

A Report by
Mediation Hertfordshire



The Cost of Community Conflict



“

I've really enjoyed the course ... above all, it's giving me confidence in my role, that I can deal with conflict between staff and/or young people, and I feel confident addressing difficult situations.

”

“

WMS staff have human hearts and understand what people are going through. This charity needs all the help they can get, as they literally save lives.

”

“

We were given an amazingly safe and well-regulated space to listen to each other as a couple, and to make huge steps forward with understanding ourselves and the situation we were in.

”

“

[The mediation] has helped clarify the underlying issues which have caused problems in our family relationships for many years.

”

“

Mediation is the best thing I've done and it's completely changed my life. I don't dread going out and I can walk out of my front door without fear of bumping into my neighbour ... Our relationship now is polite and pleasant, and we message and call each other.

”

“

Afterwards I cried my eyes out, but that was a good thing because I felt so much better than I have for months.

”

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Produced by Mediation Hertfordshire with assistance from the Tudor Trust

Mediation Hertfordshire
3 Halsey Drive
Hemel Hempstead
HP1 3SE
www.mediationherts.org.uk

Author: Victoria Harris
Researcher: Jag Bhandal

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Victoria Harris
Author



Jag Bhandal
Researcher



Chris Mills
Chair of Mediation Hertfordshire

Foreword

Conflict exacts a cost on every community, a fact understood by all but rarely explored. This report takes a significant step towards examining the impact of conflict in the UK, and advances ways to reduce that cost to benefit both individuals and the services that support them.

At Mediation Hertfordshire we are committed to raising the voice of community mediators. This research follows on from *Transforming Community Conflict*, our 2021 report, which laid bare the reduction in community mediation services since 2005.

What is apparent from this new research is that the growth in demand for conflict resolution *outside* the court process continues unabated. It is clear, too, that the cost of that conflict to individuals and the services that seek to support them is huge.

Thanks to the support of the Tudor Trust, this report provides an overview of the deeply pervasive nature of conflict, which can have a corrosive impact across the mainstays of our social fabric: from health to housing, and from education to community safety.

I came to community mediation after many years in the legal profession, and can attest to the challenging and deeply meaningful nature of community mediation, which changes lives for the better. I have witnessed first-hand both the professionalism of the organisations that work in this area and the continued struggle for funding, which makes the future of these vital community mediation services so precarious.

We are deeply grateful to the organisations, groups and individuals who contributed to this report. Thank you.

This report is part of an ongoing conversation, so when you have read it we would welcome the opportunity to engage with you. If we can continue to work together to raise awareness of the heavy cost of community conflict and the profound value of community mediation, the benefits could be transformative.

Chris Mills
Chair of Mediation Hertfordshire
transforming-conflict@mediationherts.org.uk



Introduction

The most important cost of conflict is the deep distress it brings. In a very real sense that cost is unquantifiable – the personal hurt experienced, rupture of relationships, souring of community spirit and a legacy that weighs heavily for years and in some cases generations. It cannot neatly be quantified.

However, in another sense, the cost of conflict can be examined in terms of money spent by national and local government to repair and respond to the damage caused by conflict. In areas such as health, housing, education and policing there are bills to be paid, and while conflict is not the only reason for damage to the social fabric, it unquestionably plays a role. This report seeks to amalgamate evidence from a variety of sources to show just how huge the bill for conflict might actually be.

This is not a straightforward task. As this report explains, conflict contributes to the crisis in the NHS, to soaring levels of homelessness, and to record numbers of teachers leaving the profession, to name just a few examples. However, data analysing conflict as a dominant causal factor is not easily isolated. It is in this context that this report analyses related research findings to infer where conflict drives costly outcomes.

By way of illustration, the impact of interpersonal conflict is revealed in reports that relate to the tragic outcome of suicide. We learn how each tragic loss of life has a cost to the economy of **£1.67 million** and that 30% of suicides in one geographic area are attributed to 'relationship breakdown'. In relation to the devastating impact of homelessness, we discover that a single homeless person costs the UK public purse up to **£26,000** more than other citizens. And research from Hertfordshire reveals that 35–40%

of homelessness is caused by the combined factors of 'family no longer willing to accommodate' and 'non-violent relationship breakdown'.

In some other countries mediation has been recognised as an antidote to the pervasive, damaging and costly nature of conflict. In this report we look at the national community mediation schemes in operation in Norway and Singapore, both examples of an accessible national scheme implemented to support citizens in dispute. These schemes help to prevent the escalation of conflict, which can lead to broken lives, fractured communities and a need for costly state intervention.

In the UK, attention to the value of mediation as a method to resolve conflict has largely resided with the Ministry of Justice, since the department's creation in 2007. This has led to a natural focus on mediation at the legal interface of disputes and within the court system, which in turn resulted in a landmark announcement in July 2023 that small claims will automatically be referred to mediation.¹ So, with the value of mediation within the court system now recognised at government level, we ask what infrastructure is in place to support citizens who experience conflict *outside* the court process, to support not only individuals, but also the local, regional and national infrastructure for education, healthcare, housing and community safety.

In this report we consider the existing system of community mediation in the UK, which supports non-court-based disputes. Specifically, we look at how these individual services resolve conflict and at the work they do to prevent conflict arising in their local areas. But the UK's community mediation services are currently run on a shoestring and offer only patchy geographic accessibility. In light of the data contained in this report, we reflect on the potential benefits of a more coherent structure for community mediation with the advantage of consistent funding and resources.

The value of mediation has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Justice after detailed consultation. In this report we seek to take the conversation further and consider a way to model the economic value of mediation within the wider community. For a government that finds itself stretched by budgetary responsibilities, could a plan to roll out national community mediation provision be part of a future vision to improve national wellbeing, to support our public services and, critically, to save costs?

In considering the costs associated with conflict, we ask this essential question: if conflict is a natural part of life, what could we do differently to create a more restorative and conflict-confident society that benefits individuals, the services they rely upon, and the public purse?



The work of community mediation organisations

Community mediation supports conflict resolution outside the court process. In *Transforming Community Conflict*, our 2021 report,¹ we examined the history and philosophy of community mediation in the UK, learning that the country's community mediation organisations (CMOs) come in a variety of forms, are differently constituted, and work with a range of emphases to respond to the needs of their local populations. We also discovered that despite their differences, they had all adapted swiftly to providing online dispute resolution, and they experience similar challenges in securing long-term funding.

The report revealed that the number of CMOs has declined dramatically, down from 250 at its high point in the mid-2000s to around 40 or 50 today. It's also clear, though, that organisations such as homeless charities are embracing mediation as an important element of their work – examples include The Bridge (East Midlands) and Herts Young Homeless (Hertfordshire). New local initiatives are springing up in places such as Hackney Wick and Camden, with interested parties attending a new platform, the community mediation working group, set up for the community sector by the Civil Mediation Council.

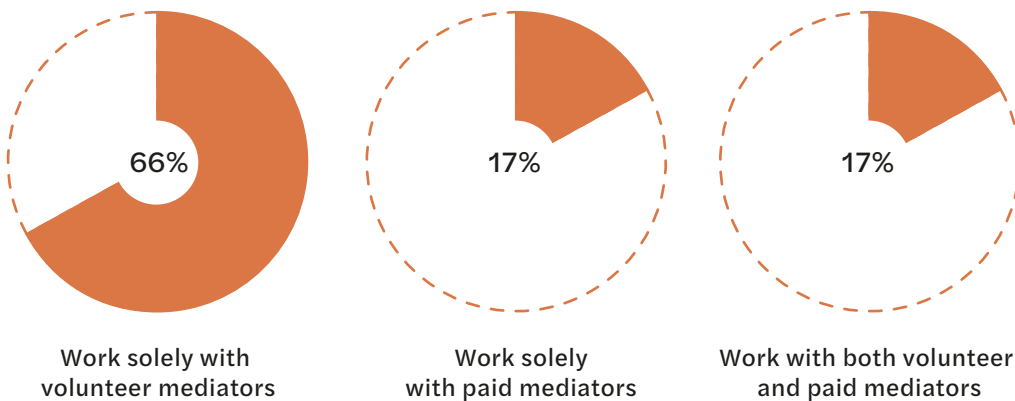
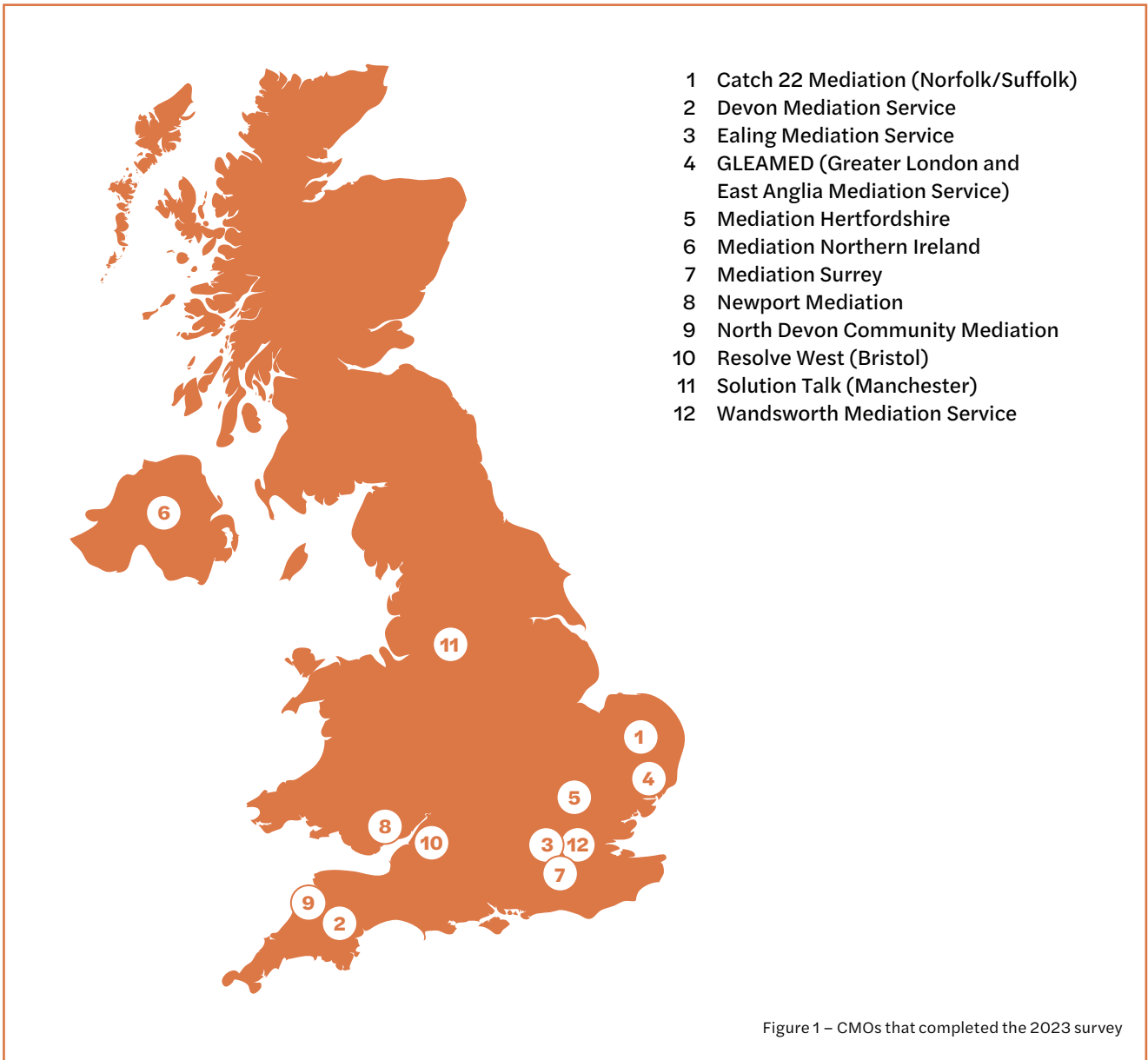


Figure 2 – CMOs responding to a question in the 2023 survey about the mediators they work with

For this report we undertook fresh primary research to create a new snapshot of community mediation in the UK. We are grateful to the twelve CMOs – based in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – that generously shared their data. Although this is a small sample, representing possibly one quarter of the UK’s CMOs, the findings indicate clear trends.

What follows in this chapter are selected details from the data collated, compared with 2021 data where appropriate, addressing topics including case numbers, the types of work being carried out, who is referring cases, methods of working (face to face or online), costs per case, and work by CMOs to support the prevention of conflict.

Case numbers

Our 2021 report related to data for 2020, and this 2023 report covers data for 2022. In 2020, fifteen organisations undertook 1,462 cases, an average of 97 per organisation. In 2022, twelve organisations undertook 1,529 cases, an average of 127 apiece and an increase of 23.6% in just two years.

The experience of Solution Talk, a Manchester-based CMO, sheds some light on this apparent trend. Its team reported growth in referrals in their area of 38% in 2022 and 214% between 2019 and 2022, a surge they attribute to factors such as free online open-information briefing sessions for potential referrers; regular promotion of mediation and conflict coaching on social media platforms; and establishing new connections with anti-social behaviour (ASB) professionals.

Volunteers or paid mediators?

In our 2021 report 80% of CMOs reported working with volunteer mediators, either exclusively or in combination with paid mediators.

See figure 2 for the latest numbers.

The number of CMOs now working with volunteer mediators is a similar figure at 83.4%, but a new question revealed that

more than a third of organisations surveyed now pay mediators. While we don’t have a benchmark figure that would tell us whether this represents an increase, the new statistic does raise the question of remuneration for community mediators to reflect their skills and the costs of initial mediation training and continuing professional development (CPD).



Figure 3 – Average cases per CMO, showing an increase of 23.6% in two years

The Cost of Community Conflict

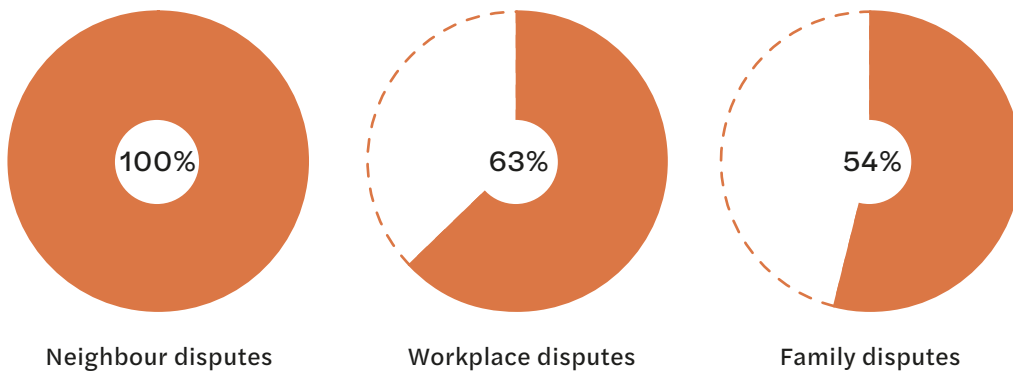


Figure 4 – CMOs responding to a question in the 2023 survey about types of work undertaken; ‘family disputes’ do not relate to work regulated by the Family Mediation Council

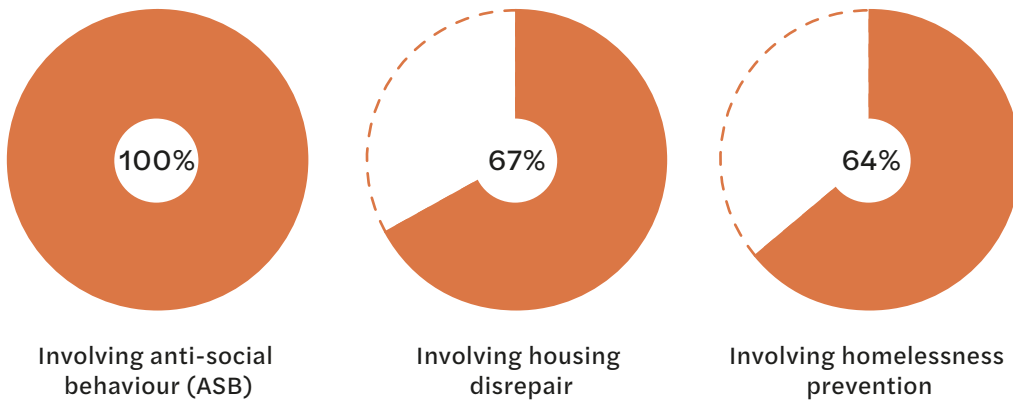


Figure 5 – The degree of engagement by CMOs in work carried out to support aspects of housing and community safety

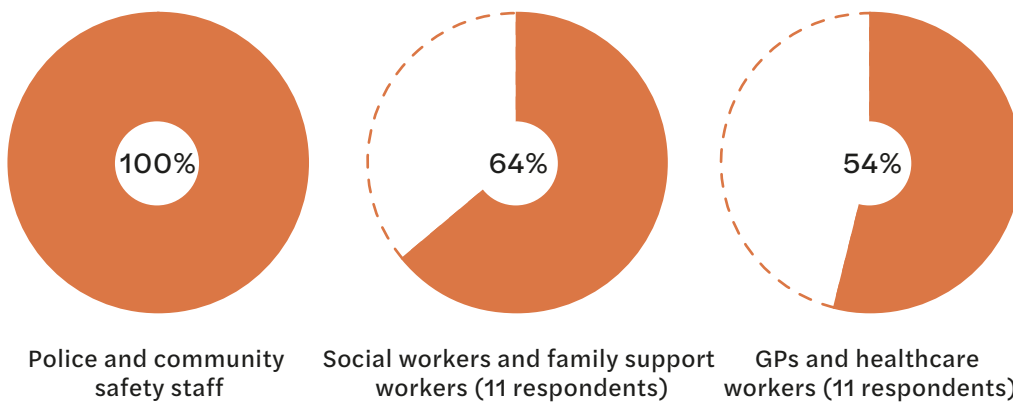


Figure 6 – CMOs responding to a question in the 2023 survey about the origin of case referrals

Types of work

In the two years since our previous survey, there had been little change in the type of work undertaken by CMOs, with the exception of a fall in work relating to workplace disputes from 87% to 63%.

Respondents commented that other types of dispute they supported include community peacebuilding, special educational needs and disability (SEND) disputes, conflict in educational settings, occasional small claims disputes, conflict coaching (where only one

party to a dispute will engage), restorative justice initiatives (including involving hate and discrimination), and commercial and international disputes.

The breadth of this conflict-resolution provision is determined by factors such as geography, priorities identified by organisation leadership, and the needs of those who refer cases. Some CMOs carry out a hybrid of community and other mediation work.

