

Community leaders forum

An opportunity for community leaders to talk about their communities and help identify how the police can work to build trust and confidence.

First published

8 March 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement Diversity and inclusion Ethics and values Leadership, development and learning Operational policing Organisation including workforce Violence against women and girls
Organisation	Bedfordshire Police
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Region	South East

Key details

Partners	Police Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	May 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Communities General public Victims Workforce

Aim

The aims of this initiative are to:

- engage with communities through community leaders – these leaders can include faith leaders and leaders of local community groups
- work with community leaders to reach out to local communities, including infrequently heard groups such as women and young people
- build trust and confidence in areas where there have been past difficulties between police and communities through collaboratively working together
- capture lived experience
- develop a network of critical friends
- open effective dialogue and opportunities for young people to join Bedfordshire Constabulary
- improve and maintain public confidence and satisfaction in Bedfordshire Constabulary
- bring change through listening and action

Intended outcome

- Improved policing service offered to infrequently heard communities.
- Increased engagement with infrequently heard communities.
- Increased trust and confidence in the police.

Description

Bedfordshire Constabulary engages with community members from infrequently heard groups. The groups help the force to identify how the police can improve their service as a resource to serve and protect.

As part of this, the force established a bi-monthly forum for community leaders. Forum topics focus on how community leaders and the police can work together to help and support each other. For example, one forum focused on upcoming work experience opportunities within the police. The information and support provided at this forum led to four young people applying to take part in work experience.

The leaders who attend the forum represent communities that are typically infrequently heard. The aim of the forum is for the police to ask questions and carry out follow up actions, recognising that one approach to action does not fit all communities.

Although the forums have an agenda, the community leaders can raise topics of importance to their communities for discussion (for example, regarding any current contextual events).

The agenda itself is set collaboratively by attendees – a process that sets the tone for a collaborative meeting. The meetings can either be held face-to-face or online using Microsoft Teams.

The forums are chaired by two representatives from Bedfordshire Police, including a positive action coordinator. The representatives from Bedfordshire Police raise forum discussion points with the force's equality, diversity and inclusion board, to ensure that the feedback from the forum is kept on the policing agenda.

The forums tend to have about 13 attendees. Face-to-face forums are hosted by churches and mosques. The forums are low cost, with only travel and time costs for the force.

Overall impact

The findings from the forums are presented at the force equality, diversity and inclusion board. By reporting back on discussions, the force can ensure that the forum is kept on the policing agenda.

The consistent and open communication provided by the community leaders forum is helping to build the foundations of trust and confidence in the police. This is early days for the forum however, with a lot of work left to do.

Learning

- Having a facilitator at the leaders forums can help discussions remain focused and engaged. This person can also follow up with non-attendees and find out why they do not want to engage. It's ideal if this person is someone from the local community who has some degree of policing knowledge (for example, from being on a scrutiny panel).
- The force has found that discussions about the futures of young people are a positive talking point, as there is collective agreement about the desire for better opportunities for young people.
- Do not be afraid to go into different venues, including religious and community venues.
- Engage innovatively if you can and do not continue to always engage in the same way. For example, Bedfordshire Constabulary has started to collaborate with the University of Bedfordshire alongside the leaders forums.
- Have meetings that focus on listening, rather than speaking. This helps ensure you do not only hear what you want to hear.
- Be proactive and reach out to different communities. This can include all forms of faith and community leaders, young people and groups, local colleges and universities. This can be done through the community facilitator or by joining events held by local communities and promoting the forums.
- Do not be put off if attendee numbers are low. The forums should still go ahead – you are still engaging and offering a space for communities to be listened to. The community facilitator can support you with speaking to community leaders and improving attendee numbers.
- Although these forums are designed to increase trust and confidence in the police by all community members – with a focus on infrequently heard groups – Bedfordshire Constabulary has also started to run listening circles. These are specifically designed as a safe space for women to be listened to.

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Tags

Diversity and inclusion Equality Community engagement