

Police support volunteers

Volunteers providing their skills and time to enable police officers and staff to focus on core duties.

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Overview

Police support volunteers (PSVs) are not warranted police officers, and (almost without exception) possess no policing powers. They perform a range of supporting tasks and functions which better enable police officers and staff to focus on core duties. The degree of additionality that PSVs provide enhances the capability of the police service to fulfil its role in serving communities.

Background

The first PSV programme was created in 1992. They are now an established part of police culture, with programmes in every Home Office police force. PSVs are increasingly valued by forces not only for the direct additional support they give, but also for the links to communities they can provide.

Latest [official figures](#) show that, as of 31 March 2021, there were 8,014 such volunteers across the 43 Home Office police forces, offering support to policing in a number of ways.

The role of PSVs should not be confused with the role of special constables. While both groups are volunteers, who give up a portion of their free time in support of policing, there are significant differences. Special constables are fully warranted officers who possess all the powers of a police constable, in contrast PSVs (except for a handful) do not possess any policing powers and provide support via additionality, supplementing the work of police officers and staff.

Principle of PSV engagement

The underpinning principle of PSV programmes is that volunteers are regarded as an additional resource, engaged to supplement the day-to-day efforts of regular officers and staff. PSVs are not a direct replacement for paid roles or a low-cost replacement for what should be a paid role.

An effective PSV programme will engage volunteers to perform specific tasks and responsibilities, freeing up officer/staff time to concentrate on other, frontline duties. PSVs provide an additional resource capacity by which a force may continue to offer services to the public that might otherwise not be available.

Employer supported policing

Employer supported policing (ESP) is a partnership between employers, their staff and the police service. The scheme asks organisations to allow members of their staff who volunteer in policing, as Special Constables or Police Support Volunteers, an agreed amount of paid time off to undertake volunteer police duties, tasks and/or training in the communities they serve. Currently 122 companies in England and Wales participate with the scheme.

At its heart ESP promotes both increased community engagement and corporate social responsibility. There is also potential flexibility to consider local expansion to support other business-specific crime reduction initiatives, eg, cybercrime and fraud.

The scheme can provide real, long-lasting benefits to all parties. It represents an opportunity for private, public and community organisations to celebrate and participate in what volunteering can achieve. The benefits to business are great, and an ESP Impact Report 2019 demonstrates the evidence base.

By taking up the opportunities offered by ESP business or community organisations will be making a worthwhile contribution to the local community in terms of increasing available policing resource. By their actions special constables and police support volunteers already help to make communities safer and provide public reassurance. By giving employees greater flexibility to support policing, ESP allows employers to directly show commitment to this goal.

Roles

The roles performed by PSVs can vary significantly between police forces (and may also vary between areas of a particular force). PSVs can be engaged in all departments, subject to the relevant vetting checks being completed, and assist with a wide variety of tasks. All bar a small handful of roles possess no policing powers.

Roles can be created or adapted based on the skills and time individuals have to give, and volunteers are locally supported by dedicated volunteering managers and supervisors. Training and development may be available and, in some instances, there may be access to longer-term career pathways in key areas.

Some examples of roles/tasks carried out by PSVs include:

- staffing police station front counters
- general administrative tasks
- situational role playing for purposes of officer and staff training
- skilled, professional support (in areas like social media and marketing)
- vehicle maintenance support
- IT tasks
- criminal investigation support
- updating victims and witnesses
- CCTV monitoring

However, the scope and range of volunteer tasks and roles significantly extends beyond those listed above and continues to grow in order to meet the needs of policing.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing