

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex 2026 Conference



Wednesday 1st July 2026 – Colchester JobServe Community Stadium



**Keeping
Essex Safe
Together**

Agenda Overview Morning Session

Time	Session	Speakers
09:00 – 09:30	Arrival - teas, coffees, pastries	Compere: Joel Charles, Deputy Police Fire and Crime Commissioner
09:30 – 09:45	Welcome and Opening Address	Roger Hirst MBE – Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
09:45 – 10:00	The Future of Fire & Rescue in a Changing Essex	Rick Hylton – Chief Fire Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
10:00 – 10:20	Creating Safer Communities Through Opportunity	Dr. Natasha Richards-Crisp and Jess Plant Creative Lives
10:20 – 10:30	Whatever Changes, This Must Not: Providing Consistent Support for Every Victim	A Survivor’s Voice
10:30 – 10:45	Commissioning Through Change	Dr. Katrina Wickes – Researcher and Local Authority Commissioner
10:45 – 11:15	Supporting the Forgotten Victims of Sexual Abuse and Violence	Cath Pickles – Founder, Restitute
11:15 – 12:30	Interactive Workshops – AM Session	See “Workshops” section for topics & facilitators
12:30 – 13:15	Lunch & Networking	(buffet lunch break)

Agenda Overview Afternoon Session

Time	Session	Speakers
13:15 – 14:15	Interactive Workshops – PM Session (repeat of workshops)	See “Workshops” section for topics and facilitators
14:20 – 14:35	Why Early Interventions Work	Sam Grant and Jim Pearson – Essex Violence & Vulnerability Unit (VVU) and Landi Muca, Headteacher, Victory Park Academy
14:35 – 15:05	The Listening Project: What Young People Think About Crime & Safety in Essex	Presented by Alexia Karras, Kai Dixon & Ruth Kigozi ,Epping Forest Youth Council and Nicole Redgwell, Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Service (ECVYS)
15:05 – 15:20	Supporting Young People to Thrive	Nick Cook – Director of Young People’s Services, The Children’s Society
15:20 - 15:40	Policing in Partnership through change	B.J. Harrington QPM, Chief Constable, Essex Police
15:40 – 15:45	Closing Remarks & Next Steps	Roger Hirst

Workshops

During the conference, five interactive workshop topics will run in two sessions (Session 1 at 11:15 and Session 2 at 13:15). These concurrent workshops give attendees an opportunity to delve deeper into specific safety and community support topics. Each workshop is repeated in Session 2, so delegates can attend two different ones. Below is the list of workshop topics and facilitators:

Room	Workshops	Facilitators
Layer Suite	Workshop 1: How We Cut KSI's On Essex Roads - The Hidden Epidemic of Drug Driving	Adam Pipe, Head of Roads Policing, Essex Police
Vice Presidents Suite (1st Floor)	Workshop 2: Risks, Realities and Responsible Practice	Dr Katrina Wickes and Lauren Peck, OPFCC
Dick Graham (1st Floor)	Workshop 3: Exploring Trauma Informed Practice on children, young people and their families	Sarah Clementson and Anita Warren, Centre for Rape and Sexual Abuse (CARA)
Enterprise Suite (2nd Floor)	Workshop 4: Cybercrime Escape Room – test your knowledge on scams and phishing	Gavin Saunders – Cyber Prevent, Protect & Prepare Officer, Essex Police
Academy Suite (2nd Floor)	Workshop 5: Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VVU) - problem solving for safer communities	The VVU Team

Welcome to the PFCC Annual Conference 2026

Welcome to the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's 2026 Annual Conference. We are coming together at a pivotal moment for Essex, shaped by significant change and shared challenge. Potential Local Government Reorganisation, the drive towards devolution, and ongoing consultations on proposed policing reforms are all on the horizon.

While these developments bring a degree of uncertainty, they also present opportunities: now more than ever, maintaining strong partnership is crucial. The progress we've made together in reducing crime, protecting the vulnerable and improving public safety must not be lost.

Across Essex there is a wealth of excellent work taking place. This includes the many high-quality services we commission – several which are represented here today. These services are delivering real results, from supporting victims, commissioning youth interventions and funding third sector organisations to carry out community focused initiatives, and it is vital these services are protected, sustained and strengthened throughout change and beyond.

Today we will also hear about the challenges faced by young people in our county – and how by focusing on prevention, partnership and participation, we can turn the challenges of today's youth into opportunities for tomorrow's Essex.

Please take the opportunity today to connect, share and build relationships with colleagues and partners from across Essex. Just as importantly, take a moment to reflect on the outstanding work taking place and the life-changing impact of the services we commission and support. These services are vital to our communities, and as we navigate the changes ahead, it is essential that we continue to champion, sustain and strengthen them. By keeping a clear focus on the needs of our residents and working together, we will not only navigate this period of change, we will emerge stronger, united and better equipped to serve Essex now and into the future.

Roger Hirst MBE, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner



Roger Hirst is the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, currently serving his third term after first being elected in May 2016 and re-elected in May 2024. In October 2017, he made history as the first Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner in the country, taking on responsibility for both policing and fire & rescue services in Essex.

Roger is a strong advocate of working together – fostering close collaboration among emergency services, local councils, the voluntary sector and communities – with the conviction that more can be achieved when we work together.

At national level, Roger is a long-standing member of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners board and serves as the national finance lead for Police and Crime Commissioners. In Essex, he spearheaded a successful campaign for additional policing resources, securing extra government funding that enabled the recruitment of 905 additional police officers in Essex by March 2023. This expansion made Essex Police the largest it has been in its 185-year history.

Looking ahead, Roger's ambition is to drive down crime even further through continued investment in local policing, data-driven targeting of crime hotspots, and early intervention to protect vulnerable people. His ultimate goal is to continue to ensure Essex is a safer place for to live, work and thrive.



BJ Harrington QPM, Chief Constable, Essex Police

Ben-Julian “BJ” Harrington QPM is the Chief Constable of Essex Police, a role he has held since October 2018. He began his policing career with the Metropolitan Police Service in 1990, gaining extensive operational experience across London. Rising through the ranks in a variety of roles – from frontline response and specialist public order policing with the Territorial Support Group to overseeing major events like the Notting Hill Carnival and the London 2012 Olympics – he ultimately became Commander for Public Order in London and also served as a National Counter Terrorism Commander.

In 2017, Mr Harrington was seconded to Essex Police as Deputy Chief Constable and took up the Chief Constable position the following year. Utilising his wealth of experience, he has focused on building community confidence, modernising policing (including new technology and equipment) and promoting diversity, equality and inclusion. Under his leadership, Essex Police launched the acclaimed “We Value Difference” recruitment campaign. BJ has navigated major challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the fatal stabbing of Sir David Amess MP and other high-profile incidents.

Nationally, BJ chairs the NPCC Operations Coordination Committee and leads on Joint Emergency Services Interoperability (JESIP). He holds postgraduate qualifications in police leadership and in 2022 was awarded the Queen’s Police Medal for distinguished service.

BJ is married to a former police officer, has two teenage daughters and an annoying Spaniel.



Rick Hylton, Chief Fire Officer, Essex Fire and Rescue Service

Rick joined Essex County Fire and Rescue Service in 2019 as Deputy Chief Fire Officer. He had responsibilities for strategic planning, assurance and performance and was the strategic lead for collaboration, working with partners to deliver on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's local business case.

In January 2022, Rick became Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive for the Service.

Since 2022, Rick has focussed the Service on ensuring it is best delivering the needs of local communities, creating a working environment to help people be successful, as well as building the capacity and capability of the Service for the future. During that time, the Service has increased the amount of prevention work it carries out, has rebuilt the capacity needed within its fire protection department and invested in training and technology to ensure it is best placed to support its people in meeting the changing risks and needs of its local communities.

In 2024, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service received a gold award from the Public Sector Transformation Awards and received a silver award from Inclusive Employers -at the time, the highest award achieved by a fire and rescue service.

Rick is the chair of the Essex Resilience Forum and co-led the Strategic Coordination Group throughout the pandemic. He also led the National Fire Chief Council Home Safety Committee from 2015 and in 2023 became the NFCC Prevention Committee Chair. In 2025 he became the Vice Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council.

Rick has a master's in public administration from Warwick University. He is married with two children and a frequently frustrated Sunderland FC fan.



Joel Charles, Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner



Joel brings wide-ranging experience across public protection, community safety, policy development and partnership working at both local and national level.

He is a Councillor on Harlow District Council, and previously held the roles of Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member responsible for Business and Community Resilience in the period following the Covid-19 pandemic. Through this work, Joel has played an active role in Safer Essex and wider community safety partnerships.

Before entering local government, Joel worked in Parliament as a Senior Parliamentary Assistant and was part of the executive team that established the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. During this time, he acted as Secretary to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Policing.

Joel also has more than ten years' experience in senior leadership roles across the charitable and private sectors. His career includes director-level positions in policy, communications, public affairs and government relations, as well as serving as Deputy Chief Executive of a health and social care think tank.

As Deputy PFCC, Joel supports the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner in providing effective governance and oversight of policing and fire and rescue services, working closely with partners and communities to deliver the Police and Crime Plan and the Fire and Rescue Plan for Essex.



Creative Lives

Dr Natasha Richards-Crisp

Natasha is an arts practitioner, educator and researcher with over 15 years' experience across the arts, education and creative health sectors. Alongside completing an AHRC-funded PhD in Theatre at the University of Essex, she has led collaborative projects regionally, nationally and internationally. Natasha works across higher education, local government, health and cultural sectors, specialising in partnership-building, facilitation and participatory research. Her work uses creativity to support social change, health and wellbeing. She has extensive experience convening stakeholders, leading training and engagement programmes, and creating inclusive spaces. Natasha is passionate about strengthening creative health infrastructure in Essex through sustainable partnerships, research and education.