Origin of case referrals

Of the figures illustrated in figure 6, the first (police and community safety staff) is unchanged since the 2021 report, but the other two show marked increases. The percentage of CMOs reporting cases referred by social workers and family support workers rose from 47% to 63.6%, and the percentage reporting cases referred by GPs and health-care workers went up from 27% to 54.5%

On the face of it, these significant changes are likely to point both to greater awareness of mediation services and to increasing demand from family services and healthcare services.

It's worth noting, too, that 91.7% of CMOs are set up to receive self-referrals.

“We see a greater number of self-referrals,” says Mandy Hargreaves, Director of Services at Mediation Surrey, “which I think suggests services are signposting to us as a way of resolving conflict before it escalates.”

Sherril Franklin, General Manager at Mediation Hertfordshire, has also noted an increase in self-referrals, which she attributes to greater public awareness arising from marketing initiatives such as social media posts and attendance at community events.

Online provision

The proportion of CMOs offering online dispute resolution declined from 100% two years ago to 83.3% in our 2023 survey. The former figure reflected the absolute need for online working during the pandemic, and illustrates what is possible. The new figure still represents a major shift from the way most organisations operated pre-pandemic.

More research is required to establish whether face-to-face mediation is chosen due to the preference of the mediator or the client. This matters because client preference is key, particularly when trying to engage individuals to participate in the mediation process.

Safeguarding

An area where community mediation differs from other mediation sectors is the extent to which mediators work with vulnerable individuals. In our 2023 survey, 100% of respondents confirmed that they will make a safeguarding referral if they have a safeguarding concern for a vulnerable individual.

The training necessitated by this work is an example of the responsiveness of individual CMOs to supporting vulnerable individuals as well as in response to funder requirements.

Community mediators are well aware of the human cost of conflict, which often manifests as family estrangement and relationship breakdown, which in extreme cases can lead to suicide. As we will see later in this report, CMOs are in a unique position to identify vulnerability in such circumstances, and to seek support.

The cost of community mediation provision

Eleven CMOs answered the question 'What was your total income in the last financial year?' The average was **£95,685.72**, and by dividing this figure by the average number of cases in the same period (127), we arrive at a rudimentary cost per case of **£753.43**, a significant increase from **£527.50** two years ago. This no doubt reflects inflationary pressures, but possibly payments to mediators, too.

A further reason could be the nature of the work. As one CMO noted, "Cases are more complex, many ... now involving mental health issues. Average case time is up to 42 hours from 27 in 2019." Two respondents commented that their income does not match the cost of providing the service.

It's also worth returning for a second to the word 'rudimentary', used above. The calculation of average cost per case is unsatisfactory in that it doesn't reflect other work performed by CMOs, such as conflict resolution training and facilitation work, such as 'peer mediation' programmes in schools.

Not just resolving conflict, but preventing it

Resolving disputes where they arise is important, but preventing them from happening in the first place, and working to prevent and resolve conflict, is a vital task for community mediation organisations and a growing trend in the work of CMOs.

A good example is peer mediation programmes in schools, which model a mediation process for pupils to deliver to their peers. In 2022 just 16% of responding

CMOs delivered peer mediation in schools, making it an area for potential growth. In 2022, Mediation Hertfordshire delivered peer mediation training in nine primary schools, and at Bacon's College in Rotherhithe, CALM Mediation delivered a similar programme for sixth formers.

More widely, 75% of CMOs provided training in mediation, conflict coaching skills, or mediation awareness to those who referred

cases to them, and 50% of CMOs provided training in conflict resolution skills in their local community. Below we look at three examples.

Mediation Northern Ireland reported in June 2023 that “We only undertake a small number of mediations directly, and are more geared towards supporting the use of mediation by others within their own contexts. Where we intervene directly, that may include long-term complex cases of intercommunity conflict – legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland, or issues arising from the dynamic with new arrivals into communities here ... Our work reduces the likelihood of additional damage to people and property where disputes have the potential to spiral into violence ... transformative mediation provides hope for ... new relationships; and increases community skills to handle future contention with courage and creativity.”

Wandsworth Mediation Service has invested heavily in training programmes for the local community. One example is bespoke training in 2022 for ‘Carney’s Community’, a local organisation working with young offenders and disadvantaged young people. This training programme focused on how to connect and communicate with young people demonstrating challenging behaviour or engaging in conflict.

Other training courses delivered in 2022 and 2023 include:

- free ‘Connecting and communicating in conflict’ workshops for community organisations linked with the Knife Crime Unit and the Battersea Alliance
- peer mediation training projects at two primary schools in Battersea
- training for managers at Richmond and Wandsworth Council to improve communication between colleagues, and reduce workplace conflict

As Lisa Owen, marketing manager at Wandsworth Mediation Service explains, “We work with businesses and community organisations, and run workshops for local residents. Our school initiatives transform primary pupils into peer mediators, and equip staff and at-risk secondary students with vital communication skills. This approach creates a ripple effect, reaching even those inaccessible for direct mediation.”

Yorkshire Mediation has delivered conflict awareness training in prisons, to support a restorative culture in the prisons, and to foster understanding of why conflict arises and how to manage it. This work is designed to promote healthy relationships for prisoners, and to give them a lifelong skill that supports the prevention of reoffending. Colin Bourne from Yorkshire Mediation told us that “Yorkshire Mediation have recently received approval from a prison to deliver a third training course, this recommitment being evidence that the training is meeting its objectives and providing value for money.”

- ‘reducing parental conflict’ training for teams at Richmond and Wandsworth Council
- free communication skills workshops led by women, for women, where many attendees have experienced domestic abuse, or are lone-parenting



The cost of conflict: housing

Home is everything. It's a place where we take our first steps, it shapes who we are, and then reflects who we have become. Home also determines our health, the water we drink and the air we breathe. At best it is a place of psychological safety, a springboard from which we can thrive and live our values.

Yet one in five English adults surveyed by the New Economics Foundation in 2018 said that a housing issue had negatively impacted on their mental health in the last five years, and one in 20 said they had gone to their GP in the last five years with a stress-related housing issue. These GP visits cost the NHS **£17.6 million** each year.¹ Not all of that sum is down to conflict, of course, but conflict related to housing can take many forms, each of which can have a powerful negative effect on health. Among the contexts for cost analysis are noise disputes, housing disrepair, eviction from

social housing due to anti-social behaviour (ASB), and homelessness due to relationship breakdown.

Local authorities are financially affected, too, as they hold responsibility for resolving conflict related to housing, which can arise and be a causal factor in the areas noted above. Their brief includes:

- provision and maintenance of social housing
- private sector housing regulation and enforcement
- homelessness reduction
- community safety
- support for dispersal and resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees

The sections below explore the financial costs associated with conflict in the areas of noise, housing disrepair, eviction and homelessness.

Noise

According to the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health (CIEH),² noise is the single largest subject of complaints made to local authorities in the UK and, according to the World Health Organisation, is a health burden second only to air pollution. Noise disputes are often referred to CMOs where such provision currently exists.

The CIEH survey shows that between 2019–20 and 2020–21 noise complaints rose by 54% across the 89 local authorities that participated in both years. The cost is relatively straightforward to estimate. In 2020–21 there were 563 full-time equivalent (FTE) professionals working at 144 local authorities in England on the investigation and resolution of noise complaints, an average of 3.9 FTEs per local authority. Multiply that figure by the average

salary of an environmental health officer³ – **£38,463** – to discover that the annual cost of dealing with conflict over noise is, on average and not counting overheads and other non-salary costs, **£150,005** per local authority.

Mediation is an effective option in the prevention and management of noise complaints, where the goal is to reduce the number that are subject to lengthy and costly monitoring and environmental health intervention. Many noise complaints are resolved, particularly when dialogue can foster greater understanding of the very real and damaging impact noise can have. All CMOs surveyed support neighbour disputes where noise is a common problem.

Housing disrepair

According to a March 2023 Insight report into the work of the Housing Ombudsman,⁴ housing disrepair was cited in 51% of complaints to local authorities. Tenants can claim through the courts against councils, housing associations and private landlords. Although mediation won't be a suitable route for all claims, some councils have introduced it to reduce the cost and time involved.

Yorkshire Mediation ran a pilot scheme for a local council in 2017. While the council's average solicitor costs for such cases were **£3,282**, Yorkshire Mediation charged just **£550** per case, saving the council **£30,652** during the pilot scheme as well as delivering swifter resolutions.

According to the Insight report, only 2% of housing disrepair cases referred to it resulted in mediation. "Parties are not always offered mediation," explained Nisha Khatri of the Housing Ombudsman Service. "It's only offered if the case is deemed suitable and the decision is part of our triage process." The Housing Ombudsman Service also advised of a plan to triple the size of its triage and mediation service section between November 2022 and September 2023.

Eviction

Where conflict is unresolved, for example due to disputed rental payments or a neighbour dispute, tenants sometimes find themselves

facing eviction. That is traumatic enough, but what often goes unreported is the sheer cost of eviction, financial and otherwise, to society.

Shelter Scotland reported that the overall cost to Scottish local authorities of evictions from social tenancies in 2019–2020 was **£27,848,932**,⁵ an average per-eviction cost of **£14,924**. Its report also examined the social costs of eviction: “Being evicted and potentially having to move away from friends and family and changing schools also adds an extra layer of emotional distress ... children who are homeless are three to four times more likely to have mental

health problems than other children.” The report revealed that in 2019–20, 805 evicted households in Scotland went on to present as homeless or threatened with homelessness. As one local authority employee noted in the report, “If you evict on Monday, you have to rehouse on Tuesday.” Mediation, particularly in relation to neighbour disputes, can be a powerful tool to help prevent eviction and the human and financial costs that flow from it.

Homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness. In 2021–22, 133,460 households in England were assessed as threatened with homelessness and owed a prevention duty – up 11.3% on the previous year – and 144,670 households as homeless and owed a relief duty.

Recent figures are hard to come by, but in 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government published an ‘Evidence Review on the Costs of Homelessness’, which estimated the annual cost to the government of **£24,000–£30,000** per person more than other citizens, and up to **c.£1 billion** annually.⁶

Relationship breakdown due to conflict can be a significant factor. In Hertfordshire, the combined factors of ‘family/friends no longer willing to accommodate’ and ‘non-violent relationship breakdown’ are the stated cause for between 35 and 40% of cases of homelessness.⁷

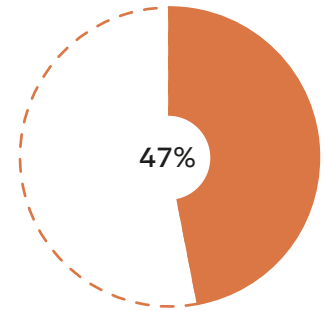
Figure 7 shows data on homelessness among young people, from a recent report by the charity Centrepoint.

In recent times, central government has further tasked local authorities with supporting dispersal and resettlement programmes for asylum seekers and refugees, another area of responsibility for homelessness prevention.

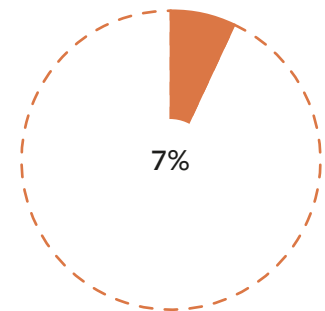
Mediation has a part to play. “Early intervention and exploration of a range of resolutions are vital to bringing about resolution and reduc[ing] the far-reaching impacts of community conflict,” says Natasha Beresford, Assistant Director of Housing and Community Safety for Dacorum Borough Council in Hertfordshire.

Local government would benefit from a mediation service that:

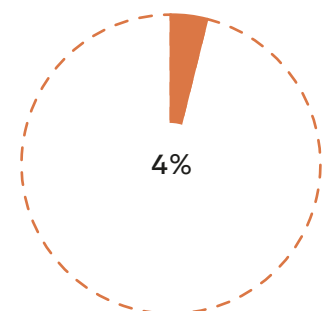
- is fully accessible to residents
- can support integration for those who are looking to make a new life in the UK
- can support those experiencing relationship conflict particularly in the context of youth homelessness
- can be offered to individuals experiencing issues related to noise disputes, housing disrepair, or the threat of eviction



Family no longer able or willing to accommodate



Evicted from social housing



Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner

Figure 7 – Reasons for 16 to 24-year-olds being at risk of homelessness in England in 2021–22. Source: Centrepoint



The cost of conflict: health

A GP is often a first port of call when experiencing conflict. Every day, patients present GPs with social issues such as distress arising from conflict at work, poor living conditions, and the breakdown of family relationships.

When an individual experiences conflict, they may also experience depression, anxiety and insomnia, as well as the exacerbation of physical ill health. A GP practice is an obvious place to go: a safe and confidential space for a patient to speak to someone outside their family to seek support.

But what of the cost to primary care of managing what is essentially a social need? And is it right for the individual that these needs are always medicalised?

As well as engaging with these questions, this chapter examines how the health system is coping with increasing needs around mental health, and considers how unresolved conflict can result in poor mental health and even the tragic consequence of suicide.

Primary care costs

In 2021/22 the average cost of a nine-minute GP appointment was **£42**,¹ and we know that in March 2023 there were 31.6 million general

practice appointments in England alone, of which 47.6% (14.97 million) were carried out by a GP.²

Further, pre-pandemic research commissioned by Citizens Advice reveals that 19% of all GP appointments are for a social need (see figure 9), and while not every GP visit for a social need will relate to conflict, many will. And tellingly, 92% of GPs report that their patients had raised issues about personal relationship problems, one social determinant of health, with them in the last month (see figure 10). It's impossible to be exact, but it's clear that dealing with issues caused by conflict is costly.

If we look at the social determinants of health identified by Dahlgren and Whitehead, set out in figure 8, we see that social and community networks, and living and working conditions – both areas which can be impacted by conflict – are key to population health.

It's suggested, too, that the impact on GP practices of social problems is greater than formally documented. Tim Anfilogoff, Head of Community Resilience at the Integrated Care Board for NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex, and a steering group member for the National Social Prescribing Group, reports hearing from GPs that the number of appointments for social needs is, in their experience, much higher than 19%.

Dr Mehul Mathukia, who runs a busy practice in South Ilford in London, which he describes as one of the poorest wards in the country, with lots of socio-economic problems, concurs with the underestimation of time spent on social needs. "We have observed in general practice," he says, "that a significant bulk of the presentations are for social problems."

Looking at the potentially conservative figure from the Citizens Advice report of 19% of all appointments, it is likely that GPs are spending at least a fifth of their time with patients presenting with social issues.

The Citizens Advice report also tells us that this time represents more than 5% of the NHS England budget, or a sum equivalent to the salaries of 3,750 full-time GPs. If even half of the time identified as spent on social need could be absorbed in other ways, Citizens Advice has calculated 3.4 million hours of GP time and **£200 million** would be released: efficiency gains that could be reinvested in patient healthcare.

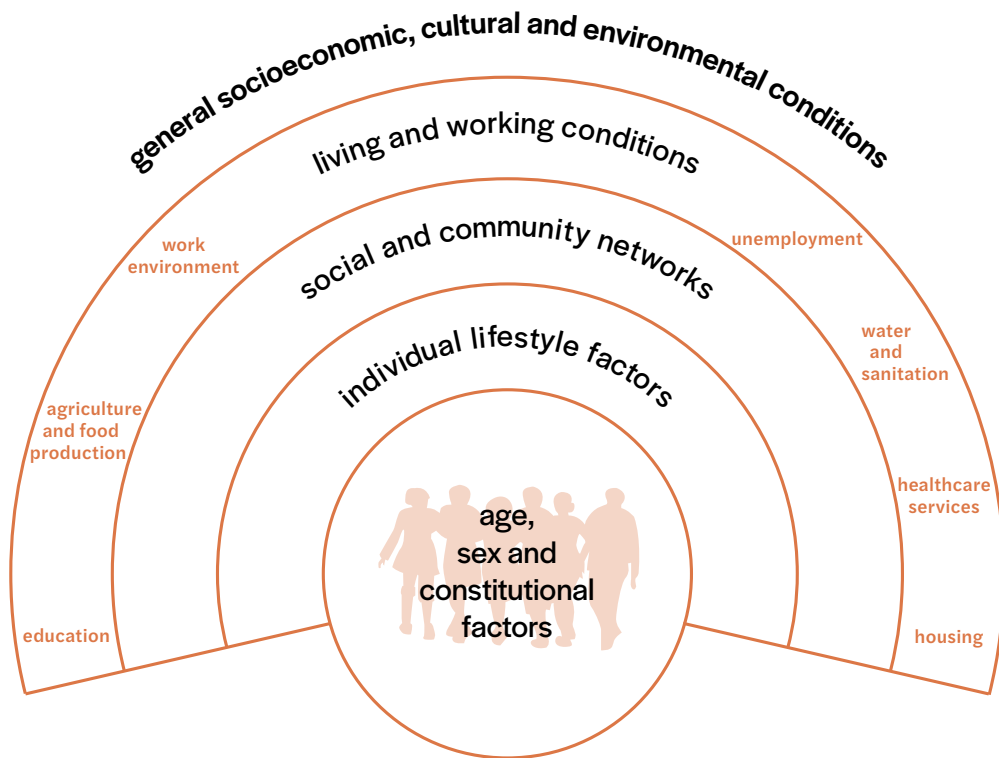


Figure 8 – Social determinants of health. Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

Citizens Advice ³ also found that:

- 73% of GPs report that the proportion of time they spend dealing with non-health issues as part of consultations has increased over the past year
- 80% of GPs report that dealing with non-health queries results in decreased time available to treat other patients' health issues

It would be remiss to fail to mention another aspect of this phenomenon perhaps best

expressed by Tim Anfilogoff when he says, "It's not just about making sure GP time is focused on clinical care, but also how we prevent people who are facing life challenges from being pathologised when they don't need to be. As evidenced by the ever-increasing prescription of anti-depressants, there's a danger that we're treating distress as a disease. What else can a GP do with a patient in distress, when he or she has 10 minutes to try to help, but prescribe a pill, unless he or she has easy access to other resources that can help the person?"

Social prescribing

Many will have heard of social prescribing, where a patient with a social need is signposted by a healthcare worker towards support that can help address the root cause of the patient's suffering. The growing recognition of the importance of social prescribing is neatly summed up by Tim Anfilogoff: "If the average time for a GP appointment is ten minutes, and the patient presents with complex social problems, it is impossible for the GP to resolve, hence the importance of social prescribing."

Dr Mehul Mathukia agrees. "The introduction of a social prescriber has helped to unpick, solve and signpost patients to appropriate services who can help these patients," he says. "We have found this to be of huge benefit both in terms of improving the quality of service we can offer our patients but also in terms of reducing demand to see the GP."

