

'Come meet us' – outreach events for the D/deaf community

Monthly 'come meet us' events to strengthen relationships between the D/deaf community and Avon and Somerset Police, reduce communication barriers and create inclusive interactions.

First published

5 May 2026

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)
Organisation	Avon and Somerset Police
Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malissa Thompson - malissa.thompson2@avonandsomerset.police.uk • John Ross-Osborne - john.ross-osborne@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2025

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities General public

Aim

When capitalised, 'Deaf' refers to people who may self-identify as part of the cultural and linguistic Deaf community. When starting with a lower-case 'd', 'deaf' refers to the medical and physical condition of hearing loss. We have used 'D/deaf' here to encompass both terms.

The aims of the 'come meet us' events are to:

- provide a welcoming and accessible space for members of the D/deaf community to meet officers, ask questions and share concerns in a setting designed around their communication needs
- encourage ongoing dialogue to ensure the D/deaf community feel supported, heard, and informed
- build a relationship between the police and the D/deaf community to improve understanding, inclusivity, and accessibility
- encourage the D/deaf community to report incidents or concerns

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the 'come meet us' events are to:

- increase engagement with D/deaf individuals attending events
- increase the number of repeat D/deaf attendees to show sustained engagement
- increase the number of referrals or signposting to relevant support services
- improve officers' confidence in communicating with D/deaf individuals
- increase the number of officers trained in British Sign Language (BSL) and D/deaf awareness training
- reduce the number of reported communication barriers during police interactions

- increase the use of appropriate communication methods such as interpreters, technology, or visual aids
- improve the D/deaf community's confidence in local policing

Description

A Police Degree Apprenticeship Programme (PCDA) dissertation researched the services Avon and Somerset Police provide to the D/deaf community, which identified a gap in service provision. In response, two neighbourhood police officers developed and delivered a programme of community engagement, accessibility improvements, and organisational learning. The purpose of the initiative is to improve trust, increase visibility, and form stronger community partnerships.

D/deaf 'come meet us' events

In-person monthly D/deaf 'come meet us events' were developed in Mendip, Somerset. To plan for the events, the problem-solving scanning, analysis, response, assessment (SARA) model was used to:

- scan and analyse the problem – many D/deaf clubs had closed due to reduced funding, leaving a gap in community cohesion and police visibility
- response – monthly events were subsequently planned to increase communication methods, strengthen partnerships, expand officer skill sets, and delivered awareness campaigns
- assess – D/deaf community feedback and interactions with officers is assessed following the events

Two neighbourhood officers are responsible for the delivery of the events, including planning, organising, and coordinating all aspects of each session. They work together to manage communication with attendees and external speakers, oversee the structure of the event, and handle any logistical requirements. Joint responsibility ensures the events remain consistent, accessible, and engaging for everyone who attends. Each event is attended by approximately 20 to 25 D/deaf residents. The events are hosted in a local community centre and include:

- inputs from external speakers
- a presentation on crime type awareness and the promotion of force activities
- a Q&A session to allow D/deaf attendees to engage with officers and raise their concerns

Guest speakers have included the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service delivering D/deaf tailored smoke alarm demonstrations and home visits and the roads policing unit providing a demonstration on seatbelt safety.

To support the events, the force have promoted the following national D/deaf awareness events and milestones:

- BSL anniversary.
- awareness posts highlighting key aspects of D/deaf culture and communication
- "Sign of the Day" posts to help increase basic BSL knowledge and promote everyday learning
- posts introducing and promoting guest speakers who have attended the 'come meet us' events
- event updates and reminders to encourage attendance and maintain engagement with the local D/deaf community

These have been shared across the internal force intranet and external force social communication channels such as Facebook, X, and Instagram.

To increase officers' confidence, the force have encouraged the completion of BSL courses. Initially, 12 officers completed level one, with nine also completing level two. These officers have used the training to improve their frontline confidence when interacting with the D/deaf community.

Evaluation

An evaluation is ongoing and being led by Avon and Somerset Police. The evaluation is looking at whether the events improve accessibility, strengthen trust, and reduce communication barriers with the D/deaf community.

The evaluation is using the following mixed-method approach:

- monitoring the number of attendees
- attendee feedback
- officer reflections

Overall impact

The 'come meet us' events have had a positive impact on communication, accessibility, and engagement between local police officers and the D/deaf community.

- Officers have reported an improvement in confidence when interacting with D/deaf individuals, particularly around cultural awareness, communication expectations, and the use of appropriate support tools.
- Feedback from attendees indicates that there are fewer barriers to communication, through the consistent presence of approachable officers and being known on a first-name basis.

Key findings and observations:

- increased engagement – each event has attracted D/deaf residents who had not previously interacted with police
- improved accessibility – by providing visual information, clear communication support, and an open environment, this has encouraged participants to express their concerns
- strengthened relationships – D/deaf participants reported that they feel more comfortable approaching police. Some individuals have asked for advice or discussed personal safety concerns
- improving officers' knowledge – officers have developed a greater awareness of deaf culture, which has led to better practice during daily duties, incidents, and safeguarding situations
- partnership strengthening – by collaborating with D/deaf groups, interpreters, and community organisations, there has been an increased shared understanding and joint problem-solving

Learning

What went well

- Strong attendance and engagement – D/deaf residents have responded positively, showing interest and returning to subsequent events.
- Building relationships – consistent officer presence has helped to build trust and reduce anxiety around interacting with the police.
- Improving communication – officers are more confident to use adapted communication methods and visual tools.
- Creating a safe and accessible environment – the informal setting has encouraged open conversations allowing individuals to share concerns.

- Positive feedback – D/deaf residents have expressed appreciation for the force's effort to understand the deaf culture and taking proactive steps to improve accessibility.

Challenges

- Access to interpreters – interpreter availability, cost, and scheduling sometimes limited the level of communication support at events.
- Time and resource pressures – balancing workloads, shift patterns and event planning has required commitment and coordination.
- Awareness gap among officers – not all officers understand the deaf culture or the communication barriers that D/deaf residents experience.

Weaknesses

- Limited promotion – some D/deaf may not have been aware of the events, especially those less connected to community groups or social media.
- Reliance on a small number of officers – impact can be dependent on officer availability.
- Venue accessibility variations – different venues offered various levels of lighting, acoustics, and layout, which can influence communication effectiveness.
- Lack of formal evaluation tools – without using structured feedback forms, some learning and data may have been missed.

Recommendations from the force

- Engage with D/deaf partners at the earliest opportunity – the force work closely with deaf organisations and local groups to design events that meet the community's needs.
- Provide deaf awareness training for staff – to reduce the risk of unintentional communication barriers.
- Book interpreters in advance – booking interpreters at the earliest opportunity will ensure better communication accuracy and inclusivity.
- Be consistent and visible – holding regular events with the same officers will help to build trust more effectively than one off sessions.
- Use visual communication tools - posters, written prompts, gestures, and technology greatly support interaction when signing is limited.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.