

# TACKLING RACIAL INEQUALITY

## Good Practice Case Studies

City of Westminster  
Westminster Police and  
Council Mentoring Scheme

To address distrust around policing and BAME communities in Westminster, highlighted in conversations with Westminster's BAME Staff Network, the council and MPS agreed to establish a mentoring scheme that would pair senior MPS officers and Westminster staff that to help share professional and personal experiences and build trust and mutual understanding of issues and challenges.



### Background

Following the murder of George Floyd and the revival of the Black Lives Matter movement, members of Westminster's BAME Staff Network began to discuss their experiences with community policing. They often expressed distrust and doubt around the intention of the police when approaching BAME communities.

### The solution or actions/proposed solution or actions

Westminster had established a positive relationship with the police covering the Basic Command Unit (Kensington, Westminster, and Hammersmith & Fulham) in the development of the community youth provision. They decided to enhance this through the creation of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Mentoring Scheme. This partnership would pair senior Westminster Metropolitan Police Officers with BAME staff from within the council to share their experiences of community policing, both personal and professional.

The hope was that this mentoring session would allow parties to talk, share experiences and interrogate their perceptions.

### Process:

1. WCC and MPS staff were invited to express their interest on the programme. The programme launched in September 2020 with 11 pairings and ran for six months.
2. During this time, the pairs arranged their own meetings. The entire group would meet three times over the entirety of the scheme to reflect on experiences and learning. Outside of the group and pair meetings,

### Partners involved

City of Westminster  
BAME staff network  
MPS



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the project managers met regularly to share informal feedback and plan for the group sessions.

3. As conversations could be difficult, the group had access to a therapist who offered them space individually or in pairs.
4. For the second phase of the scheme, the current members nominated whom they wanted to handover the work they had started to. This they called "Handover the baton." The significance of this process is in the commitment to a legacy that is different – an alumni.

### Desired outcomes

The intention of the scheme was to increase understanding of community policing in London from the perspective of both the recipient and the provider of the service. This understanding would then pave way for:

- Tackling structural racism and racial trauma.
- The development of opportunities that would positively impact police-community relations.
- Open dialogue between the Metropolitan Police and the Community.
- Highlight commonalities.
- Allowing both parties to share their experiences and stories.
- Develop greater understanding on specific cultural nuances.
- Provide opportunities beyond the individual mentor relationship .
- To provide a role model for improving community relations across London.

### Learning/evaluation

#### Communication styles

The two organisations have different communication styles that impact on how information is shared, received, and acted upon. In the MPS, communication is hierarchical and it's usually to cascade information and or give instruction. While WCC is hierarchical, it has flexibility around the hierarchical boundaries and is rarely instructional.

There was feedback that as a result of this difference in communication, WCC staff sometimes dominated the conversation, silencing the MPS as the style of communication lacked their procedural formality. To overcome these invisible fences the group had a session on communication, psychological safety and the



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need for us to be vulnerable as part of the learning process.

It was also suggested and agreed that sessions would not be recorded to give participants the space to communicate freely.

### **More similar than different**

At its heart, race and discrimination had brought WCC and MPS together. The ever changing tensions between the community and police made the visible differentiating constructs between WCC and MPS staff more visible. During this time, the landscape changed from the murder of George Floyd to the murder of Sgt Matt Ratana to the murder of Sarah Everard. The pairs had to look for common ground implicitly or explicitly in order for the conversation to start and the polarisation to stop.

This meant connecting at a personal level first, as the personal and professional sit within one person. Through this they realised that they were more similar than different. They often found that they held similar values and beliefs. These commonalities not only alleviated the 'Us vs Them' dichotomy, but often made the discussion of more complex issues easier as the parties had built some level of trust. As the relationships developed, the context of conversation widened to include partnership work and leadership responsibilities.

Outside of trust, there was also an increased level of respect for the roles that mentees played not only in their teams but for communities across Westminster. The narratives shifted, WCC staff were able to see the person behind the uniform and felt the need to bring their colleagues and the community along on this journey.

### **Agency**

The landscape that precipitated the mentoring programme is still the same, but in different guises. This is a challenge with tackling discrimination. This programme created urgency and agency in the two organisations. There was an understanding that, in order to change community policing, both parties needed to take responsibility and understand the role they play individually and together in addressing current sentiment.

The mentoring scheme brought intentionality to the focus on community policing. This scheme will maintain an alumni network for accountability and to ensure the programme is delivering results.

### **Opportunities to take forward**

1. Ensure police are represented at round tables.
2. Safe space within community – bringing back police hubs so there is access to police in the community.
3. Help change narrative about police by filming or creating a documentary like police interceptors that shows them in a different light.
4. Change culture within police. It's ok to not be ok. Create a culture that



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it's ok to speak to someone. Police experience a lot of traumatising events on a regular basis. They have access to support, but this is not used enough because talking about emotions is seen as a sign of weakness. This has an impact on how they also show up at work.

5. Use this experience or learning in recruitment processes or to identify any training needs or advisory groups.
6. Youth engagement and youth council. How do we help bring the voice of the police to help create safety and not fear?
7. Youth project in schools run jointly between WCC and MPS.
8. Sharing learning with more senior officers and our political members.

Contact



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