne Lee,
Head of Candidate Services, Rullion

Why BPSS prices vary and why rate cards mislead

Through conversations with our customers we have seen first-hand how background screening is increasingly assessed under time pressure and delivery risk. Decisions are often made quickly, with multiple stakeholders involved and limited tolerance for delay. In that context, buyers tend to look for simple comparison points.

When organisations compare screening providers, the first reference point is usually the rate card. One provider quotes £90. Another £150. Another £200.

The assumption is that the check must be different. It usually isn't.

What sees prices diverge is **how the screening is delivered,** not what is included.

Buyer expectations around BPSS have shifted. Speed, certainty and clean handovers are no longer "nice to have"; instead they are operational requirements, particularly across critical infrastructure. This has exposed meaningful differences in delivery models that rate cards alone fail to explain.

BPSS is typically delivered using three different operating models:

Each model produces different outcomes.

Fully automated

System-driven, self serving workflows where candidates complete checks independently, with limited human intervention unless issues escalate.

Human-led case management

Advisor-managed screening where candidates are actively guided, discrepancies are resolved early, and files are completed end-to-end.

Hybrid delivery

Technology-led screening supported by human oversight, with advisors stepping in to resolve issues before cases stall.

Price reflects:

- Level of candidate support
- Depth of issue resolution
- Ownership of incomplete cases
- Consistency of turnaround times

This difference rarely appears on a rate card.

Experience across regulated sectors shows that automated-only screening models generate significantly more queries and stalled cases than hybrid or human-led approaches.

Anecdotal industry experience suggests 30–50% more interventions may be required where automation is used without active case management.

Transactional vs complex screening: a critical distinction

A common mistake in procurement-led screening decisions is treating all checks as transactional. Some checks are. BPSS often isn't.

Transactional screening works best when:

- Data is clear and complete
- Candidates know exactly what is required of them
- Minimal clarification is needed

Complex (BPSS) screening involves:

- Employment history gaps
- Non-standard references
- International elements
- Candidate uncertainty around what is required of them
- Sector-specific rules

When transactional delivery models are applied to complex screening, cases stall.

At Rullion, this is exactly where our hybrid, human-led delivery model makes the difference. Technology is used to drive speed and consistency, but every BPSS case is actively overseen by experienced advisors who take ownership when issues arise.

Candidates are guided, discrepancies are resolved early, and files are completed end-to-end; preventing delays, rework and the return of incomplete cases to our client's internal teams.

Industry experience indicates that hybrid delivery models can clear regulated BPSS cases faster than fully automated competitors, because issues are resolved before they escalate.

The difference is not technology. It is when and how humans intervene.

# The hidden cost of "low cost" background screening

Most disruption linked to screening does not come from price. It comes from incomplete work. A common industry practice is returning "amber" BPSS files - cases where elements remain unresolved and responsibility is passed back to the employer.

Indicative experience across large infrastructure employers suggests:

> ### Circa 30% of BPSS cases from low-cost providers return as amber

> ### Each amber file can add over an hour of manual work for internal teams

This approach often creates hidden operational risk that only becomes visible once screening cases begin to stall, including:

Unplanned internal workload

Confusion for candidates

Delays to start dates

Increased candidate dropout risk

What buyers often miss:

In infrastructure environments, **each week of delayed mobilisation can cost between £3,000 and £8,000 per contractor** in lost productivity. Multiply this across a cohort and the difference between rate cards becomes irrelevant.

At programme level, the cost compounds quickly! What begins as a small delay in individual clearances scales into missed mobilisation windows, unplanned internal effort and reduced delivery confidence across entire teams. In regulated infrastructure environments, these delays directly affect productivity, project timelines and workforce planning.

At that point, the headline cost of a BPSS check becomes far less relevant than the organisation's ability to keep people and programmes moving.

