

Special constables

An overview of the Special Constabulary.

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Overview

The Special Constabulary is a force of warranted, uniformed volunteer police officers. A key strength is that 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 is a further strength, helping 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 police'. 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 2021, there were 9,174 special constables across Home Office police forces.

Powers

The Special Constabulary is unique among policing volunteers in that its officers have full police powers and directly supplement the regular service. Special constables are warranted constables, with all the powers of a regular police officer.

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 a number of 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).

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. The benefits to business are great, and an ESP Impact Report 2019 demonstrates the evidence base.

Roles

The majority of special constables assist in the delivery of effective frontline, operational policing. However, there are an increasing number performing in specialist roles, often making use of skills and experience they have gained from outside policing. Such roles include roads policing, rural crime, public order duties, professional standards and cyber-crime.

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

Hours

There is no nationally mandated hourly amount that people must volunteer as a special constable. This will be the subject of local force policies. However as a guide, most forces currently 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 as a special constable will be taken into account. They will not have to duplicate any of the learning they have already completed.

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

Additional resources

- [Employer supported policing report 2019 \(pdf\) 1.23 MB](#)

Tags

Neighbourhood policing