

Bridging the gap between the black community and Bedfordshire police

A workshop to improve the relationship between the black community and Bedfordshire Police by increasing the awareness of online fraud, personal safety, exploitation, mental health, peer pressure and gangs.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity and inclusion
Organisation	Bedfordshire Police Bedfordshire Police Independent Advisory Group
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	April 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities General public Race/ethnicity Victims Women

Aim

The aim of the pilot workshop was to:

- build trust and improve relationships between Bedfordshire Police and the black community
- ensure that the black community, including both young people and older generations, can share their opinion on policing and safety decisions
- encourage two-way conversations to make policing more transparent, fair, and responsive
- open dialogue between the police and the black community through small group discussions, role-play, and interactive sessions
- provide education on legal rights and stop-and-search procedures
- promote mental health and wellbeing tools and support services

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the pilot workshop were to:

- raise awareness among the black community about online fraud, digital safety, and exploitation risks
- raise awareness about personal safety, enabling participants to make informed choices
- improve the black community's understanding of legal rights, stop-and-search procedures, and conflict resolution strategies

- strengthen trust and engagement between the black community and Bedfordshire Police
- increase participation in interactive workshops and discussions
- reduce harmful behaviours among young people, including substance misuse, gang involvement, and unsafe online activity
- reduce misinformation and stigma surrounding mental health within the black community
- strengthen long-term engagement by fostering ongoing partnerships across generations, faiths, and communities

Description

The initiative was developed to improve the relationship between Bedfordshire Police and the black community. Previous engagement events identified gaps in trust, awareness of legal rights, personal safety knowledge, and understanding of mental health support.

Planning process

The planning process involved consultations with black community leaders, including the church and internal meetings with Bedfordshire Police Independent Advisory Group (IAG) members. In response to the consultation process, the force developed an interactive workshop. The contents of the workshop included:

- for the older generation – online fraud, personal safety, and mental health
- for the younger generation – exploitation, peer pressure, gang risks, and conflict resolution
- mental health and wellbeing support

Delivery of the workshop

The following stakeholders were responsible for the delivery of the pilot workshop:

- Bedfordshire Police IAG – oversaw the project, liaised with the church and co-ordinated planning process.
- Bedfordshire Police's Prevention and Problem-Solving Team – supported the planning of the workshop, delivered content on law, safety and stop and search procedures, and facilitated discussions.

- Community leaders and church representatives from Bedfordshire – provided local insight, promoted the workshop and helped tailor content to meet the needs of those receiving the intervention.
- Total Wellbeing Luton – delivered sessions focused on reducing stigma and offering practical support.
- Volunteers and support staff – assisted with elements such as registering participants and facilitating throughout the workshop.

The True Vine Fellowship Church was chosen as the pilot venue due to its accessibility and strong community reach.

In January 2024, a pilot community safety workshop was delivered at True Vine Fellowship Church in Luton, attracting over 300 participants both in-person and online. The workshop included:

- opening remarks to introduce aims and set expectations
- targeted sessions on digital safety
- stop and search procedures
- legal rights
- personal safety
- peer pressure
- gang awareness

Interactive elements such as role-play, small group discussions, and creative exercises were used throughout the workshop to encourage active participation. A dedicated mental health and wellbeing session was delivered by Total Wellbeing Luton providing practical tools for managing stress, anxiety, and family pressures. Feedback and discussion were integral to the workshop, capturing community concerns and informing the design of future workshops. Participants were also encouraged to maintain engagement with the police and community support services.

Funding and future workshops

The initiative did not require external funding, as the workshop utilised existing resources from Bedfordshire Police, Bedfordshire Police IAG and partner organisations. Senior management approval was obtained to ensure compliance and alignment with organisational priorities.

Future workshops will consider alternative spaces, such as youth centres and community halls, to maximise attendance.

Evaluation

An evaluation was launched in January 2024 and is being led by Bedfordshire Police.

The evaluation is looking at:

- attendance data for both in-person and online participation
- follow up engagement such as meetings, enquiries, and requests for advice
- feedback gathered using open-ended questions such as:
 - what was most useful to you?
 - what else would you like to learn or discuss?

The purpose of the evaluation is to identify community concerns, unmet needs and areas for improvement.

Interim results are being used to demonstrate that there is an improved relationship between the black community and Bedfordshire Police. Feedback from participants directly informs the design of tailored workshops that respond to priorities and concerns, helping to build stronger trust with the police.

Overall impact

The pilot workshop had a positive impact. Officers who attended welcomed the high levels of engagement and positive feedback from participants. Many attendees actively shared their experiences, asked questions, and expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to speak directly with police.

Participants showed an interest in learning about online safety, stop and search procedures, and mental health support. The older generations valued the guidance on fraud, wellbeing, and supporting family members, while younger participants engaged in discussions about peer pressure, conflict resolution, and help-seeking behaviour. Officers noted an increase in trust,

openness, and willingness to discuss sensitive topics compared to previous community engagement events.

The success of the pilot has encouraged the planning for a wider roll-out, including separate sessions tailored for different age groups and partnership events with Total Wellbeing Luton to provide preventative mental health support. Feedback indicates that attendees are now more aware of their rights, local support services, and ways to protect themselves and their families. Officers reported being encouraged by the level of engagement, the insightful questions posed, and the constructive dialogue established.

Learning

The pilot workshop has successfully created a safe space for open dialogue, breaking down long-standing barriers between Bedfordshire Police and the black community. The workshop also highlighted the strong link between mental health and policing, showing that preventative action and early support can reduce risks and improve community safety.

Challenges and weaknesses

- Ensuring awareness and comfort for all community members required significant outreach and balancing content for multiple age groups in a single session was sometimes difficult. Time constraints also limited deeper exploration of mental health support and family guidance.
- The pilot highlighted some weaknesses including, the need for ongoing mental health support, which was not fully addressed at this stage. Additionally, reliance on a single venue and session format may have restricted participation from some community members.

Recommendations

- Engaging trusted local partners was essential to encourage attendance and build confidence.
- Session formats should be tailored to different age groups and needs to ensure relevance and impact.
- The workshop reinforced the importance of recognising the link between mental health and policing, and demonstrated that preventative, dialogue-based approaches are effective in building trust and identifying community needs.

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