

Strengthening relationships between the Roma community and Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

Hosting culturally informed community engagement events for the Roma community to build trust and confidence in the police.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement
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Region	North West
Partners	Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	August 2025
Completion date	April 2026

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Race/ethnicity

Aim

The aims of the initiative are to:

- build trust and confidence between the Roma community and the police
- understand Roma cultural practices to ensure policing responses are fair, proportionate, and informed
- enhance community cohesion and promote positive perceptions of policing among the Roma community and the wider public
- develop sustainable mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, including police and communities together (PACT) meetings and police surgeries
- work with community leaders to strengthen relationships and improve access to hard-to-reach groups

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- increase trust and confidence between the Roma community and the police
- increase the number of positive engagement and meaningful interactions between police officers and Roma community members
- increase attendance and participation in community engagement forums, including PACT meetings and police surgeries
- improve police visibility and accessibility within the community through regular high-visibility patrols and proactive engagement
- increase collaboration between police and community leaders to support ongoing dialogue and problem-solving
- reduce community tensions arising from cultural misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding perceived anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- reduce negative perceptions of and suspicion towards policing within the Roma community

Description

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) developed the initiative in response to concerns raised by the wider community regarding perceived ASB of Roma residents gathering outside local shops. Initial perceptions suggested that this behaviour was disruptive and potentially linked to criminal activity. However, through observation and direct engagement, neighbourhood officers found that these gatherings were culturally normal social activities centred on drinking coffee, eating, and spending time with family and friends. The issue was therefore identified as one of misunderstanding and perception rather than genuine criminality or ASB. This insight highlighted the need for a different policing approach focused on engagement, cultural understanding, and relationship-building rather than enforcement.

Planning process

Using a structured problem-solving approach, neighbourhood officers first sought to understand the root causes of the community's concerns through direct engagement, observation, and information gathering. Rather than responding solely to complaints, officers explored the cultural context behind the behaviour and assessed the actual level of harm and risk it presented.

Once the assessment had been conducted, a plan was developed that focused on:

- visible policing
- culturally informed engagement
- accessible communication
- partnership working with trusted community representatives

Roles and teams

The initiative is led by Oldham Central neighbourhood policing team (NPT), which is responsible for engagement, problem-solving, and ongoing community liaison. Officers have worked closely with members of the Roma community to identify key community leaders who can support engagement efforts and help build trust.

GMP engaged with a local pastor and a respected senior figure within the Roma community. These individuals acted as trusted intermediaries, helping officers gain access to the community, enhance their credibility, and facilitate open dialogue.

The initiative has been implemented over a sustained nine-month period through a series of coordinated activities:

Increased visibility and positive engagement

Officers have conducted increased high-visibility patrols in key locations where community concerns had been identified. Rather than focusing on enforcement activities, officers adopted an approachable and conversational style of policing. The purpose of this is to normalise positive interactions with police officers and increase familiarity and trust between officers and community members.

Understanding Roma cultural practices

Officers have spent time with the Roma community to understand their culture, traditions, and social behaviours. This has enabled policing responses to be proportionate, respectful, and informed by cultural context. By challenging assumptions and focusing on evidence rather than perception, officers can respond more effectively to community concerns.

Accessible communication

GMP identified language barriers as a potential obstacle to engagement. The NPT developed and distributed translated Romani-language leaflets at PACT meetings and local police surgeries. By distributing the leaflets at engagement events, this has created opportunities for face-to-face conversations, reassurance, and clarification of expectations. The leaflets include information on ASB legislation and crime prevention advice.

Partnership working with community leaders

The NPT have engaged with trusted community leaders and established direct communication channels. Through these relationships, officers have attended a church service and deliver presentations covering:

- local crime concerns
- role of policing within the community
- how to access PACT meetings and local police surgeries

Engaging through established community structures has enabled officers to reach a wider audience, reduce barriers, and improve legitimacy within the community.

Establishing sustainable engagement structures

To ensure long-term impact, the initiative has moved beyond one-off engagement activity and created ongoing opportunities for dialogue. These opportunities include:

- arrangements for the first PACT meeting to be hosted within the church setting
- fortnightly police surgeries
- regular meetings with community leaders
- ongoing visible neighbourhood policing presence

These opportunities have been designed to maintain relationships, address emerging issues early, and ensure continued community involvement in local policing.

Funding

The initiative did not require any dedicated external funding. Activities are delivered using existing neighbourhood policing resources and officer time.

Overall impact

GMP officers have observed a positive impact on the relationship between the Roma community and the police. Through a sustained nine-month programme of interactions, the initiative has sought to reduce tensions arisen from cultural misunderstandings, improved trust and confidence in the police, and established long-term mechanisms for constructive dialogue.

Key outcomes

- Consistent engagement has been beneficial to enabling officers to have a cultural understanding, challenge assumptions and develop a more proportionate policing response.

- Positive interactions with children and families helped to humanise policing and support the development of long-term trust and confidence.
- Working with community leaders has been effective in overcoming barriers and facilitating meaningful engagement with a traditionally hard-to-reach community.

Feedback

The intervention has generated positive feedback from community members who have shown an increase in willingness to engage with police and participate in ongoing dialogue. Officers have reported improved rapport and stronger informal relationships through regular contact and engagement activities. The relationships built with respected community leaders has helped to establish credibility within the community.

Learning

What went well

- It is essential to take the time to understand the root cause of community concerns. This enabled officers to identify that the issue was based on cultural misunderstanding.
- Maintaining a consistent, visible policing presence has helped to build familiarity, trust and confidence within the Roma community. Officers adopted an approachable style of engagement, which has reduced suspicion and encouraged positive interactions.
- Establishing sustainable engagement opportunities, such as PACT meetings and police surgeries, has ensured that relationships continued beyond the initial intervention.

Challenges and barriers

- A key challenge has been overcoming existing perceptions held by the wider community and the Roma community. Initial reports and assumptions suggested the behaviour was anti-social, making it necessary for officers to gather evidence, engage directly with residents, and challenge existing perceptions.
- Cultural and language differences presented potential barriers to communication and understanding. These have been addressed through cultural awareness, translated materials, and engagement with trusted community representatives.

- Building trust and confidence requires a significant investment of time and consistent engagement over a prolonged period rather than relying on short-term interventions.

Recommendations

- Create long-term engagement structures, such as community meetings and regular police surgeries to maintain relationships and support ongoing dialogue.
- Challenge assumptions and ensure decisions are based on evidence, engagement, and understanding rather than perceptions alone.
- Identify and work alongside community leaders who can act as advocates and facilitate meaningful access to local communities.

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