



Essex Restorative  
& Mediation  
Service

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

**PFCC**   
POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME  
COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX



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# FOREWORD

I am delighted to present the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service (ERMS) Annual Report for 2023/2024. This year has been a significant one for ERMS, marked by continued growth, positive impact, and a strong commitment to restorative practices across Essex.

The Service continues to be a vital resource in our community, handling a total of 230 referrals during 2023/24. This demonstrates the growing awareness of restorative justice and its potential to bring resolution and healing to those affected by crime and antisocial behaviour.

The true power of restorative justice lies in its ability to empower both parties. This year's report reflects this as we have seen a sustained high level of satisfaction, with a remarkable 93% of participants reporting a positive experience. The impact on those who caused harm is particularly encouraging. 100% reported a deeper understanding of the consequences of their actions and a commitment to behaving differently in the future.

I was particularly pleased to see ERMS exceeded its commitment to improve access to the service for survivors of Domestic Abuse with a 40% increase, while Hate Crime referrals saw a 42% increase.

ERMS was also recognised for providing outstanding contributions to volunteering when it won the Lord Ferrers Award at a ceremony held at Lancaster House in October 2023.

These outcomes are a testament to the dedication and expertise of our ERMS team and our invaluable volunteers. Their tireless efforts ensure that restorative justice remains an important element in our approach to crime and community safety in Essex.



Looking ahead, ERMS remains committed to expanding its reach. We will strive to raise awareness of its services among victims and criminal justice partners. We will also continue to develop innovative ways to deliver restorative justice, ensuring it remains accessible and impactful for all.

I am incredibly proud of the work that ERMS has accomplished this year. As you explore this report, I encourage you to learn more about the positive different restorative justice is making in Essex.

**ROGER HIRST**

POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME  
COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX

# WE SAID, WE DID

Increase referrals of burglary and assault by 30%.

Referrals for cases involving burglary increased by 60% this year, while referrals for incidents of assault decreased by 23%.

Increase domestic abuse referrals by 25%.

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service received 14 domestic abuse referrals in the year 2023-24, representing a 40% increase from the previous year.

Increase prison access and cases coming directly from prisons.

Although prison referrals did not increase this year, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service has worked with local prisons to raise awareness of RJ and develop referral pathways.

Recruit 10 new volunteers and upskill 3 volunteers to act as 'buddies'.

Eleven volunteers were recruited this year and five facilitators were upskilled to be 'buddies'.

Increase hate crime referrals by 25%.

Referrals for incidents of hate crime increased by 42% this year, from 24 referrals in 2022-23 to 34 referrals in 2023-24.

Invest in a new case management system to provide better reporting and comparison capability.

The Service successfully migrated to a new case management system in November 2023.

# WE PROVIDED AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service (ERMS) received a total of 230 referrals between April 2023 and March 2024. Across those referrals, the Service contacted 576 people including 422 individuals who had been harmed by criminal or antisocial behaviour and 154 people who were responsible for causing the harm.

