

Merseyside Police: Digital Recruitment Platform Evaluation

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Project Overview

Project overview

1. Project overview

Merseyside Police set out to improve the experience of applicants to the Special Constabulary and Police Support Volunteer roles, by both professionalizing the process and decreasing the amount of time it takes from initial interest to commencing training.

To achieve this, they chose to digitize as much of the process as possible, seeking to enable applicants to undertake the majority of the application requirements online, at a time and location convenient to them. Stakeholder workshops were undertaken to map the existing process, identify opportunities for improvement and to assess the experience from the applicants' point of view. The findings from these workshops were developed into a specification for services, which was used to undertake a tender process for the supplier of digital services. Several companies bid for the work, and two were invited to interview and to present their digital solutions to the recruitment process.

Jobtrain were selected for delivery of the contract, having experience in HR systems and processes for regular officers in policing and other public services. The process of designing the specification and tendering for a supplier took several months. Jobtrain worked to these overarching requirements:

- Applicant experience; Applicants need a portal that engages them throughout the application journey and provides a fast end-to-end journey
- Efficiency; Police staff need a system that improves efficiency through automation and applicant self-service
- Ease of use; Police staff need to ensure that new business processes and systems can be quickly and easily adopted as part of wider HR processes. Applicants should find the portal intuitive and easy to use
- Scalability; The police need to ensure that the portal and related processes and systems can adequately scale to meet the

needs of new volunteer roles and to be easily rolled-out across forces

- Security; The police need to ensure that any system, tools or applications developed for community or business use, are supported, secure and can perform under increasing demand.

The digital recruitment platform was built and implemented in Autumn 2018 and went live in December 2018. Evaluation of the impact of the platform is based on data collected from 13th December 2018 to 30th April 2019.

This report provides evaluation of:

1. the process of the design and implementation of the digital recruitment platform;
2. the impact of the digital platform on the efficiency of the recruitment process;
3. the experience of the digital platform and wider recruitment process for applicants.

Learning from the process

Learning from the process

2. Learning from the process

This chapter explores the qualitative themes arising from semi-structured interviews conducted with the individuals involved in the strategic planning, design, and implementation of the digital recruitment platform in Merseyside Police. Perspectives were obtained from police officers and staff involved in project delivery, and representatives of the externally contracted service provider that delivered the platform (Jobtrain).

The first section of the chapter investigates views on the purpose of the new recruitment platform. The second section explores experiences of the process of delivering the platform, from design through to implementation. The third section considers perceptions of barriers, successes and the impact of the new system, before the final section in this chapter looks at how the platform might be improved and how it could be implemented on a wider scale or nationally.

2.1 Purpose

There were several perspectives provided regarding the purpose of introducing the new digital recruitment platform. The views expressed covered both the benefits to the police force and improvements to the volunteer experience.

Comments relating to benefits to the police included cutting down on the amount of resource required to carry out the recruitment process for Special Constables. It was noted that the aim was not to increase the numbers of Specials being recruited, but to speed up the process for getting volunteers into post.

“We set the vision that we only really wanted to have contact with the individual once between

them saying ‘I want to be a Special Constable’ and us offering them a job.” (Merseyside Police)

“It was to try and sift out people who weren’t suitable candidates as early in the process as possible. And quite a lot of the sifting out could be done automatically by the system...” (Merseyside Police)

“...it’s about the process, for me it’s not about the numbers, it’s about improving the process in lots of different areas really.” (Merseyside Police)

There was, additionally, a feeling that the existing system created a user-experience that put off potential volunteers due to the amount of time it took to complete, coupled with the subsequent delay in converting applications into interviews and into commencement of training. Therefore, a key purpose of the new digital recruitment platform was to address these issues and create a better experience for potential police volunteers.

