

Inclusive mentoring scheme for young people and the police

An inclusive mentoring scheme led by Waltham Forest Council and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), involving young people mentoring police officers to encourage the safe sharing of their experiences of community safety and policing.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)
Organisation	Metropolitan Police Service
Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alisa Musanovic - alisa.musanovic@walthamforest.gov.uk Scott Mason - scott.a.mason@met.police.uk
Region	London
Partners	Police Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	December 2025

Key details

Completion date	June 2026
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Race/ethnicity

Aim

The inclusive mentor scheme aims to:

- build stronger relationship between young people and the police to increase feelings of trust and confidence
- encourage collaboration between young people, the police, and council at every stage of the process, from planning the design through to the evaluation
- provide safe environments where young people and police can participate in meaningful dialogue and mutually learn from each other's local experiences
- provide a voice for young people to influence local police practice and decision-making

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the inclusive mentor scheme are to:

- increase the understanding of the experiences of local young people by police
- enhance young people's understanding of the policing
- improve the relationship between young people and the police
- improve trust amongst young people and the police

Description

In March 2024, in response to the Casey Review and local challenges around trust and confidence in policing, Waltham Forest Council and the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) North East Basic Command Unit (BCU) held a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Neighbourhood Policing. The

purpose of the assembly was to provide residents with a voice in shaping and influencing how policing is delivered locally, to address the challenges around low levels of trust. The assembly identified that addressing low trust and negative experiences among young people must be a priority. In response, an inclusive mentoring scheme was launched where young people with lived experience of community safety issues could mentor policing staff.

Planning

Young people have worked alongside the MPS and Waltham Forest Council, at every stage of the process, from planning the design through to the evaluation. A working group was established led by two young people, two officers (one inspector and one sergeant) from the safer neighbourhood team and two council officers. The meetings are informal, with no uniforms or lanyards. The meetings are held regularly in person in council properties and involve a specialist youth worker to ensure young people feel safe.

Design and implementation

- Training – local voluntary and community sector (VCS) partner, Spark2Life, commissioned to design and deliver training to equip young people and police to safely participate. There are separate sessions for young people and police followed by two joint sessions.
- Therapeutic support – a partner, Act for Change, are responsible for ensuring the scheme is therapeutically safe by attending training and mentoring sessions and being available outside of the formal sessions to provide support.
- Safeguarding – Act for Change are the designated safeguarding lead responsible for any safeguarding concerns.
- Participants – include 17 young people aged between 13-18 years, and six local officers from varied ranks, roles and experience.
- Pairings – Two to three young people are matched with one police officer with a pre-meet for each group before mentoring starts.
- Sessions – five, two-hour sessions are held for each group over four-month period, with a whole group check in halfway through.
- Celebrations – participants will come together at end of pilot to share their experiences and identify learning.

Funding

Waltham Forest Council commissioned VCS partners to deliver the training and therapeutic provision at a cost of £26,000.

Waltham Forest Council and the MPS safer neighbourhood team have allocated two officers to oversee the scheme with young people over a 12-month period. Abstraction has been restricted where possible, for officers participating in the scheme on the days they are needed.

Oversight

The delivery of the scheme is overseen by Waltham Forest Council assistant director for community safety. The progress of safer routes is reported to the borough's multiagency Violence Reduction Partnership, which links into the Waltham Forest Community Safety Partnership.

Evaluation

An evaluation commenced in September 2025 and is being led by Spark2Life and Act for Change. The evaluation report is due following completion of the pilot in the summer 2026. The evaluation is looking at the:

- design process
- training element of the programme
- support element of the programme
- overall impact of the scheme

Evaluation methods include:

- pre and post implementation surveys completed by all participants which will include measures of trust, confidence and awareness
- workshops and check-in sessions, using innovative methods to capture impact and experiences, such as art and music therapy
- structured feedback from youth workers, commissioned partners, police and council staff to inform the process evaluation

Overall impact

The inclusive mentoring scheme remains in its pilot stage, however young people and the MPS have built confidence, increased understanding and strengthened relationships.

All 17 young people and six officers have now completed their training, and the first two mentoring sessions are progressing into their third of five mentoring sessions.

Following the training and early mentoring sessions, young people reported feeling increasingly confident in expressing their views, describing the experience as “*powerful*” and noting that their confidence is “*way higher than when I started.*” Officers similarly valued the opportunity to hear directly about young people’s lived experiences of policing. They described the scheme as an important opportunity to challenge their assumptions and improve how they communicate with young people.

Self-reported data from both groups indicates that participants felt engaged and heard within the training sessions. Initial learning from conversations reflects genuine two-way insight:

- young people are gaining an understanding of policing constraints and differing officer experiences
- officers have reported to have a deeper awareness of how past experiences such as racial profiling and community context can affect young people’s perceptions of the police

The collaboration approach and the therapeutic support also appear to be contributing positively to feelings of safety and openness in the room. Young people and police are already generating suggestions for strengthening future sessions, demonstrating an emerging sense of ownership over the programme and its outcomes.

Learning

- Collaboration strengthens engagement but requires time and flexibility – working with young people throughout the development and implementation has been critical to building trust and ensuring the scheme reflects their priorities. This approach requires sustained officer commitment, dedicated youth work support and flexible processes, including informal working environments and non-uniformed meetings to reduce barriers.
- Training is important for all participants in creating a safe starting point – feedback from participants suggested the training has increased participant confidence and prepared both groups to engage in challenging conversations. All participants felt that the training met their

expectations and had increased confidence in sharing their views. Participants reflected most positively about the sessions on self-awareness and power dynamics. Some officers felt parts of the training, such as safeguarding, were longer than necessary or overlapped with prior learning, indicating different perceptions of need between officers and young people. Future iterations could offer modular or role specific content to minimise duplication.

- Group structure and size matters for the quality of dialogue – both young people and officers have expressed that the initial groups of two young people and one officer felt too small and could benefit from additional participants. Merging the groups is being explored to allow more dynamic discussions, while maintaining the structure of young people outnumbering adults.
- Mentoring sessions need clearer structure and preparation time – early sessions highlighted a need for more preparation to help young people feel ready to lead conversations and to promote more meaningful dialogue. The team has introduced 90-minute structured preparation sessions to support planning, build confidence and incorporate creative tools. This also ensures officers come prepared for more focused, youth-driven discussion.
- Embedding action and system change from the start is vital – young people and officers that the scheme must lead to tangible change. The team is now integrating action setting into each session, enabling participants to co-develop recommendations that can be fed back into the BCU and wider MPS practice. This ensures that insight gained through dialogue directly informs behavioural and organisational change.
- Sensitive topics require skilled facilitation and organisational readiness – conversations on structural racism, racial profiling, trauma and community experiences surfaced early in the pilot. This underscored the importance of explicitly supporting facilitators to engage in reflective practice, consider their positionality, and draw on strong cultural competency. These insights will help strengthen future facilitation models and ensure safe, equitable dialogue.

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