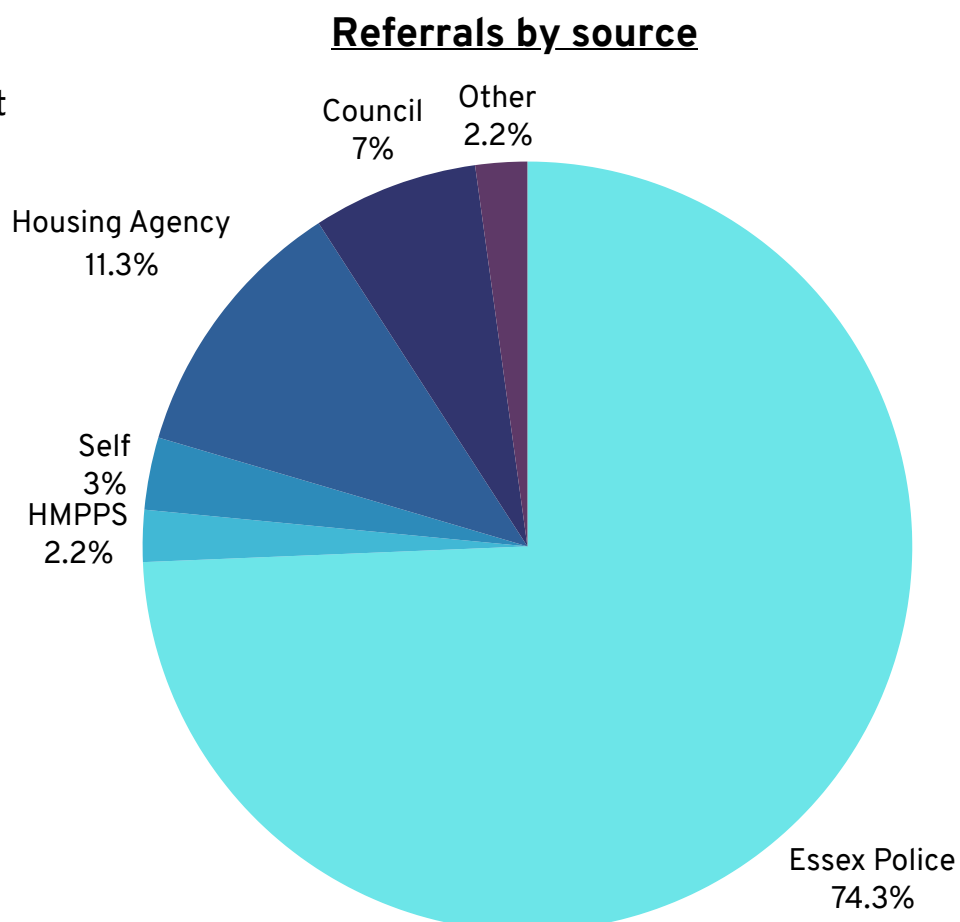
Communication was facilitated in 17% (42) of closed cases this year, which means 76 people were able to communicate, either directly or indirectly, with another party involved in their crime or conflict.

ERMS saw a 12.3% decrease in overall referrals this year compared to the previous year. This drop in referrals can be attributed to a decrease in referrals from several partner agencies including Essex Police (14.7% decrease), the Probation Service (20% decrease) and the Victim Contact Scheme (75% decrease).

Self-referrals also decreased this year, with ERMS receiving 8 referrals directly from individuals involved in crime or conflict (an 11% decrease). Following the introduction of a new case management system in

