

Safer routes scheme

A local authority led scheme placing trained youth workers on key routes around schools and colleges to ensure young people feel safe walking home.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other) Anti-social behaviour Community engagement
Organisation	Waltham Forest Council
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Region	London
Partners	Business and commerce Community safety partnership Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is at a pilot stage.

Key details

Start date	January 2026
Completion date	January 2028
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aim of the safer routes schemes is to:

- ensure young people feel safe when travelling on school and adjacent routes
- provide wellbeing support for young people
- educate young people on local youth provisions

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the safer routes schemes are to:

- improve young peoples' feeling of safety
- improve school attendance along the identified routes
- reduce the number of self-reported levels of physical victimisation
- reduce the number of serious violence incidents other crimes such as theft from person within 500 metres of identified routes

Description

Crime and violence, including among young people navigating public spaces after school, are the main concerns for Waltham Forest residents. In response, Waltham Forest Council launched the safer routes pilot to create safer journeys for young people on their way home from school.

Planning

The idea for the safer routes initiative originated from young people during engagement workshops as part of the development of the borough's serious violence strategy. During the workshops, young people shared that they "wanted trusted adults from the community outside schools to make it feel safer." The pilot has since been co-produced with young people through workshops and other engagement opportunities to ensure it reflects their needs.

Design and implementation

The pilot was launched in January 2025 and places trained youth workers on routes around schools. The purpose of this is to provide a visible presence for young people on their way home from school, engaging with them and signposting them to support services.

The pilot operates across four routes, which have been identified as at elevated risk of violence through analysis of local crime data, resident intelligence, and feedback from young people. Engagement sessions were held in schools, with young people involved in the Youth Offending Service and Waltham Forest Council Streetbase (youth-led peer engagement programme). The purpose of these sessions was to scope and develop the initiative.

Local voluntary and community sector partners such as the Creative Engagement Services were commissioned to deliver the pilot, drawing on their existing network of youth workers who provide outreach across the borough.

The senior officer responsible for delivery is London Borough of Waltham Forest's (LBWF) assistant director for community safety. The pilot has been designed and delivered in collaboration with a range of partners including:

- LBWF violence reduction coordinators – conducting joint patrols with commissioned youth workers
- LBWF CCTV operations centre – monitoring routes between 3pm to 6pm
- LBWF neighbourhood teams – conducting environmental visual audits to keep routes safe and well-maintained
- voluntary and community sector – providing positive activities for young people and signposting them to support services
- social workers - supporting safeguarding concerns
- schools – raising awareness and building support with parents and pupils

- police – encouraging young people to report incidents to the police and sharing concerns of emerging issues

Funding and oversight

Safer routes is a two-year pilot and has received £270,000 from the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

Waltham Forest Council Community Safety Team are responsible for the oversight of the initiative. 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 is ongoing and being led by Waltham Forest Council. A report with key findings and learning will be available in early 2027 after the conclusion of the pilot.

The methods of the evaluation include:

- self-report surveys from pupils in participating schools, pre, during and post pilot
- data on the number of serious violence incidents pre and post pilot, with comparisons to similar boroughs
- school attendance data
- data on the number of young people, schools, parents, businesses engaged with before and during the pilot and feedback
- data on the number of referrals made to relevant services and support offers
- workshop data to capture learning from young people, council, community and other partners involved in design and delivery of the pilot

Overall impact

A six month review was conducted in the summer of 2025. The finding included:

- there was high levels of engagement with over 4,000 interactions with young people, over 2,000 parents, carers and businesses and 65 professionals
- youth workers are building trust, providing reassurance, and supporting safeguarding, with nearly 100 young people receiving targeted one-to-one support

- schools and communities are confident of the pilot by actively requesting support
- pupil self-reported physical victimisation and feelings of safety rates on routes remain broadly unchanged, however the response rate is low and data may reflect seasonality
- data on incidence of violence in the pilot areas is currently being collated and will be presented in the next progress review
- local residents report to youth workers that they feel reassured by their visible presence

Learning

- It is important to review self-reported metrics on physical victimisation, wellbeing and safety perceptions, due to low response rates. To resolve this, focus groups could capture a deeper insight into the feelings of young people.
- Ensure youth workers are equipped with the right skills and referral resources such as support leaflets to strengthen impact.
- Build on existing relationships to strengthen socialisation approach with schools, providing reassurance and increasing buy-in by addressing any concerns that involvement signals safety issues.
- Consider additional offers to youth workers to maintain retention and sustainability, for example training or peer learning.
- Within limited budgets, target youth workers in the specific locations where risk is greatest, prioritising depth and quality of contact over breadth of areas covered.
- Enhance communication and collaboration with schools to secure stronger buy-in.
- Deliver a structured communications plan co-produced with young people to amplify their voices.
- Mobilise community ownership through local champions, steering group discussions, and partnership engagement.

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