*All figures in this document are indicative and drawn from practical delivery experience across regulated sectors. Outcomes will vary depending on role complexity, candidate circumstances and client-specific processes.

Price vs outcome: what buyers actually experience

Nowadays most background screening decisions are made under pressure. Hiring volumes fluctuate, mobilisation windows are tight, and stakeholders want certainty quickly. In that environment, buyers often default to the rate card as the fastest way to compare providers.

The rate card feels objective. It gives procurement teams a clear figure. It creates the impression that BPSS is a standardised, interchangeable service. In reality, the rate card only reflects the starting point of the screening journey - not the effort required to complete it, nor the disruption caused when it doesn't run smoothly.

A more useful way to assess screening providers is to compare outcomes, not headline cost.

What the rate card shows (and what it doesn't)

The rate card tells you the price of initiating a BPSS check. It does not account for what happens when information is missing, references are slow to respond, or discrepancies need resolving. It also does not reflect the internal effort required when cases stall or return incomplete. In practice, the true cost of screening is shaped by several factors working together:

- The rate card price for the check itself
- The internal workload created when files are incomplete or unclear
- The operational impact of delayed mobilisation
- The risk of candidate disengagement or drop-out during prolonged clearance periods

The apparent savings of a lower-cost provider diminish quickly when these elements are considered.

What buyers experience in practice

	Low-cost, automated model	Hybrid / human-lead model
File completion	Partial or amber files returned	**Fully resolved, end-to-end**
Turnaround times	Variable and unpredictable	**Consistent and measurable**
Candidate experience	Limited guidance	**Active support and clarity**
Internal effort	High manual follow-up	**Minimal internal intervention**
Mobilisation impact	Start dates frequently slip	**Faster, more reliable starts**

Put simply, background screening only becomes expensive when it goes wrong!

How to evaluate background screening providers properly

The most effective screening conversations move away from "how long should it take?" and towards how problems are handled. In regulated and safety-critical environments, delays rarely come from the check itself; they come from what happens when information is incomplete, unclear or slow to verify. The way a provider responds in those moments determines whether a BPSS case progresses smoothly or stalls for weeks.

For buyers, this means evaluation needs to focus less on stated turnaround times and more on operating behaviour. Understanding when human intervention occurs, who takes ownership of issues, and how incomplete cases are managed provides a far clearer indication of real-world performance than headline metrics alone.

The guidance below is designed to help buyers assess BPSS providers based on how screening is actually delivered in practice - not how it is described in sales materials - and to support more informed, outcome-led decision making.

In today's market, where mobilisation timelines are tight and tolerance for disruption is low, choosing the wrong delivery model can introduce hidden workload, delivery risk and avoidable cost.
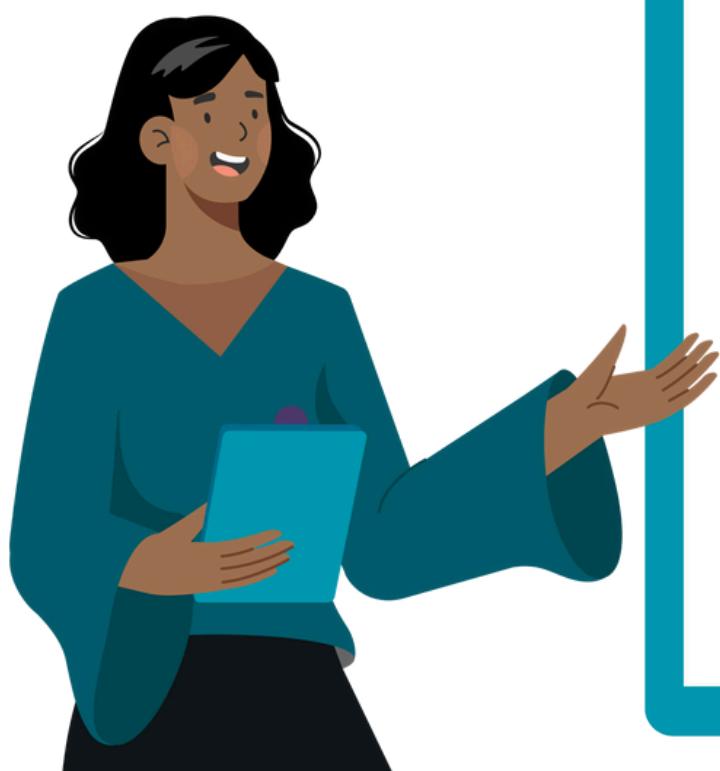
Five diagnostic questions to expose how a provider really works