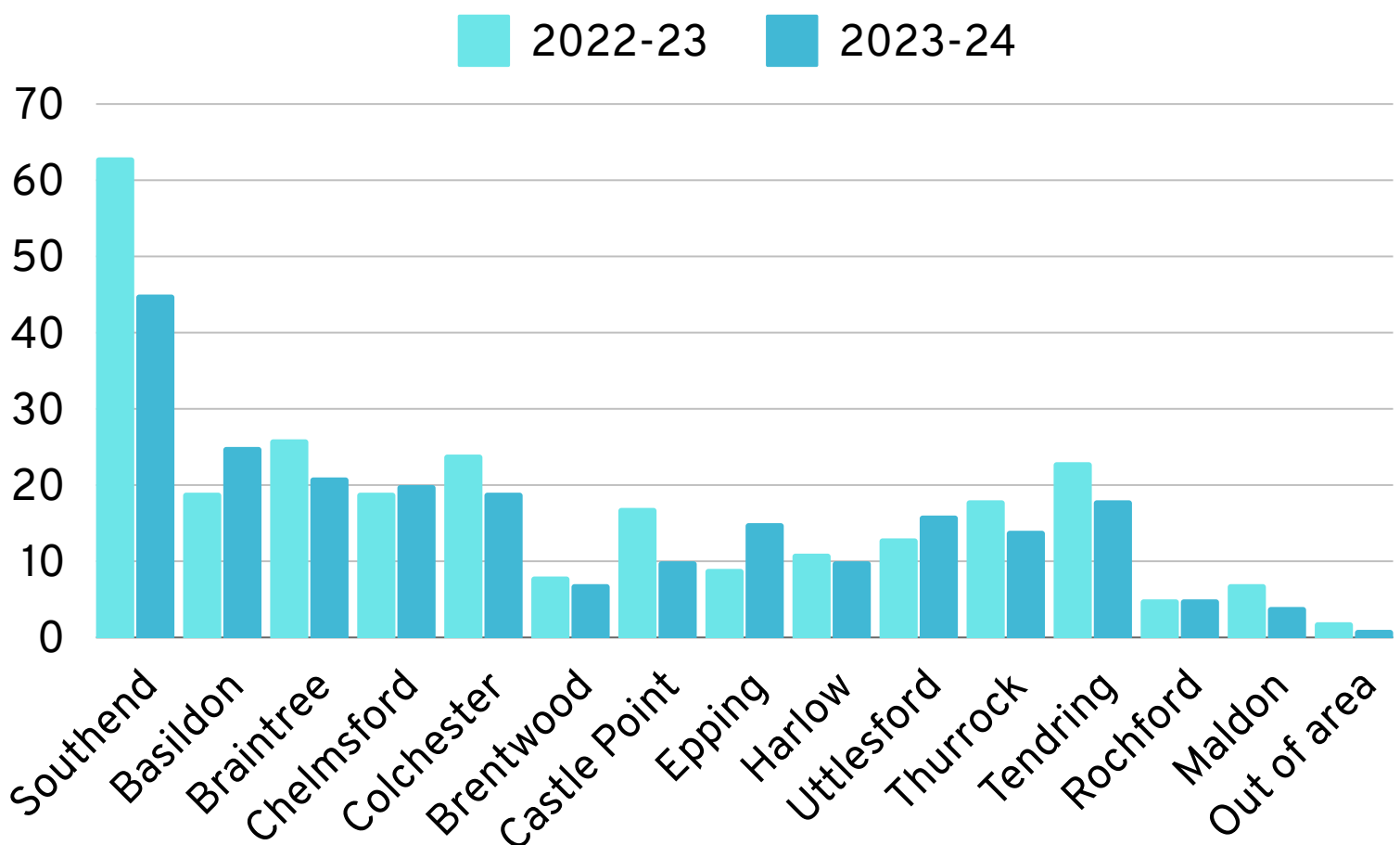
November 2023, ERMS have been able to record where individuals who have self-referred heard about the Service. This information was available for 5 self-referrals and indicated that 3 individuals heard about ERMS from the Witness Care Unit, 1 from Essex Police and 1 from a local support service.

Some referrers increased their referrals this year, with referrals from council and housing agencies both increasing by 13%. While referrals from the Witness Care Unit remained the same, a further 3 self-referrals reported hearing about ERMS from the Unit.



Across Essex, referral numbers vary between districts. Southend continues to be the highest referral area, accounting for 20% of all referrals last year, and Rochford and Maldon continue to be the lowest referral areas with both districts accounting for 2% of referrals each. ERMS saw decreases in referrals for many districts compared to 2022-23; most notably Southend (29% decrease), Colchester (21% decrease) and Braintree (19% decrease). Referrals increased in three districts, which were Basildon (32% increase), Epping (67% increase) and Uttlesford (23% increase). The graph below shows a comparison of the referrals received across Essex between 2022-23 and 2023-24.

### **Referrals by district, comparing 2022-23 to 2023-24**



A possible explanation for the decline in referrals from the Probation Service and the Victim Contact Scheme this year could be the new restorative justice framework which was launched by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in March 2023. This framework introduced changes to the ways in which HMPPS assess and refer serious and complex cases for restorative justice. Previously, partners within HMPPS could refer serious and complex cases directly to local restorative justice services, however the new framework introduced a robust internal risk assessment which must be completed before engaging with local services. Given that sensitive and complex cases account for most of the referrals from HMPPS, this may explain the decline in overall referrals this year. ERMS continue to work closely with HMPPS to raise awareness of restorative justice and promote referrals for all case types.