But, although conflict is unquestionably one of the social needs best dealt with away from the GP's surgery, it's not always clear to social prescribers where the services are to which they can signpost those experiencing conflict.

Tim Anfilogoff reports that while there are now 2,500 social prescribing link workers in England, it remains a challenge to link GPs with the voluntary sector, where the 'prescriptions' (the voluntary sector services themselves) are not adequately funded. In the case of conflict, it's sadly true that community mediation is not at present readily accessible nationwide.

Even where conflict resolution services exist, funding is patchy and short term.

The argument for greater funding, though, is a strong one. If national community mediation provision was in place, patients would be able to self-refer, potentially reducing the number of GP appointments. Similarly, if patients experiencing conflict were matched through social prescribing with a conflict resolution service after an initial GP appointment, the number of repeat GP appointments would shrink as the root causes of problems would be examined and resolved rather than medicalised.

Unless root causes are resolved by providers skilled in dealing with conflict, the symptoms and treatment needs will continue, and the problem will remain a drain on GPs' time and resources.

A recent report⁴ provides economic analysis that shows the twin effects of social prescribing: fewer GP appointments and a reduction in prescriptions dispensed. The report shows a cost saving of **£78.37** per frequent attender to primary care over a five-month period.

Social prescribing is a vehicle that could link individuals with a conflict resolution service, reducing the number of GP appointments and preventing the medicalisation of social needs related to conflict. The key issue is the existence and funding of a conflict resolution service to signpost to.

Mental health and suicide

Community mediation organisations working with individuals in their local communities see first-hand the distress, abuse and in some cases self-neglect suffered by individuals experiencing conflict. As increasing numbers of people look for support with their mental health, we examine the cost and ask whether early intervention in issues arising from conflict would be a worthwhile investment.

According to the Office for National Statistics,⁵ the Health Index for England declined from 100.5 in 2019 to 100.1 in 2020, taking it back to 2015 levels. Worsening mental health contributed to the declining ‘Healthy People’ score, including a 2.5-point decline in children’s social, emotional and mental health. Mind, a mental health charity, quotes a 2018 survey of 1,000 GPs in England who said two appointments in every five involved mental health.⁶

The NHS National Cost Collection 2022 report⁷ reveals that the total cost of mental health services in 2021-22 was **£7.1 billion**.

Meanwhile, a recent report by the Office for National Statistics⁸ illuminates the level of ‘unhappy relationships’, and shows that the number of those living with depression and anxiety is at its highest level since 2009–10. The most tragic outcome of poor mental health, of course, is suicide, which itself brings social and financial costs in its wake. The Association of Directors of Public Health said in written evidence to a parliamentary committee that for every life lost to suicide, the estimated total cost to the economy is around **£1.67 million** and that for every person who ends their own life, a *minimum* of six people will suffer a severe impact.⁹

Conflict and family estrangement often play a causal role in suicide. The Samaritan’s Report¹⁰ indicated that men account for three of every four suicides, and that there is a causal relationship between relationship breakdown and suicide, especially in men. One local report from Cheshire and Merseyside¹¹ indicated that relationship problems were recorded in 30% of cases.

The reality is that community mediation offers something that can help with relationships, firstly in the shape of individual conflict coaching, and secondly with mediation, where a skilled individual can assist the parties to gain a better understanding of each other’s perspective, potentially warding off estrangement and future conflict, and promoting better mental health.

Conflict can lead to physical and emotional abuse, but perhaps the most common detriment seen by community mediators is the self-neglect that individuals experience when they are mired in conflict. Community mediators don’t just bear witness to the suffering, but can also be a listening ear, and are in a position to signpost individuals for support and, perhaps most crucially, to make safeguarding referrals to local authorities to protect the wellbeing of those who pose a danger to themselves.

National provision of community mediation has scope to provide visible and practical support to individuals experiencing conflict that goes way beyond conflict coaching and mediation.

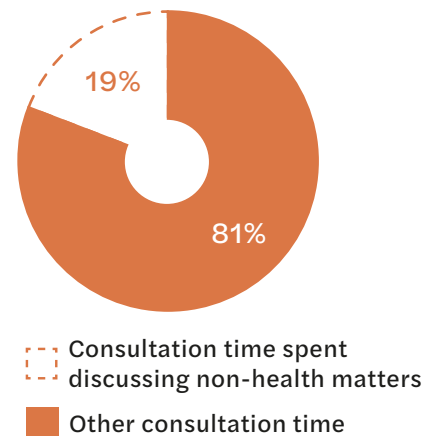


Figure 9 – Average GP consultation time spent discussing non-health matters; n=824

Next steps

In the report, ‘Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention: The economic case’¹² from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the authors prefaced their work with these words: “Health systems aim to improve health and health-related wellbeing, but are always constrained by the resources available to them. They also need to be aware of the resources available in adjacent systems which can have such an impact on health ... Careful choices therefore have to be made about how to utilise what is available. One immediate corollary is to ask whether investment in the prevention of mental health needs and the promotion of mental wellbeing might represent a good use of available resources.”

This report was commissioned by the Department of Health to identify and analyse the costs and economic payoffs of a range of interventions in the area of mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention, and to present this information in a way that would most helpfully support NHS and other commissioners in assessing the case for investment.

In the report, the authors sought to examine a range of interventions, fifteen in total, including work such as befriending older adults, and suicide prevention training. While conflict prevention and resolution were not examined, the authors stressed that “the interventions examined and modelled here are not necessarily the only ones for which there may be an economic case: they are the interventions for which we were able to find sufficient evidence to build economic models.”

The authors confirmed that some interventions initially identified as possible candidates for detailed economic analysis had to be dropped because of a lack of robust evidence on their effectiveness. This applied particularly to interventions which focus on the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing rather than the prevention of mental ill health, and to those which operate at the community level rather than the individual level. The authors were keen to emphasise that the fact that there was inadequate evidence to model some of these interventions did not mean that they are not cost-effective.

In chapter 6, ‘Measuring the value’, we will look at how to marshal evidence to support economic modelling, as the impact of an effective conflict resolution service would arguably be greatest in the area of health, but without effective modelling the case is difficult to make to policymakers. And the case must be made, in order to reduce the strain on primary care, to support individuals with mental health issues arising from conflict, to support suicide prevention through relationship building and safeguarding, and to help build a population with the tools to maintain a healthy ability to manage the conflict that inevitably arises during a lifetime.

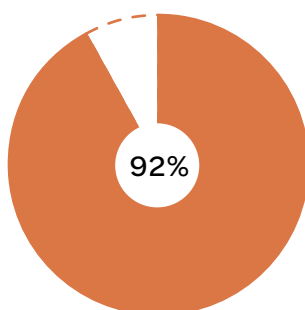


Figure 10 – Percentage of GPs saying patients had raised relationship issues in the past month



The cost of conflict: education

The manifestation of conflict within educational establishments exacts a high price from young people and the teachers who support them. In this chapter we will examine the impact on schools and young people experiencing conflict, including the

cost of school exclusions and the effect of conflict on levels of teacher retention. We will also look at the role of conflict resolution programmes and the potential beneficial impact for schools who adopt them.

Behaviour, suspension and exclusion

In the Department for Education's National Behaviour Survey for the 2021–22 academic year,¹ teachers reported that, on average, for every 30 minutes of lesson time, 6.3 minutes were lost due to misbehaviour. Primary and

secondary school teachers reported similar figures. Conflict in the classroom diminishes educational time for all students, as well as affecting teacher morale and, on occasion, promoting concerns for personal safety.

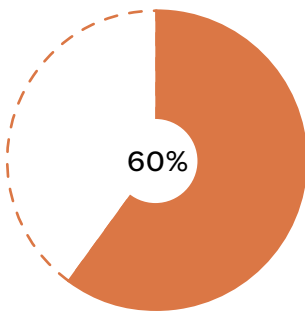


Figure 11 – 60% of school leaders said that pupil misbehaviour had a negative impact on their health

The government’s ‘Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England’² report for 2020–21 reveals that there were 3,900 permanent exclusions and 352,500 suspensions in that academic year.

The economic cost to the public was estimated by the Institute for Public Policy Research³ in 2017 at approximately **£370,000** over the lifetime of each permanently excluded student. The estimate was informed by the following factors: “Education in the alternative provision sector; lost taxation from lower future earnings; associated benefits payments

(excluding housing); higher likelihood of entry into the criminal justice system; higher likelihood of social security involvement; and increased average healthcare costs.”

In addition, school exclusion can lead to social exclusion. As the charity Centrepoint noted, ‘not being in education can make it far more difficult for young people to access help with problems at home or health issues. Missing out on formal education can also make it more difficult for them to move into work.’⁴

The role of peer mediation programmes in schools

As they wrestle with the issues outlined above, schools in the UK adopt a variety of approaches to discipline, as spelled out in ‘Peace at the heart’ (2022), a report from Quakers in Britain.⁵ Notwithstanding the differing pedagogical approaches to discipline, it is hard to dispute the assertion that “outside the home, school is the social crucible where young people spend the most time – a relationally rich environment that powerfully shapes their attitudes to other people for the rest of their lives.”

So the importance to schools (and to pupils and wider society) of improving the ways they manage conflict is clear. Better conflict management will reduce the adverse consequences of classroom disruption, suspension and permanent exclusion, and should support pupils to work together and learn the life skills of conflict prevention and resolution.

