

Walk and talks with young Somali community members

Police worked with a local charity and volunteer Somali community leaders to visit Somali children and young people in public places. They discussed issues important to the young people, aiming to improve police engagement.

First published

27 September 2023

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity and inclusion Drugs and alcohol Ethics and values Operational policing
Organisation	Metropolitan Police Service
Contact	Naveed Mahmood
Email address	naveed.mahmood2@met.police.uk
Region	London

Key details

Partners	Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Communities

Aim

To proactively engage with young Somalian community members through visiting local areas and speaking to community members who:

- are often overlooked within larger projects because they are from smaller black communities
- have not previously engaged with the police to tackle local issues, and/or have had limited engagement with the police due to negative experiences of interactions with the police

The purpose of the walks were to:

- increase the trust and confidence in the police by Somalian young people and their communities
- identify community concerns and enable subsequent appropriate action to be taken
- engage community members in further engagement activities with the police
- use diversion tactics where issues with anti-social behaviour and involvement with drugs were identified
- provide a two-way process of communication whereby the police and community members collaboratively visit areas, and in return, communities are invited to internal policing engagement events
- raise awareness of issues faced by the community and the police
- offer insight into the police and employment opportunities

Intended outcome

- An increased number of walk and talks carried out over time, demonstrating sustained proactive engagement.
- More frequent contact, engagement, and collaborative working between the police and young Somali community members, particularly with community members who have not previously engaged with the police to tackle local issues and/or have had limited contact with the police due to previous negative police interactions.
- A platform and opportunities provided for young Somali communities to voice their concerns, and subsequent appropriate action being taken.
- Community members engaging in further engagement activities with the police.
- Increased use of diversion tactics where there are known issues with antisocial behaviour (ASB) and involvement with drugs, and fewer arrests relating to these.
- Increased awareness of young Somali community members about the police, the issues faced, and employment opportunities. An increased interest in working for the police and job applications received from Somali community members.
- Increased trust and confidence among young Somali communities, and overall improved relationships between the police and community members.

Description

Through police engagement with a local Somali charity who have strong links with the Somali community, [Women's Inclusivity Team \(WIT\)](#) and the police's Youth Engagement Team explored solutions to better engage with the young Somali community, it was decided that walk and talks would be implemented.

Walk and talks involve volunteer Somali community leaders and members, in connection with the WIT, going out into the local community with the police to engage with Somali youths. Where possible, Somali officers are involved to demonstrate representation and help the community feel relaxed. The chosen locations for the walk and talks are areas where Somali youths live. These locations were identified prior to the initiative being implemented. Walk and talks are organised collaboratively by a mutually suitable date, time, and place to meet.

One walk and talk has been carried out so far. This was during the evening/night, focusing on the night-time economy where clubs are situated. The community participants and officers involved

meet at a police station. The community participants are given a lift to the walk and talk area and the police make suggestions about which streets to go down. However, the exact location is largely dependent on where people feel able to facilitate conversations.

The community participants accompanying the police approach members of the public and initiate conversations. The purpose of the conversations is to discuss members of the public's backgrounds including their heritage, religion, culture and where they live. They also discuss their experiences and views of the police to highlight community concerns.

The community participants aim to speak to other Somalian members of the public, who they identify via their conversations. However, engagement also occurs with members of the public who are not Somalian.

The walk and talks also offer community members first-hand insight into some of the challenges the police face. The police do not get directly involved in the conversation, in accordance with community members' wishes to maintain independence. The police's role is to be nearby and offer support if needed.

A walk and talk typically lasts for around two to three hours. It was agreed that the first walk and talk would conclude prior to clubs closing for the safety of the community members involved. At the end of walk and talks, those involved are taken back to the meeting point and a verbal debrief is conducted between the police and community members to discuss issues raised by members of the public. This process is an informal discussion which is not recorded to facilitate engagement.

The insight gathered during walk and talks is intended to inform the police interventions moving forwards. For example, feedback was received that people felt targeted by stop and search. In response, stop and search workshops were held with Somalian youths, explaining their rights, grounds for searches, the expectation of the police, and providing an opportunity to scrutinise the police. Other concerns have been addressed via providing Somalian youths insight into the Muslim Police Association, and updates about internal policing issues and complaints procedures. Community members are also invited to talks with officers.

