

Police community support officers (PCSO) focusing on engaging with seldom-heard communities

A specialist PCSO role focusing on building trusted relationships with diverse and seldom-heard communities, improving understanding and capturing lived experiences.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Public order and community safety Community engagement Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)
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Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2023

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Communities General public

Aim

The aim of the specialist police community support officer (PCSO) role is to engage with diverse and seldom-heard communities and gain a better understanding of their lived experiences.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the specialist PCSO role are to:

- increase engagement with seldom-heard communities
- improve trust and confidence in policing among seldom-heard communities
- increase awareness of community concerns within policing teams
- improve the sharing of community intelligence
- increase the use of culturally informed policing responses

Description

The specialist PCSO role was developed to address gaps in engagement with diverse and seldom-heard communities and strengthen trust and understanding between the police and the public.

Warwickshire Police currently employs three specialist PCSOs, who are managed by a DEI inspector. Unlike other PCSOs, this role is not deployed to incidents. Instead, the specialist PCSOs' primary purpose is to undertake long-term, relationship-based engagement. This enables them to build meaningful and consistent relationships with communities that may historically have had limited trust in, or contact with, the police.

The specialist PCSOs work closely with safer neighbourhood teams (SNTs) to provide advice, guidance and insight on diversity-related matters. Through regular face-to-face engagement, they identify emerging community concerns, gather and share local intelligence, and enhance cultural awareness. This supports more informed, culturally sensitive and effective policing responses.

Key responsibilities

Attending community events through invitation to listen and build trust

The specialist PCSOs attend community events at the invitation of local groups, organisations and community leaders. Their role is to engage with residents in informal settings, listen to their concerns and experiences, provide reassurance, and build positive relationships between communities and the police. This engagement helps to increase trust and confidence in policing, particularly among groups that may have had limited previous contact with the police.

Facilitating initiatives such as ‘Walk With Us’

The specialist PCSOs have developed and implemented the ‘Walk With Us’ initiative. Their responsibilities include:

- identifying locations and routes
- setting event dates
- engaging community participants
- attending events alongside policing colleagues

The walks provide a safe and informal environment for members of the public to discuss personal safety concerns, share their lived experiences, and contribute to local problem-solving activity.

Ongoing community cohesion events

The specialist PCSOs lead the planning and delivery of community cohesion events, including food and faith festivals. This involves building partnerships with local faith groups and community organisations, coordinating participation, and creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together. These events promote understanding, encourage meaningful dialogue, and strengthen relationships between communities and the police.

Feeding back community concerns to inform policing strategies

The specialist PCSOs act as a link between communities and the wider force by sharing community feedback, concerns, emerging issues, and examples of good practice with relevant departments and operational teams. Their insight helps to inform local policing priorities, improve cultural awareness and understanding, and support more responsive, community-focused policing approaches.

Senior management approval

The specialist PCSO role required senior management approval. The initiative prioritises listening, visibility and trust-building rather than enforcement. This helps identify early signs of tension, misunderstanding or disengagement within communities and enables preventative action.

Overall impact

Early indications suggest that specialist PCSOs are improving engagement with communities by creating informal opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building. The approach is designed to increase understanding of cultural issues within policing teams and improve access to community insight. Warwickshire Police has observed more consistent engagement with local groups and created opportunities for constructive dialogue, particularly with seldom-heard communities.

Feedback has primarily been gathered through informal conversations with community members. Communities have expressed significant appreciation for the specialist PCSOs, highlighting that they are the officers they see most regularly and with whom they have developed trusted relationships over time. Community members have welcomed the specialist PCSOs' consistent weekly presence and regard them as reliable points of contact, particularly when safer neighbourhood teams are managing competing operational demands.

Learning

What worked well

- The specialist PCSOs have developed stronger relationships with community groups, resulting in invitations to attend private, community-led events. Attending events by invitation has helped to minimise perceptions of enforcement, creating a more welcoming environment for engagement and encouraging open and honest conversations.

- Informal engagement methods, such as walking events and community festivals, have encouraged greater participation and more open conversations. The 'Walk With Us' events have provided opportunities for community members to discuss concerns in a relaxed environment. This has generated valuable community insight and intelligence that may not otherwise have been identified through more traditional engagement methods.

Challenges

- Building trust takes time and cannot be rushed. Some communities were initially reluctant to engage due to previous perceptions of policing.
- There was initially limited awareness and understanding of the specialist PCSO role across some departments. As a non-deployable specialist function, the role was sometimes misunderstood, resulting in differing expectations regarding its responsibilities and priorities. To address this, clear communication and ongoing engagement with colleagues were required to explain the purpose, remit and value of the role, and how it complements neighbourhood policing and wider force objectives.

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