One approach is to introduce peer mediation programmes in schools (referred to earlier, on page 14). Peer mediation enables students to learn about mediation and put it in to practice in their social setting, giving them agency to promote better outcomes.

In one school in South London the local mediation service dealt with 135 cases over 18 months, 59 of which could have resulted in permanent exclusion or prosecution. In the remaining 76 cases, the service prevented situations escalating into more serious incidents.

Leadership within schools to foster a restorative culture (focused more on resolving conflict, and less on punishment) is crucial to student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships, and embedding this learning at an early stage will lead to lifelong benefits for students and their future communities.

‘Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention: The economic case’,⁶ a report published by the Department of Health in 2011, looked at the impact of social and emotional learning programmes (SEL), such as peer mediation programmes, which help children and young people to recognise and manage emotions, to set and achieve positive goals, to appreciate the perspectives of others, to establish and maintain positive relationships, to make responsible decisions, and to handle interpersonal situations constructively. A key finding was that the net payoff of SEL programmes

was **£6,369** per child after five years, rising to **£10,032** after ten years.

So if the economic benefits of programmes like peer mediation are clear, there is a new imperative to consider. As the Ministry of Justice recently announced that parties to

small claims in the civil justice system will automatically be referred to mediation, it is vital that our schools play a part in educating future generations about the mechanics and benefits of mediation that will be present in the justice system that governs their future.

The wider benefits of a restorative culture in schools

The benefits of a restorative culture in schools cannot be overestimated, and not only because it will promote a happier educational environment. Without the tools to fully understand how conflict arises and how to manage it, young people who lack life experience and learned resilience may suffer a disproportionate reaction to conflict that in extreme circumstances can lead to youth homelessness and even suicide.

The report from Quakers in Britain⁷ provides us with a snapshot of student wellbeing today when it states that in a secondary school class of 22 students in Britain:

- four have a current mental health problem
- three have a diagnosable mental health condition, of whom two are unlikely to be getting the support they need from an overwhelmed NHS
- three have been lonely this week
- four have a history of self-harm, of whom at least one child will be self-harming currently, typically for relief from overwhelming feelings and/or to punish themselves

- seven have witnessed the separation of their parents, and consequently may be experiencing anxiety, depression and/or low self-esteem
- two have known at least four distinct types of traumatic experience

At the National Suicide Prevention Alliance conference on 24 January 2023, it was reported by Professor Louis Appleby that suicide rates in 15 to 19-year-olds were the highest total figure in 20 years overall, and in 40 years for girls.⁸ We also know that relationship breakdown, usually between young people and their parents (or step-parents), is 'a major cause of youth homelessness. Around six in ten young people who come to Centrepoint say they had to leave home because of arguments, relationship breakdown or being told to leave'.

Affording our children access to the important life skill of conflict management is critical to mental health and resilience during education and beyond.

Teacher retention

Conflict has another powerful impact in schools, in the area of teacher retention. The latest workforce survey by the Department for Education (DfE)⁹ shows that record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession: in 2021–22, 44,000 teachers left the state-funded sector, up by 7,800 on the previous year. This figure represents 9.7% of all qualified teachers, and is the highest rate since 2017–18.

The Guardian picked up on this story and published an article revealing that unfilled teaching vacancies were also at a record high: more than 2,300 empty posts, compared with 530 a decade earlier.¹⁰ A further 3,300 posts were filled by supply teachers, 1,000 more than the year before, and more than three million working days were lost to illness in 2022, a rise of more than 50% compared with pre-pandemic levels in 2018–19.

While pay and workload are key issues, teaching unions also blamed poor working conditions as partly responsible for the exodus. The Department for Education's National Behaviour Survey, mentioned earlier, found that 60% of school leaders and teachers said that pupil misbehaviour had had a negative impact on their health. Interestingly, while 90% of head teachers and senior school leaders rated their school's behaviour as good, just 64% of classroom

teachers and 47% of pupils felt the same. Time lost in lessons due to behavioural issues has an impact on morale and, as we have already seen, in 2021–22 teachers lost 6.3 minutes of every half hour in lessons due to misbehaviour.

If student-to-student conflict can be supported with peer mediation, then, how can teacher-to-student conflict be resolved? A good starting point would be mediation-awareness training for all teaching staff, to reduce classroom tension and promote a restorative and conflict-confident teaching environment. We saw in chapter 1 that a number of CMOs are increasing training provision within their communities, and there is a clear case for developing a training programme to benefit staff and senior leadership teams in educational settings. A school that does not have a restorative philosophy to support conflict resolution could find itself with more vacancies to fill.

As the authors of 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention in 2023'¹¹ write, "[T]eacher shortages do not look the same as shortages in other professions, where it might be possible to leave a role vacant for extended periods. In teaching this can't happen – ultimately, somebody must be standing at the front of the classroom."



The cost of conflict: community safety

In 'Individual and Community Wellbeing, Great Britain: October 2022',¹ a report from the Office for National Statistics, participants were asked what was most important for the wellbeing of their communities: 82.3% chose 'Feeling safe'. The message is crystal clear, but if the first duty of government is to keep citizens safe, what costs arise from this task, and what can be done to reduce the costs, human and financial, of community conflict?

Financial costs can be difficult to establish, as the UK's criminal justice system consists of multiple agencies (police, Crown

Prosecution Service, Probation Service, and Prison Service) overseen by different government departments. However, the Home Office compiles a report on the economic and social costs of crime² in a bid to calculate the impact of crime on society. Costs are calculated in three categories: incurred in the anticipation of crime; incurred as a consequence of crime; and incurred in response to crime, such as police investigations and the courts.

The total cost of crime against individuals in the UK in 2015–16 was estimated at

£50 billion. Violent crimes account for almost three-quarters, or around **£35 billion**, of this figure.

We know that reduced funding for the administration of justice is a reality. Mark Tuley from TCM Consultancy notes that “The MoJ [Ministry of Justice] saw its budget reduced from **£9.1 billion** in 2009–10 to **£7.35 billion** in 2015–16. In the years since ... this budget has gradually increased and the budget for 2021–22 reached **£9.43 billion**. The reduction in police officer numbers after 2010 is a well-known consequence of budget cuts.”

A report by HMICFRS, updated in November 2022,³ focused on serious acquisitive crime (SAC), such as robbery, theft and burglary,

and reported that “the response to SAC from policing isn’t consistently good enough. Too many offenders remain at liberty and most victims aren’t getting the justice they deserve.” Limited resources make the capacity to focus on these types of crimes (where the public understandably expects support) a real issue for modern policing.

In this chapter we look at some discrete and varied examples of where community mediation can work independently or in partnership with community safety professionals to help to prevent crime and to free up police capacity, which in turn will help to reduce the costs of crime, support public confidence in policing, and improve the victim experience.

The cost of deploying police officers

Rank	Cost per annum
Constable	£60,812
Detective Constable	£62,497
Sergeant	£76,725
Detective Sergeant	£75,924
Inspector	£94,664
Detective Inspector	£93,745
Chief Inspector	£100,906
Detective Chief Inspector	£100,295
Superintendent	£122,028
Detective Superintendent	£121,020
Chief Superintendent	£141,859
Detective Chief Superintendent	£140,487
Commander	£180,371
Deputy Assistant Commissioner	£241,499
Assistant Commissioner	£312,280

Policing doesn’t come cheap. The table below shows the average costs for Metropolitan Police officers by rank in December 2021,⁴ which underlines the importance of deploying police resources appropriately and cost-effectively. Accessible and resourced national community mediation provision could, as we explore below, prevent and redirect inappropriate and expensive deployment of officers.

Figure 12 – Average cost of Metropolitan Police officers, including basic pay, all non-specialist allowances, employer’s pension contribution, employer’s NI contribution, apprenticeship levy costs, and uniform costs

Policing, non-emergency call-outs and mental health

So in a time of limited resources, how can policing capacity be expanded? One answer is for police forces to divest themselves of work that is more appropriately carried out elsewhere. In July 2023 the BBC reported that some police forces in England and Wales attend 80% of so-called ‘health and social care incidents’.⁵ Further, information in a tweet from West Yorkshire Police in April 2022 shows that the force answers a non-emergency call every five minutes, and that each call can cost as much as **£1,000**.⁶

A specific issue that encroaches on police time is calls relating to mental health. The College of Policing defines a mental health incident as “any police incident thought to relate to someone’s mental health where their vulnerability is at the centre of the incident.” Police officers are estimated to spend 20–40% of their time dealing with such incidents.

From 31 October 2023, the Metropolitan Police will no longer attend mental health calls where there is no risk to life, no danger to the public, and no crime taking place.⁷ “We are failing [callers] first by sending police officers, not medical professionals, to those in mental health crisis, and expecting them

to do their best in circumstances where they are not the right people to be dealing with the patient,” said Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of Police for the service. “We are failing Londoners a second time by taking large amounts of officer time away from preventing and solving crime, as well as dealing properly with victims, in order to fill gaps for others.”

Sir Mark adds that his officers currently spend 10,000 hours a month dealing with mental health issues, a figure further illuminated by a freedom of information request that revealed the growing number of police attendances for mental health call-outs, shown in figure 13.

In chapter 3 we explored the interplay between mental health and conflict. Giving community mediation services a larger role to play in supporting the prevention and de-escalation of conflict could be a positive and cost-effective way to partly address the ‘mission creep’ for police of mental health management. With the support of a national conflict resolution service, many non-emergency call-outs that arise from community conflict exacerbated by less serious mental health issues could be triaged or even prevented outright.



Figure 13 – 101 and 999 calls related to mental health received by the Metropolitan Police over time⁸

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is already a common source of referral to CMOs. Referring neighbour and community disputes that fall short of a crime to community mediation is another area where support can be provided to increase police capacity. Our survey revealed that 100% of CMOs that participated in the research receive referrals related to neighbour disputes and ASB from police and community safety staff, demonstrating a need and a recognition of the benefits of access to such a service where one exists.

ASB affects lives, and mediators often hear of individuals changing their routine or even seeking to move house to escape the impact. Some who seek a community mediation remedy share how scared they are of their neighbours, and how ASB affects their sleep and even their employment.

In Hertfordshire, the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner has made some funds available for community mediation to be referred by police officers countywide, in an acknowledgement that prevention and early response are vital to the de-escalation and resolution of ASB. Not every geographical area is so fortunate.

ASB is a topic of increasing public concern. The government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan reported that more than one social housing resident in four had been affected by anti-social behaviour in 2022.⁹ Within the report, IPSOS MORI polling revealed that ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas were significantly less likely to feel safe where they live.

ASB encompasses a wide range of behaviours that cause nuisance and harm to others. Local authorities, police and social landlords share responsibility for tackling ASB at a local level, and have powers as set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and

Policing Act 2014. Local public services can also tackle ASB with informal remedies. In 2022, the Home Office issued guidance, updated in 2023, headed 'Anti Social Behaviour Principles',¹⁰ which refers to the importance of victims having clear ways to report and 'access to help and support'.

In September 2022, Labour MP Sarah Jones tabled a written question in the House of Commons, asking "whether additional resources have been provided to support the delivery of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategic Board's principles that had been published in July 2022."¹¹ Jeremy Quinn MP responded, "No additional funding will be available for implementing the principles. However, the Safer Streets Fund aims to support local areas in preventing and tackling neighbourhood crime, ASB and violence against women and girls."

A somewhat dated report, from the National Audit Office in 2006, offers interesting data on the cost of ASB. 'Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour',¹² informs us that "The cost to government agencies of responding to reports of anti-social behaviour in England and Wales was approximately **3.4 billion** per year," also recognising that this was "in addition to the significant indirect and emotional costs".

Mandy Hargreaves, formerly of the Metropolitan Police and now Director of Services at Mediation Surrey, writes that "Statutory services are looking for support to offer clients/residents help when continual low-level ASB is affecting their quality of life. It's my belief that there's more recognition of the support that should be given to those who suffer ASB that does not reach the level for statutory intervention. There's greater understanding of the impact of ASB on individuals ... and a realisation that by resolving low-level conflict, escalation may be prevented."

Missing persons

54% of CMOs in our survey respond to cases involving family conflict. Being unhappy at home is one of a range of reasons why people might go missing, and family conflict and estrangement can lead some people to choose to 'disappear'. When

a person goes missing there is an (often unseen) financial consequence, as well as the obvious human cost. Research in 2013 by Dr Karen Shalev Greene and Professor Carol Hayden showed that missing person investigations are a bigger drain

on police resources then either theft or assault,¹³ reporting that £1,325.44 was a realistic minimum, and **£2,415.80** a realistic estimate for medium-risk, medium-term cases. Missing person investigations vary greatly, and for higher-profile cases the costs will be far higher.

Community mediation can support families experiencing conflict that is not at the legal interface of a dispute. It is common for a referral to take place where there is conflict between a parent and an adult or teen child living at home. Resolving conflict at this level has the potential to prevent individuals from walking away from their lives, and the consequent costs of a missing persons investigation.

Homicide

Tragically, we know that neighbour disputes can escalate to violent crime, and sometimes homicide. The murder in 2023 of an 11-year-old British girl, shot dead in her family's garden in France, is a likely example. Marguerite Bleuzen, the mayor of Plonévez-du-Faou, said the attack appeared to be connected to a "dispute between neighbours" over land and noise that dated back three years.¹⁴

In the UK, published figures reveal that homicide has not only a tragic human cost, but huge consequences for the public purse. In July 2018, 'The Economic and Social Costs of Crime' reported the total cost of a homicide (including costs of anticipation, consequence and response) as **£3,217,740**. In 2015–16, 572 homicides were recorded, at a total cost of **£1.8 billion**, and in 2017–18 the number of killings jumped to 701.¹⁵

"This report lays bare the astronomical cost of crime, not just to the victims but to society as a whole," said Alex Mayes, of the charity Victim Support. "While the emotional costs of these tragedies are incalculable, the economic costs of the recent rises in homicide are particularly startling."

Better community ties with CMOs have the potential to de-escalate conflict and prevent serious crime. As Dave Newsome commented when Community Safety Lead at Dacorum Borough Council in 2021, "Most homicides are committed by someone the victim knows. A friend, a partner, a neighbour. Early intervention in conflict can avert risks as serious as homicide."¹⁶

Crime prevention

The tragedy of homicide, the vexed issues surrounding ASB, and troubling cases of missing persons are just three areas where mediation in the community can support policing and reduce costs. But whether we are looking at road rage offences, the prevention of reoffending, hate crime, social media abuse, violent crime or other community safety issues, a greater understanding of how conflict arises and how to de-escalate and manage it is an important life skill for all citizens.

A key trend identified from our research is the increasing work being carried out by CMOs to provide training to the public to prevent conflict: 50% of CMOs provide training in mediation, conflict coaching skills or mediation awareness

to members of the public, and 16% provide peer mediation training in schools. On page 15 we looked in more detail at the work being carried out by Mediation Northern Ireland, Wandsworth Mediation Service and Yorkshire Mediation to support community cohesion and prevent offending. While the existing patchwork of CMOs are doing great work, nationwide conflict resolution provision which also delivers training in conflict management and is directly accessible by individuals, could do so much more to help police and local authorities to prevent crime, free up financial and other resources, boost community safety and reduce the human and financial cost of conflict.



Measuring the value

Although it is clear from the preceding chapters that reducing conflict through mediation can in turn reduce damage to the social infrastructure, government will only create new policy initiatives to implement community mediation more coherently if and when it has solid data from which to produce accurate cost-benefit analysis. What follows below is a four-step programme with the goal of achieving exactly that.

Step one

The first consideration is the depth and quality of the available evidence. In 2022, a discussion took place between Mediation Hertfordshire and Pro Bono Economics, a charity that brings together charities and economists, to review data held by Mediation Hertfordshire on the benefit of community mediation to social infrastructure. It was decided that a much larger data sample, based on uniform pre- and post-evaluation questions, was needed.

It is worth noting that following the publication in 2021 of *Transforming Community Conflict*, Mediation Hertfordshire's first report, the Civil Mediation Council, in recognition of the valuable role of CMOs within the mediation sector, set up a community

mediation working group that is open to all community mediators and CMOs, and is currently comprised of twenty organisations. This group is uniquely placed to pool its resources to take part in a larger research initiative, and has indicated its desire to do so.

Step two

Next comes a decision on what information must be gathered in order to evaluate the benefits of community mediation. Rachel Gomez from Pro Bono Economics has suggested that “If you collect the Office for National Statistics’ life-satisfaction-measure outcomes for each service user before and after mediation, this could potentially allow you to attach a monetary value against the wellbeing change.”

Further input comes from HM Treasury’s Green Book,¹ which offers guidance on appraising and evaluating policies, programmes and projects, and includes an overview of using wellbeing evidence to inform the strategic stages of policymaking. It also gives step-by-step guidance on assessing wellbeing impacts and, where evidence allows, financial value, and including them in cost-benefit analysis.

Step three

The third step would be for government, having considered the initial research findings, to commit to a pilot project, perhaps one that echoes either the Norway model or the Singapore model (see chapter 7). The pilot could support a wide range of infrastructure – including health, housing, education and community safety, for example – over more than one geographical area to enable understanding of the potential for broader impact.

A mobilisation period would be required for a pilot project to set up or to link up with community mediation hubs for those areas. During this time it would also be important to (a) raise public awareness of the mediation service, (b) provide awareness training to referrers such as housing officers, social workers, youth workers, primary care providers and community safety officers, and (c) run a campaign to support public engagement.

During the substantive phase of a pilot project, analysis could be carried out in relation to wellbeing change, to assess both the impact of the conflict resolution service on individuals, and the potential of the service to impact demand on public services.

Step four

If the pilot project is successful, the fourth step would be a shift from research and pilot-project activity to the detailed planning necessary to develop and implement national community mediation provision. The critical ingredient at this point: political will.

Creating a new national service will be seen by some as ‘bigger government’, leading to an increased burden on taxpayers. However, we have seen in earlier chapters that in many circumstances effective community mediation can reduce not only the social cost of conflict, but also the financial cost. Further, if cost savings related to the ‘wellbeing change’ (see step two above) are demonstrated by the pilot project, that concern can be countered.

Making a case for a national community mediation service is eminently possible. The key is to explore the benefits – over time and with a variety of stakeholders – in order to build the necessary political will.



What happens elsewhere?

Grass roots

Around the world, countries have adopted differing approaches to conflict prevention and resolution in the community. A primary difference is whether governments have embraced the benefits of mediation and implemented support within a national infrastructure, or whether needs have been addressed from within the community through a grassroots-type movement.

The UK has taken the latter path, and there are now some 50 community mediation groups supporting local communities, down from a high of around 250 in the mid-2000s. But while the drop in numbers is disappointing, local services run *by* local people

for local people have a distinct power and potential. Not only are local CMOs uniquely placed to understand the needs of their communities, but many are long-established and have both a strong local presence and a network that is key to making the service visible and available. The problem with the existing system in the UK is the patchy accessibility and often insecure funding. It is in this context that this report seeks a national response to community conflict, enabling uniform access to locally delivered services.

Government-led

Two countries that have taken a top-down approach to implementing a conflict resolution service within their national infrastructures are Norway and Singapore, which have acknowledged the cost of community conflict and the benefits of a national conflict resolution service

that exists outside of the judicial process. The belief in both countries is that such a service has the power to relieve the burden on national infrastructure services, while providing a go-to service for individuals experiencing conflict, and raising wider awareness of mediation.

Norway

Konfliktradet, Norway's nationwide community mediation service, is free to access for all residents of the country. The service is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Security and began operating nationwide in the 1980s. In 2022, the author of this report met Karen Kristin Paus, from Secretariat Konfliktradet, to learn more about the service.

The organisation has twelve regional offices supporting 22 locations, ensuring national coverage. In 2022 Konfliktradet had 130 employees, Paus reported, working in roles including casework, mediator recruitment, continuing training for mediators, research and evaluation, and a year earlier it had 550 community mediators (independently contracted), which equates to one mediator for every 10,000 people. The central funding also covers work to raise awareness of Konfliktradet's services nationally.

The mediators have no specific educational or professional background, and are recruited locally to help each mediator group reflect its community as well as to encourage diversity and inclusion. The key requirement at interview is good interpersonal skills.

Successful candidates then receive a four-day training programme, followed by observations, and then a further three days of training. Continuing professional development is also provided and mediators have a maximum initial four-year tenure, after which they can apply to be reappointed.

The service was originally provided solely by volunteers, but today Konfliktradet pays the community mediators a modest hourly rate of

140 Norwegian krone (roughly £12), a fee that is under review as the service seeks to enable less affluent people to become involved.

Beyond mediation, Konfliktradet also provides restorative practice designed to support victims in the criminal justice system – both mediation and restorative services are available to all Norwegian citizens at no cost. Konfliktradet's caseload includes neighbour, family and money disputes, and it seeks to promote community safety and individual wellbeing, to support both the civil and criminal court systems.

'Circle work' with wider groups on divisive issues in communities is also now being carried out.

The reasons for Konfliktradet's longevity and development since the 1980s, according to Karen Kristin Paus, are (1) that it has always been valued as way of *preventing* conflict, and (2) the many benefits, human and economic, that follow.

Konfliktradet's 2022 report¹ shows a small decrease in the number of mediators, but a 9% increase – to 7,095 – in the number of cases dealt with.

The report also gives the cost of the service at NOK 145,860,531 (£10.6m), of which 69% was wages, and the remainder largely linked to the operation of the regional conflict councils, and to competence-enhancing measures for mediators and employees. A rough calculation provides an average cost per case of **£1,500** per case, and a cost per head of **£1.96**.

Singapore

In 1996 an inter-agency committee (comprising representatives from the Ministry of Law, Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, the courts, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Singapore Academy of Law, the National University of Singapore, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, the Law Society of Singapore, and members of parliament) was tasked with exploring how alternative dispute resolution processes, and in particular mediation, could be further promoted in Singapore. Its report, published in 1997, recommended that in order to prevent Singaporeans from becoming too litigious, less expensive and non-adversarial methods of dispute resolution should be introduced to deal with a range of social, community and commercial conflicts.

Noting that mediation reflected important aspects of Asian tradition and culture, the committee recommended that it should be promoted to resolve social and community disputes. The Ministry of Law then set up community mediation centres (CMCs – see www.cmc.mlaw.gov.sg) to help develop a more “harmonious, civil and gracious community, where social conflicts can be resolved amicably.”

An article by Pitamber Yadav² illuminates how Singapore, a long-established leader in mediation practice, has developed its own system for community mediation through the CMCs, which provide a platform for practical and efficient resolution of community disputes.

The Community Mediation Centres Act was enacted in 1998, defining mediation to include “the undertaking of any activity for the purpose of promoting the discussion and settlement of disputes”. Mediation sessions must be conducted with “as little formality and technicality, and with as much expedition, as possible”, and only family, social or community disputes that do not “involve a seizable offence under any written law can be referred.” So CMC mediation is suitable for disputes between co-workers, neighbours, family members, friends, landlords and co-tenants, or other kinds of inter-personal

matters, but not disputes that involve legal, contractual or commercial issues.

Once a party applies for mediation, if the other party agrees, the CMC will arrange for a date and time. The service is subsidised, so only an administrative fee of S\$5 is payable, by the person requesting the mediation, no matter how many sessions take place during the process.

The mediators themselves are “volunteers from different professions and walks of life ... trained and appointed for tenure by the Ministry of Law”. They are not paid, and must be Singapore citizens or permanent residents, aged 30 years or above.

Yadav's article concludes by noting that the low cost of the service provides access to all, but also helps to create awareness of the service, and to educate Singaporeans about the value of the mediation process. It “instils confidence in the public about the relevance of the process of mediation and its impact in the long run,” he writes.

In February 2023, Channel News Asia reported that mediation will become mandatory in Singapore for noise complaints.³ Although the CMCs have an 80% success rate, they have only a 30% take-up rate, the report reveals, and the move is designed to give mediation “more standing and more teeth”.

In 2015 the Singapore CMC published *Mending Fences – Building Bridges*,⁴ a book of 50 stories penned by community mediators to provide insight into their work. In an introductory message, Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee, who spearheaded the movement to introduce community mediation to Singapore, wrote that “The philosophy of mediation is one where creative options are generated towards an amicable solution to resolve issues faced by both parties ... There is really no magic formula to ensure that peace and harmony will remain the norm in society. But, a pervasive mediation culture will go a long way towards attaining this.”



Conclusion and reflections

In a world pressed for time and resources, both human and financial, community mediation offers a powerful solution to support individuals and the public services they rely on. This report was written with the hypothesis that national community mediation provision, accessible to all, would be of huge value to individuals in conflict *and* to the public infrastructure that serves them.

There is little doubt that mediation offers a cost-effective way to prevent conflict from escalating to the point where a significant repair bill is required. The pressure on public services and the economic outlook, together with the recently announced plan to embed mediation within the civil justice system, make it timely for government to look with new eyes at the potential for community mediation to deliver societal and financial benefits more widely.

We have seen (in chapter 7) how Norway and Singapore are ahead in this area, using a top-down approach to embed community mediation within their social fabric. We have suggested steps (in chapter 6) to analyse the value of a domestic national community mediation service – steps including economic modelling based on measuring wellbeing pre- and post- a mediation intervention, and a pilot scheme to gather baseline data and assess the impact on public services.

But the key catalyst for change is political will. When research on the quantifiable impact of community mediation is finally undertaken, we will possess data and understanding that will enable change. Meanwhile, the imperative for investment in that research is all around us. The news headlines in 2023 show clearly that policing, healthcare, education and local government

are under pressure like never before. In the area of community safety, commentators speak of policing being so underresourced that officers are less able to respond to crimes such as burglary, where the public understandably expect support. In health-care, medics are raising the alarm about the number of social problems (often arising from conflict) that present in primary care. In education, conflict in the classroom is a causal factor for the worst teacher retention rates on record. And local government is under great pressure to support the integration of migrants, a growing responsibility that can create conflict within communities. Community mediation has the capacity to support the services and staff facing these challenges, by reducing pressure and filling the conflict resolution chasm that exists across our public services.

Given these circumstances, it's also important to look up from our local, daily activity and engage with the issues on a national scale. While discrete policies on issues such as ASB will undoubtedly help, the greatest and most cost-effective impact would flow from an overarching policy on conflict resolution and prevention, and, when a pilot programme has been implemented and evaluated, a nationwide community mediation solution.

National funding and accessibility would not only deliver coherence and scale and cost-effectiveness, but would enable greater awareness of the benefits of mediation.

Already, community mediation organisations provide not only conflict resolution services, but also training (through peer mediation schemes in schools and targeted training within communities) to support conflict prevention. This work has the potential to effect

a cultural shift around how individuals view conflict. Raising awareness of mediation and encouraging public engagement with it have the capacity to achieve a move away from a traditional, adversarial approach to conflict, bringing dividends as diverse as reducing the burden on courts and addressing the dangers of polarisation within communities.

Technology, too, offers astonishing opportunities for mediation and those who will benefit from it. Post-pandemic, we are well placed to roll out a regional pilot, and to enable community mediation to be available on a national scale. Online dispute resolution is offered by more than 80% of existing providers, demonstrating what it is possible to achieve without significant physical infrastructure. It is important to acknowledge the value of local hubs being best placed to support their local communities. However, the advent of online working provides a cost-effective opportunity to reach areas, and individuals, with no current provision.

As Kathy Whitestone, CEO of Brighton and Hove Independent Mediation Service, says, "The opportunity to feel heard, to listen and have agency in peacefully resolving a dispute leaves people feeling more confident and less isolated. Individual wellbeing improves and the need for costly statutory interventions reduces."

A society with a pervasive mediation culture, where mediation is built in to triage processes and is accessible to all, would be transformative. Just as the National Health Service was hard to imagine for those born in Victorian times, so a nationwide community mediation service might initially seem strange to us, but in due course it could be as vital to our identity and philosophy as the NHS is today.

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