One walk and talk has been carried out so far, although more are due to be conducted with the view of them becoming more frequent, perhaps monthly, and implemented more broadly across the borough. The walk and talk carried out was facilitated by an officer working on the night-time

economy. However walk and talks can be conducted at any time of the day, in any relevant area. Additionally, uniformed police were involved, although moving forwards plain-clothed officers will be used to prevent this being a barrier to engagement.

Walk and talks typically involve around eight community members split into two groups, with two officers accompanying each group. Two cars are required to transport those involved. There is no financial cost of conducting walk and talks, but there may be cost associated with actioning the feedback received such as event space hire or providing food or refreshments at workshops or community events. Walk and talks are organised one to two weeks in advance of being conducted to ensure the availability of those involved.

Subsequent force actions to address the feedback received, and opportunities to get involved with subsequent interventions are publicised via Twitter ([see an example in Shoreditch](#) or in [Tower Hamlets](#)), local councils and the WIT.

Overall impact

Whilst no formal evaluation of the initiative has been implemented, anecdotal evidence suggests it is having a positive impact despite being in early stages.

Further walks and talks will help demonstrate commitment to sustained proactive engagement with young Somali community members. They will facilitate more frequent contact, engagement, and collaborative working.

Walk and talks provide a platform and opportunity for young Somali communities to voice their concerns and for subsequent appropriate action to be taken. They also offer opportunities to engage with the police beyond the walk and talk encounter.

Feedback received from Somali community members involved in carrying out the walk and talk has been positive and constructive. They stated that they are happy to be part of more walk and talks. They found the experience to be eye-opening regarding awareness about the police and the issues they face, and they felt positively about assisting with engagement and change.

The initiative appears to be having a positive impact on relationships between the police and Somali community members. However, it's too early to say whether trust and confidence has increased given the time it takes to have an impact on this, and this initiative being in the early

stages.

As a result of the initiative, Community Engagement Forums have been possible, supported by senior police officers. Two members of the Somali community have expressed an interest in joining the Metropolitan Police.

Opportunities to secure baseline performance information (including police data and community survey information) is being discussed to support the possibility of an evaluation in six to 12 months' time.

Learning

Mechanisms that make the initiative successful

- It is important to collaborate with external organisations. Empowering Somali community members to take the lead during the walk and talks enables engagement – they act as a mediator. Otherwise, people were found to be reluctant to engage with the police directly.
- Where possible, it is helpful for Somali officers to accompany Somali community members on the walk and talks to show visible representation and facilitate engagement. It is important that such officers live in the areas where the walk and talks are being carried out and are familiar with the local area.
- Keeping the environment of the initiative relaxed and informal in nature helps to engage people. Having verbal debriefs and not recording information facilitates engagement. People did not want things written down, due to lacking trust.
- Perseverance and continued investment into building relationships with community members is key. This enables them to see that they are welcome and that the police want to build genuine relationships. The police cannot have conversations or engage with communities if they cannot get communities to the table in the first place.
- Having a mix of female and male, and different aged Somali community members involved in facilitating the walk and talks enables engagement with more people.
- It is important to consider the safety of those involved at all times, particularly when carrying out walk and talks in contexts such as the night-time economy. Necessary mitigation must be put in place such as bringing the walk and talk to a close prior to nightclub closing times.

Challenges requiring consideration

- Many of the male Somali community members were harder to engage with, and were sceptical. This was overcome by communicating effectively, giving people the option to engage or not and time to decide. It was important to openly recognise that rebuilding relationships takes time and perseverance.
- Uniformed police officers attending the walk and talks was found to be a barrier. This is going to be overcome by officers involved wearing plain clothes, moving forwards.
- Time-constraints surrounding operational requirements has meant that only one walk and talk has been carried out so far.
- Given that the first walk and talk was carried out in the context of the night-time economy, alcohol consumption was a challenge requiring consideration in relation to engagement. This also resulted in Somali community members who were assisting with the facilitation of the walk and talk feeling uncomfortable due to their culture and religious beliefs. This requires consideration for support.

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.