

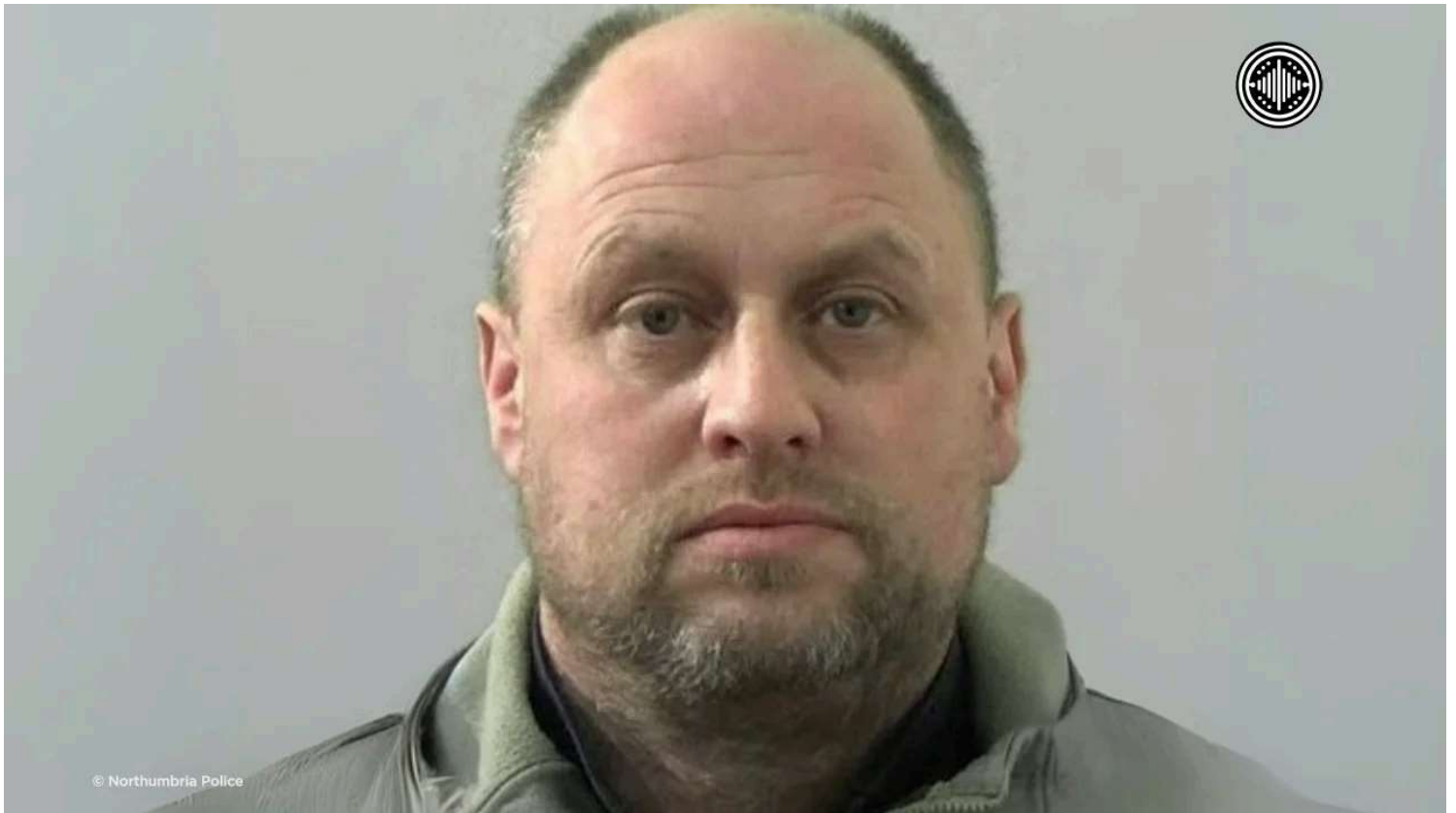
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Jailed Dealer Caught With Drugs in Prison Says He Was Just Holding Them

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— Categories: Crime



A convicted drug trafficker serving nearly 20 years behind bars has admitted to possessing Spice and other illicit substances inside HMP Northumberland, just weeks after starting his sentence, claiming he was merely storing them for someone else.

Stephen York, formerly of Killingworth, pleaded guilty at Newcastle Crown Court to possessing the drugs with intent to supply but maintained he had been pressured into hiding them for another inmate. The court accepted his basis of plea, although he refused to name the individual. York was found with four A4 sheets soaked in Spice, 856 bromazolam

tablets, 93 buprenorphine pills, and two new mobile phones during a surprise prison cell search in February 2024. Some of the contraband was concealed inside a salt shaker, wrapped in a latex glove, only days after an earlier search found nothing.

Judge Tim Gittins handed York an additional six-month sentence to run consecutively, warning: “Such drugs provide significant currency and a source of power for those who supply them in a custodial setting. You, and people like you, need to be deterred from being prepared to assist others in the pernicious and dangerous trade of drugs in the prison environment.”

York’s lawyer, Tony Davis, argued the quantity was modest and that his client gained no personal profit, stressing he acted under pressure from others inside the prison.

The incident marks a disturbing continuation of York’s ties to drug crime, even while incarcerated. He had only recently begun serving a 19-year, 10-month sentence handed down in November 2023 for a major drug conspiracy uncovered during Operation Venetic, the nationwide crackdown following the takedown of encrypted messaging platform EncroChat.

York played a key role in the trafficking of 23 kilograms of cocaine worth nearly £1 million and 45 kilograms of cannabis valued at £189,000. Police linked him to multiple safe houses used to process and store drugs, and seized more than £123,000 in cash during a raid at the West Allotment Social Club. Investigators later determined that £83,000 of it was York’s share.

When arrested in January 2021, York was found with encrypted phones believed to be replacements for compromised devices used by his criminal network.

His continued involvement in the prison drug trade underscores the challenge authorities face in tackling organised crime’s influence behind bars, where narcotics and mobile phones remain a form of power and currency among inmates.