Jess Plant

Jess is Policy Director at Creative Lives, having joined in 2020 to lead the Creative Lives On Air programme in partnership with BBC local radio. She has since driven place-based work across the UK, building partnerships with local authorities and cultural organisations to champion volunteer-led creativity. Previously, Jess was Director of the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice at Clinks, where she secured Arts Council England National Portfolio status and led a major research project with the University of Cambridge. She has held trustee roles and consistently worked to expand creative opportunities for socially excluded groups, alongside extensive experience in fundraising, leadership and sector guidance.

Dr Natasha
Richards-Crisp



Jess Plant



Dr Katrina Wickes Local Authority Commissioner and Researcher

Katrina holds a PhD in Criminology, with research exploring victims' experiences of services commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners. She currently leads strategic commissioning and policy development for domestic abuse in Southend, focusing on multi-agency collaboration and survivor-centred approaches.

Katrina is recognised for translating national policy into effective local delivery and for championing trauma-informed systems change across partnerships.



Cath Pickles - Founder 'Restitute'

Restitute was founded by Cath Pickles, a mum and herself a 3rd party victim of crime.

Cath's daughter was sexually abused between the ages of 9 and 12, but it was not until many years later—following serious mental health difficulties and significant behavioural challenges—that she felt able to disclose what had happened. By the age of 14, the family knew something was seriously wrong and suspected sexual abuse. It was not until she was 15 that the full extent of the abuse became known.

Cath and her family struggled to understand her behaviour, to find appropriate support, and to navigate complex multi-agency involvement, often feeling that communication between services was fragmented and unclear.

In response, she founded Restitute to share the knowledge and experience they had gained, and to offer practical, solution-focused support to others in similar situations. She is committed to ensuring that those caring in highly complex and traumatic circumstances feel seen, respected and supported. Recognising the isolation, stigma, guilt and shame that often accompany such experiences, she aims to make it easier for others to seek and receive help. Restitute exists to change that.

Professionally, Cath has worked as a teacher, a senior manager in a county council, and served for four years as a district councillor. Alongside leading Restitute, she is an experienced public speaker, trainer and project manager.



Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit

Essex established its pioneering work of violence reduction in 2018 when partners across Southend, Essex and Thurrock came together to state their shared commitment to addressing the factors which can lead to serious violence.

Then in 2019, following a successful bid by PFCC Roger Hirst along with partner organisations, to the Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund for additional funding to tackle the growing threat of County Lines, the Essex Violence Reduction Unit – known locally as the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit – was established.

The VVU leads a coordinated, multi-agency approach, working with police, local authorities, health, education, voluntary and community organisations to prevent harm and protect vulnerable people. Its work focuses on early intervention, positive opportunities for young people and targeted support at key moments.

By combining prevention with strong enforcement, Essex continues to make progress in reducing violence and supporting safer communities. The VVU remains committed to partnership working to ensure sustainable, long-term impact across the county.



Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) and Epping Forest Youth Council

ECVYS has been around for 50 years and are an independent Charity with a passionate and strong voice for the voluntary youth sector in Essex. They aim to support, network and resource the voluntary youth sector whilst building links and possibilities with statutory services that wish to engage with the sector.

ECVYS believes that the voluntary youth sector has an important role to play in the life and education of our young people and seek to enable these services to be the very best that they can be.

ECVYS members run around 7,000 groups, with over 300,000 opportunities for children & young people to take part. These groups also support over 42,864 volunteers!

Alexia Karras EFYC

Alexia Karras is a passionate advocate for amplifying young people's voices through the Epping Forest Youth Council. She is committed to improving student wellbeing during high-pressure academic periods, promoting a healthy balance between success and mental health. Alexia champions peer-led support initiatives and is dedicated to tackling bullying and discrimination, ensuring every young person feels safe, heard, and supported in school and their community.



Kai Dixon EYFC

Kai is committed to empowering young people to have a meaningful voice on the issues that matter most, including the cost-of-living crisis and community safety. He is passionate about helping peers develop confidence, social skills, and the ability to debate and express their views. Kai also aims to raise awareness of financial challenges facing families and is dedicated to making a positive difference in his community.



Ruth Kigozi EFDC

Ruth is dedicated to creating positive change for young people across Epping Forest, drawing on her experiences within a diverse community. She is passionate about expanding youth political education and encouraging greater engagement, particularly among young people interested in shaping their future. Ruth brings a fresh perspective to the Youth Council, with a strong commitment to increasing diversity, innovation, and meaningful representation.



Nick Cook, Director of Young People's Services, The Children's Society

Nick is the Director of Young People's Services at The Children's Society, where he leads the charity's local, regional and national services and programmes – including all work delivered across Essex. He oversees a wide portfolio of support for young people, with a significant focus on supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and young people affected by child exploitation, county lines and other forms of abuse and harm.

With a deep commitment to social change, Nick is driven by innovation, systems-thinking and the belief that young people should receive help at the earliest possible moment. He has spent 15 years working in the Voluntary and Community Sector, following an early career in local government, and brings extensive experience in service design, partnership working and strategic leadership.



Thank you to all our workshops, speakers, facilitators and stallholders !



Epping Forest District Council

PHOENIX FUTURES



COMPASS



Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Essex County Council YOUTH SERVICE

healthwatch Essex

COMMUNITY PASTORS



Essex Sexual Health Service

