

Duties

PCSOs should be fully included in the work of the neighbourhood policing team (NPT) wherever possible.

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Integration with neighbourhood policing teams

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) should be fully included in the work of the neighbourhood policing team (NPT) wherever possible. The practice of assigning PCSOs mundane and isolated tasks which may not form part of their core role or for which they are not trained should be avoided.

This undermines their role and may lead to low morale and team exclusion. An NPT that works as an integrated team (at all levels and within all roles) creates a more successful and enjoyable working environment.

Level of duty and expectation

Local commanders, contact management staff, frontline officers and supervisors need to be aware that PCSOs have a different level of duty and expectation and will be within their rights to decline to perform tasks for which they are not trained. For example, a PCSO might reasonably observe and follow a shoplifter rather than intervene and detain them.

While PCSOs can be granted powers to seize property, given their status in the community, their participation in search warrants and other enforcement activity should be carefully considered. However, consideration can be given at a local level to deployment in the immediate area to offer a visible presence and reassurance, and minimise concern in the locality.

Recognition that a PCSO must be more prepared than is traditionally the case with police officers to walk away from a situation is essential.

Supervision and development

Line managers supervising PCSOs should acquaint themselves with the range of learning undertaken before deploying PCSOs to active duties, to maximise their potential and avoid placing PCSOs in situations they are not equipped to handle.

Forces should consider the burden placed on supervisors of excessive numbers of staff, and the management training they require to lead PCSOs, police staff and volunteers. Using an NPT model may assist the process of supervision, as well as integrating PCSOs in core policing.

There must be a clear command structure to supervise, develop and inspire PCSOs. As they generally lack avenues for promotion, there should be opportunities for them to develop their role, skills and experience. For example, supporting PCSOs to lead and develop projects, to work with specific groups or to address specific issues in the community may help to avoid stagnation, increase their sense of worth and ownership, decrease boredom in the role and reduce turnover. Within limits, as PCSOs will generally patrol independently, enabling them to act independently and autonomously in the community will not only benefit the self esteem of the PCSO, but may also significantly enhance the profile and public perception of PCSOs in general.

PCSOs will ordinarily report to a neighbourhood policing team sergeant or a neighbourhood police officer line managed by an inspector or neighbourhood sergeant with responsibility for a neighbourhood policing team or sector. This allows close alignment and use of the role. In all cases, it is essential that supervisors are trained in the management and supervision of PCSOs and that they fully understand the role, benefits, limitations and available powers, as well as terms and conditions. This will ensure they have the means to assess the workloads of their staff and that staff understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed.

There have been two examples of forces creating 'PCSO supervisor' roles.

In one force area, this was introduced to decrease staff to supervisor ratios and improve the quality of supervision for PCSOs and other neighbourhood policing officers. The example provided resulted in PCSO supervisors taking over the supervision of PCSOs from the neighbourhood sergeant and became responsible for tasking, performance reviews and all other aspects of supervision of the PCSOs. The PCSO supervisor was managed by the neighbourhood policing inspector.

The force found the implementation of the PCSO supervisor role resulted in positive and measurable improvements in supervisory crime review quality and timeliness, quality of briefings, decreased sickness absence and increased community visibility.

The PCSO supervisors were given personal development review objectives like the neighbourhood sergeants and they led on problem-solving and engagement activity. Their implementation for the trialling force has resulted in better quality submissions and evaluation. A single 'bar' was placed on their epaulettes to signify them as a first line supervisor.

They have attended partnership meetings as supervisory representation and inclusive terminology is used throughout the neighbourhood team to refer to all PCSO supervisor and sergeants as 'first line supervisors'.

Understanding the PCSO role will greatly increase their effectiveness and ensure that they are not used inappropriately. Forces may consider integrating the work of neighbourhood and response officers to facilitate a better understanding of the work that PCSOs do and the value that they can bring to the organisation. Alternatively, forces could require all officers to spend a certain amount of time working on an NPT as part of their training or professional development to gain a better understanding of the work that these officers and staff do.

Tags

PCSO Community engagement Career pathways