Police referrals also decreased this year which may be due to a continued lack of understanding and awareness of restorative justice across the force. ERMS are committed to raising awareness of restorative justice and have developed a training plan which has identified a range of teams across Essex Police who may benefit from a restorative justice input. Furthermore, following feedback from police officers, ERMS revamped the training package provided to Essex Police in the summer 2023 to focus on the key questions and issues identified by the force.

Throughout 2023-24, ERMS worked to raise awareness of the availability of restorative justice and the obligations criminal justice partners have under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime to offer restorative justice through training programmes. ERMS also committed to making direct contact with victims to encourage self-referrals. With the support of Essex Police, ERMS contacted 61 victims of burglary directly in 2023-24.



**“I would recommend this process to anyone. It has changed my life.**

**I feel so much better about myself. I would happily talk to anyone who is thinking about doing this but is not sure. Once you have done this process you will be glad you did.”**

## Incident Types

Neighbour disputes accounted for 45% of referrals this year, which means that these cases continue to be the largest incident type referred to the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service. Referrals for violent offences decreased to 27% of all referrals (compared to 32% last year), while harassment incidents increased slightly from 8% to 9% of referrals.

The number of complex referrals received last year (those involving a death, sexual violence or other high trauma incidents) continued to decrease and represented approximately 1% of referrals. This decrease can most likely be attributed to the new HMPPS framework that was introduced in March 2023 which has seen changes in how restorative justice cases are assessed, managed and referred by HMPPS.

In response to the challenges experienced in our most complex cases, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service focused on promoting referrals for burglary and assault this year. Burglary referrals increased by 60% to 8 referrals (from 5 referrals the previous year). Referrals for assault decreased by 23% from 74 referrals last year to 57 referrals this year. This decrease in referrals for assault may be accounted for by the decrease in Police referrals for Community Resolutions (25% decrease), Conditional Cautions (10% decrease) and early interventions (32% decrease) observed this year.

Last year, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service committed to improving access to restorative justice for survivors of domestic abuse and aimed to increase domestic abuse referrals by 25%. The team received a total of 14 referrals this year, representing a 40% increase. ERMS hope to continue to raise awareness of restorative justice for survivors of domestic abuse and hope to increase referrals by a further 25% next year.

Another area of focus for 2023-24 was hate crime referrals. The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service received 34 referrals for hate crime incidents which represents a 42% increase from the previous year.


The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service saw a decrease in the number of post-sentence referrals in 2022-23. This year saw a 22% increase in post-sentence referrals.

In addition to focusing on increasing referrals for incidents of domestic abuse by a further 25%, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service would like to focus on promoting restorative justice for retail crime offences and assaults on emergency workers next year, and aims to increase referrals by 50% and 25% respectively.


## Case Outcomes

ERMS contacted 576 potential participants across 230 referrals to offer a restorative process. In 17% (42) of closed cases some form of communication was facilitated between parties. Of those successful cases, 52% resulted in indirect communication and 48% in a face-to-face meeting between participants.

This year, ERMS were able to facilitate a successful outcome in 42 cases which is an increase of 27% compared to the previous year.



The whole process was excellent from the first communication to the conclusion. I feel so much better for having an opportunity to meet with the other party and talk things over in a calm environment. I am really grateful to have been able to complete the RJ process with the other party which I am sure will benefit them as much as it did me. Thanks so much.





## Feedback

ERMS continued to receive positive feedback from participants this year with a 93% overall satisfaction rate. 100% of respondents reported they were satisfied with their facilitators and 93% would recommend the process to others. 100% of those responsible for causing the harm reported they had a better understanding of how their actions affect others because of their restorative justice process and 100% reported they would behave differently moving forward.

Feedback was received from 10 harmed parties and 3 parties responsible for causing the harm this year. ERMS value the feedback we receive from participants and will continue to explore ways to improve evaluation response rates.

