

Special constables

An overview of the Special Constabulary.

First published 28 October 2020

Overview

The Special Constabulary is a force of warranted, uniformed volunteer police officers. These volunteer officers are warranted constables, with all the powers of a regular police officer. Special constables' integration in the local communities in which they live, work and serve, helps to build links between policing and communities.

Background

The Special Constabulary has been in existence since 1831, when Parliament passed 'An act for amending the laws relative to the appointment of special constables, and for the better preservation of the peace'. The roles and duties they perform have developed and expanded over time and special constables now form an integral part of British policing.

Numbers

There are special constables in all 43 Home Office police forces and the British Transport Police. Latest official figures show that, as of 31 March 2025, there were 5,534 special constables serving across Home Office police forces, with a further 241 serving in the British Transport Police.

The government is seeking to increase overall numbers of police officers (including special constables) and police community support officers (PCSOs) as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee (NPG).

The NPG is a programme designed to restore public confidence and enhance visible policing in communities across England and Wales, as part of the Safer Streets Mission. It aims to rebuild links between police forces and the communities they serve through providing additional neighbourhood officers. Special constables have an important role to play in the delivery of the NPG.

Powers

The Special Constabulary is unique among policing volunteers in that its officers have full police powers and directly supplement the regular service as warranted constables, with all the powers of a regular police officer. They are required to maintain the highest professional standards, in line with the policing Code of Ethics, to uphold the law and achieve the best outcomes in a wide range of potential situations and incidents.

Recruitment and eligibility

The recruitment of special constables is undertaken locally by individual police forces. Not everyone will be suited to or eligible to serve as a special constable.

There are key factors that must be considered during the selection and recruitment process. These include aspects such as nationality, age, fitness, financial status and criminal convictions (both of an applicant and those with whom they have a familial and/or close relationship).

Individuals wishing to apply to become a special constable should liaise with the police force they are seeking to join.

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.

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 like 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.

Roles

Many special constables assist in the delivery of effective frontline, operational policing. They work in partnership with regular officer colleagues, PCSOs and other agencies with important roles

serving local communities. The ongoing provision of effective, dedicated neighbourhood policing support can form a main part of the role.

However, there are a growing number of special constables performing their duties in specialist roles, often making use of skills and experience they have gained from outside policing. Such roles include:

- roads policing
- rural crime
- IT and economic crime
- public order duties
- professional standards
- cyber-crime

Adding value and improving the quality of service are part of the benefits special constables bring to policing. They have a significant role in reassuring communities and increasing social responsibility.

The College has produced [**national role profiles**](#) for special constable, special sergeant and special inspector. These are available for use by police forces, with some elements able to be tailored to address local needs and force priorities. The profiles provide an example of what each role can entail and what is expected of special constables.

Hours

There is not a nationally mandated hourly amount that an individual must volunteer as a special constable. This will be the subject of local force policies. As a guide, most forces require their special constables to regularly provide an average of at least 16 hours of volunteering duties per month.

Expenses and allowances

Special constables are volunteers and do not receive payment for performing volunteering duties. However, the [**Home Office circular**](#) provides details of the expenses and allowances which may be payable by a force to its special constables in certain circumstances.

Training, learning and development

The special constable learning programme (SCLP) is available for new recruits. The learning in the SCLP is aligned with the first year of the police constable degree apprenticeship (PCDA).

If a special constable wants to become a regular police constable having completed the SCLP, their learning and experience will be taken into account. They will not have to duplicate any learning already completed.

Individual forces are responsible for ongoing training and development opportunities for their special constables.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing