

Role and purpose

The role and purpose of a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO).

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What PCSOs should do

Every Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) should do the following:

- Be integrated into a neighbourhood policing team (normally geographic but it could be for a defined community of interest, such as safer transport teams, new and emerging communities, online communities).
- Develop comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the local community in which they operate to identify and effectively support those in their community affected by offending and those who are vulnerable or at risk.
- Proactively engage and develop close working ties with the community, using appropriate communication methods and IT systems for fostering, promoting and maintaining channels of communication.
- Develop close working relationships with key groups, agencies (such as local authority, housing associations, schools, watch schemes) and individuals to identify and tackle issues such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) and low-level offending.
- Build rapport, trust and confidence with individuals across the community, providing advice and guidance in support of their needs (such as crime prevention advice and mediation between members of the community).
- Contribute to the planning, implementation, analysis and review of evidence-based policing initiatives to address community problems and share the outcomes of those initiatives with all key stakeholders, both inside and outside the service.
- Gather information and intelligence to assist and support law enforcement and community objectives.
- Respond to incidents of low-level offending and ASB. Where incidents are outside their authority, they should seek to prevent escalation until relieved by a qualified police constable.

- Defuse conflict or threat of conflict using personal safety techniques and equipment learnt in training. If this is not possible, PCSOs should ensure attending constables are informed by keeping a safe distance and using their police radio to provide updates to other colleagues about the incident.
- Attend court and give witness testimony in relation to any incidents where they have personal knowledge or involvement.
- Be motivated critical thinkers and capable of self-deployment. PCSO activity should be targeted through appropriate partnership tasking arrangements.

Engaging with communities

PCSOs work in local communities as part of neighbourhood policing teams (NPT) to deliver an effective local service as outlined in the 2018 neighbourhood policing guidelines. The majority of PCSO time should be spent in neighbourhoods engaging with communities and not in the office or police station completing administrative functions.

To be effective, all officers and staff need to be fully integrated, understand each other's role and purpose, and work together towards common community goals. Supervisors charged with the command, control and direction of PCSOs must be fully acquainted with their terms and conditions and employment as detailed in their force role profile and relevant national and local collective agreements. The minimum skillset required is [listed in the role profile listed on the College website](#).

The fundamental role of the PCSO is to contribute to the policing of neighbourhoods through targeted visible patrol, with the purpose of engaging with and reassuring the public; increasing orderliness in public places; being accessible to communities; and working at a local level with stakeholders to solve or mitigate issues, problems or safety concerns faced by the community.

PCSO powers

It is a decision for each chief officer as to which powers their PCSOs will have. This could be traditional PCSO powers, such as dealing with ASB or, where chiefs feel it appropriate, any power of a police officer that is not in the list of [excluded powers in Schedule 10 to the Policing and Crime Act 2017](#). PCSOs cannot be designated with powers under the Terrorism Act 2000.

PCSOs help to reduce crime and ASB to make people feel safer in their communities. The principles of neighbourhood policing emphasise the importance of delivering community engagement in partnership with other key agencies.

PCSOs are not substitutes for police officers

PCSOs have a distinct role, which avoids high-risk activity and places no duty on them to engage in risk beyond their levels of training. It should be noted that only sworn police officers should be used in the following circumstances.

- Wherever there is a clear likelihood that a confrontation will arise. However, PCSOs should have sufficient support, equipment and training to cope safely with confrontations that arise spontaneously during their primary role of patrol, reassurance and tackling ASB.
- Where there is scope for exercise of a high degree of discretion. For example, where a situation is complex owing to several different parties involved, where there is sensitivity within a community about police action or where a large range of enforcement options are available.
- Where police action is likely to lead to a higher-than-normal risk of harm to anyone.
- Where there is a clear likelihood that police action will include any infringement of a person's human rights. For example, intruding into their privacy or deprivation of their liberty (beyond the temporary detention period available to PCSOs).
- Where the incident is one that is likely to lead to significant further work that has the potential to adversely affect the PCSO's fundamental role in the community.
- Where a policing incident directly links to the need for undertaking a priority, serious or complex investigation.

Tags

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