## Conflict Coaching

In neighbour dispute cases, one of the most common reasons for referral closure is disengagement from one party from the mediation process. This can often leave the engaged participant feeling frustrated and helpless to resolve the dispute. For example, in 2023-24 approximately 36% of neighbour dispute referrals were closed due to one party not responding or declining to engage with ERMS.

In August 2023, ERMS introduced a new process called Conflict Coaching which would enable the engaged participant to work directly with facilitators to explore the conflict they are experiencing, their current approaches to the conflict, how those approaches may or may not be helping the conflict, and how perhaps those approaches can be changed to better help resolve the conflict moving forward.

So far, 13 facilitators have been trained to deliver conflict coaching and there are plans to upskill an additional five facilitators in the coming year.

**“Please continue this service,  
those in situations where  
neighbours who won't respond  
to conflict negotiations need  
somewhere to go and this  
service really helped me.**

**[Facilitators]**

**were amazing and I've left  
feeling empowered and with a  
new outlook on my situation.”**



## Tiptree Project

In May 2023, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service re-delivered a restorative approaches programme to approximately 200 young people from a local secondary school in Tiptree. The project aimed to develop understanding of the impact of antisocial behaviour and criminal damage amongst the young people, and ultimately contribute to a reduction in the number of incidents of antisocial behaviour and criminal damage in Tiptree.

More information about the project can be found [here](#).



**“We were delighted to recently host the youth officer team from Essex police, RJ mediation service and 200 pupils and staff from Thurstable school. It was an excellent opportunity to connect with the Police, mediators, and local children where they had the opportunity to learn directly about the consequences of actions and many of the challenges which business face.”**

***- Chris Newenham, Joint Managing Director of Wilkin & Sons Tiptree***

## Economic Evaluation

In 2022, Why Me? published a report outlining an economic model to assess the financial and social impact of restorative justice (the report can be found [here](#)).

Applying this model to the restorative justice referrals received by the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service between April 2023 and March 2024, ERMS calculated total benefits of £648,819.46. This represents a cost-benefit ratio of £11.45 for every £1 invested in ERMS in 2023-24.

## Reducing Reoffending

Restorative Justice has been proven to reduce reoffending rates nationally; improving outcomes for individuals, reducing victimisation and easing pressure on the criminal justice system. This year, ERMS reviewed referrals received between January 2021 and June 2022 to identify cases where individuals who had caused harm to another had received an Out of Court Disposal or had been sentenced at court, and who also had engaged in a successful restorative justice process.

ERMS identified 56 individuals responsible for causing harm who had engaged in a restorative process with a positive outcome and reviewed the data to determine whether they had engaged in any further offending in the 18 months following the completion of their restorative process. Further offending was defined as receiving a conviction, reprimand or warning, and an 18-month follow-up period was selected in line with the method applied by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to estimate proven reoffending.

Of the 56 individuals identified by ERMS, 8.9% had proven to have reoffended in the 18-months post-restorative justice intervention. In comparison, MOJ quarterly estimates of proven reoffending for the same period (January 2021-June 2022) ranged between 24.3% and 25.8%, indicating that restorative justice can have a positive impact on reducing reoffending.



**“I was fully supported throughout. I went into this sceptical and feeling lost but came out empowered and feeling I had control.”**



# WE VALUED VOLUNTEERS

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service is supported by a fantastic team of volunteers whose hard work, dedication and commitment enables ERMS to continue to deliver an effective service. This year, ERMS volunteers logged over 482 hours of case work in addition to attending training, representing ERMS at external meetings and events, and attending team meetings.

Since April 2023, ERMS has recruited 11 new volunteer facilitators. Refresher training was delivered to 24 volunteers this year and all volunteers completed data protection training. An additional 5 volunteers were trained to be 'buddies'; providing support and mentoring to our newly trained team members. Following the introduction of Conflict Coaching August 2023, 8 volunteers were upskilled to deliver the conflict coaching process.