1 **What happens when a reference doesn't respond?**

2 **At what point does a human step in?**

3 **How often are incomplete files returned?**

4 **What manual work remains with our team?**

5 **Can we see recent, real turnaround data?**

Why outcomes beat price

When background screening works well, it becomes invisible.

✓ People start on time   ✓ Projects stay on track   ✓ Candidates feel supported

Across recent delivery experience, providers using hybrid delivery models have consistently cleared regulated BPSS cases faster and with fewer restarts than fully automated competitors. Organisations rarely move away from low-cost screening because of price - they move because disruption becomes impossible to ignore!

Good background screening protects:

🕐 Time   📈 Momentum   ⭐ Delivery confidence

Rullion's approach to background screening prevents the most common causes of delay seen in automated-only models: unresolved queries, amber handbacks and prolonged silence when something goes wrong.

What delivery looks like in practice:

In 2025 Rullion achieved:

| **2,500+** new starters onboarded through BPSS and pre-employment screening | **72.6 NPS** a world-class annual average Net Promoter Score | **25,200** screening tickets resolved, including discrepancies, queries and candidate support |

> ❝
> **We have seen a dramatic improvement in the speed in which cases are turned around... The whole process is slick from start to finish for both us and our candidates...**
>
> *Senior Vetting and Onboarding Lead, Balfour Beatty*

Why do organisations choose Rullion?

Because your delivery model matters.

By the time organisations reach a decision on BPSS provision the question is rarely what checks are required. The real question is who takes responsibility for getting people cleared, properly and on time, when reality intervenes. In regulated infrastructure environments, screening does not fail because requirements are unclear. It fails because no one intervenes early enough when information is missing, candidates are unsure what to provide, or discrepancies need interpretation. This is where delivery model matters most.

Rullion operates a hybrid, human-led background screening model, intentionally designed for BPSS in safety-critical and highly regulated environments. Technology is used to provide structure, visibility and pace. Human oversight is embedded to ensure progress does not stall.

Every BPSS case is actively managed by experienced advisors who:

- Prepare candidates before checks begin, reducing errors and rework
- Intervene early when information is incomplete or unclear
- Resolve discrepancies rather than passing them back
- Own cases end-to-end until clearance is complete

What this means in practice

Screening becomes a controlled, managed process rather than an operational unknown. Rullion's delivery model translates into:

- Complete BPSS files, not partial submissions returned for internal teams to resolve
- More predictable turnaround times, supporting mobilisation planning
- Minimal internal workload, freeing HR and project teams to focus on delivery
- A clearer candidate experience, reducing disengagement and drop-out risk

Organisations that switch away from low-cost, automated screening rarely do so because of price.
They do so because delays, rework and uncertainty begin to affect programmes, productivity and confidence.
Rullion's model is built to remove that friction and protect delivery momentum where it matters most.

Click here to send Jayne Lee, our Head of Candidate Services, one anonymised amber file. She will show you why it stalled and how little time it could have taken!

Let's get work done together

Rullion supports organisations across critical infrastructure with background screening that keeps people moving and programmes on track.

Our hybrid, human-led BPSS delivery model combines smart technology with active case ownership to prevent delays, reduce internal workload and deliver complete files first time.

Visit our website to find out more

rullion.co.uk