## Lord Ferrers Award Winners

ERMS was privileged to attend the 30th Anniversary of the Lord Ferrers Award at Lancaster House in October 2023, where the ERMS volunteer team won the prestigious *Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) Volunteer Team Award* in recognition of the fantastic work they deliver in Essex.

The Award is for OPCC volunteers who have demonstrated a significant and sustained contribution to policing and/or their communities.

The Panel said:

*"The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service exists to serve as a link between individuals who have been harmed by criminal and anti-social behaviour and those responsible for inflicting that harm. The volunteers that make up the organisation are extremely passionate - as is demonstrated by their staggering collective 757 hours of case work, involving 136 individuals across 33 cases. The organisation has received overwhelming positive response to their work, ultimately reducing community tensions and fostering positive relationships."*



ERMS received 21 responses to our annual volunteer feedback survey. Those who responded had been volunteering with ERMS between 3 months and 8 years, with 100% of respondents indicating the service was 'good' or 'very good' to volunteer for. All respondents also indicated that the training they received, and the level of support provided by the service was 'good' or 'very good'.

Our volunteers were asked to complete the phrase "In volunteering with ERMS I feel...". The word cloud below represents their responses:



ERMS continued to value and recognise its volunteers this year. ERMS arranged numerous events throughout the year including its annual volunteer appreciation event, a friends and family picnic, a Christmas meal, and a 'thank you' gift during National Volunteers' Week. Valuing volunteers continues to be a priority for ERMS, and the service will arrange a variety of additional events next year including an Essex County Fire and Rescue Day and a trip to the Essex Police Force Control Room.

Next year, ERMS will continue to invest in its volunteers and aims to upskill 3 experienced facilitators to deliver complex and sensitive cases and a further 5 volunteers to deliver conflict coaching.

**I think all the team in the office are amazing. I couldn't volunteer for a while and the support I received was incredible. I feel like they really do care about the well-being of all of us volunteers.**

**We are a close knit team very much like family and one that cares for everyone.**



# WE RAISED AWARENESS

In the past 12 months, ERMS continued to promote restorative justice across the county to raise awareness of the availability of restorative justice and the obligations criminal justice partners have under the Victims' Code of Practice.

The Service developed a training plan for 2023-24 which included all partner agencies and identified a range of teams who may benefit from an increased awareness and knowledge of restorative justice. As part of this plan, ERMS delivered 30 formal training sessions to partners this year including Essex Police, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, the Probation Service, Local Authorities, and local community groups.

ERMS is committed to increasing the awareness of restorative justice across Essex and work will continue throughout 2024-25 to deliver training to partners and expand on the 2023-24 training plan.

In addition to delivering training, ERMS continues to maintain positive relationships with partners and attends various multi-agency meetings including weekly Youth Out of Court Disposal Panels and regular Local Action Group meetings across Essex. ERMS also continues to be represented on various boards such as the Reducing Reoffending Board and the Out of Court Disposals Scrutiny Board. Representation at these meetings ensures that restorative justice remains a focus and is considered by our partners across Essex.

## FUTURE FOCUS

Throughout 2024-25, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service are committed to raising awareness of restorative justice and enabling equal access to restorative justice for all victims. The introduction of the Victim and Prisoners Act in the coming year will see the rights and entitlements of victims under the Victims' Code of Practice become a statutory responsibility within criminal justice agencies. ERMS will therefore continue to work with and support our criminal justice partners to understand their obligations regarding restorative justice.

ERMS also aims to:

1. Increase domestic abuse related referrals by a further 25%.
2. Continue to work closely with partners across HMPPS to increase referrals directly from Probation and prisons by 40%.
3. Increase referrals for retail crime by 50%.
4. Upskill 3 facilitators to deliver complex and sensitive cases and a further 5 facilitators to deliver conflict coaching.
5. Increase referrals for assaults on emergency workers by 25%.





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[www.restorativeessex.co.uk](http://www.restorativeessex.co.uk)



[restorativejustice@essex.police.uk](mailto:restorativejustice@essex.police.uk)



01245 291621

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