“To look at how we could improve the recruitment process for all of our specials and volunteers. Because at the moment the recruitment process is far too long, and we were losing a lot of people.” (Merseyside Police)

“We wanted it to be a really attractive platform so that if people are looking to volunteer for the police, it’s dead easy to use, looks good...” (Merseyside Police)

“We were asking people to volunteer their time to the organisation, but the process they went through was long-winded, it was drawn out. It required lots of contact and lots of input from the person who wants to volunteer. The process didn’t really portray the police service in a good light.” (Merseyside Police)

This understanding of the aims and purpose of the new digital recruitment platform was shared by the company that was commissioned to provide the platform, Jobtrain. Representatives of Jobtrain were focused on the idea of streamlining the process in

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order to get volunteers into the police more quickly, while improving the experience for volunteers.

“The process can not only be time consuming, but can be demanding on physical (people) resources as well. And that can be expensive. The aim, therefore, of the project was to see if the use of recruitment technology could streamline the process whilst enhancing the recruitment experience for all involved.” (Jobtrain)

“The ideal process requested that the first time a Merseyside Police employee looked at/assessed an application was after the candidate had completed the PIR test and interview.” (Jobtrain)

The expression of these two main sets of aims in relation to the needs of the applicant and the needs of Merseyside Police are not conflicting and demonstrate a good understanding of what the platform was attempting to achieve: making the experience more streamlined and user friendly for applicants while creating a cost-effective recruitment process for Merseyside Police. Depending on job role, individuals from the project team within the police were likely to have a focus on different objectives, and it is positive that these appeared to be well balanced across the team. Representatives from Jobtrain also appeared to have a broad understanding of what success would look like for both the police and applicants.

2.2 Delivering the platform

On the whole, participants mostly felt as though there were a good range of stakeholders actively involved in the process. Specifically, it was highlighted that having a Special Constable involved in the project team was a positive decision in terms of drawing on their experiences of recruitment.

“We also had a special constable on the project team... ..I think the special was very important as he’d undergone the lengthy process to be recruited so he could see very quickly where

some of the time could be cut out of the process.” (Merseyside Police)

Additionally, having the involvement of the right managers who could overcome barriers quickly was highlighted as an important element in the delivery of the new platform. Furthermore, the support provided by senior leadership to members of the project team was valued in terms feeling empowered to make decisions and progress the project.

“...the manager for looking after the volunteers was also key, because he was able to get rid of some of the blockers very quickly. So if we got stuck on a certain issue he could very quickly make a decision.” (Merseyside Police)

“I was never left wanting by chief officers. I was quite happy that I was empowered, that I had the decision-making responsibilities delegated to me for pretty much everything.” (Merseyside Police)

“I had a senior officer who was my project sponsor, and if I needed decisions making or things sorting out, he would generally come to those meetings and make things happen.” (Merseyside Police)

Representatives of Jobtrain highlighted the positive impact that having a main point of contact had on their ability to communicate and obtain more information throughout the design and implementation of the new platform. Moreover, their feedback suggests that the project team within Merseyside Police were very engaged with the design and delivery.

“Merseyside Police also assigned a main point of contact to the project and that proved hugely advantageous in helping to channel communications and decisions between Jobtrain and Merseyside Police.” (Jobtrain)

“A key project management contact was assigned by Merseyside Police, so we had a key

Learning from the process

contact within the project team to coordinate things. In addition, the project team seemed to be really engaged in wanting to make changes to improve the process.” (Jobtrain)

There were, however, issues raised regarding the lack of engagement of the Human Resources department within Merseyside Police. They were perceived to be an important stakeholder with experience and knowledge around recruitment processes, but it was understood that the department was very busy and that processes around volunteers were not necessarily seen as a priority.

“HR presented barriers throughout, and still do. That persists. Mainly around capacity. But also the sense that Specials is always a lower priority on their agenda compared to other things that are going on.” (Merseyside Police)

“The other people we had involved were people from HR as well. I think they were quite important to the process, but they didn’t really join in with the project in the way that I would have liked them to have done.” (Merseyside Police)

“A lack of HR involvement in the project meant that Jobtrain had to take a greater role in steering and advising on HR best-practice and leading change management than originally anticipated.” (Jobtrain)

It should be noted that despite attempts to make contact, no representatives from Merseyside Police human resources participated in this evaluation, and therefore their perspectives on the project are not included.

The design phase of the new platform involved the mapping out of the old recruitment process in order to identify where improvements could be made.

“We mapped out the as-is process and started to look where we wanted to make changes or completely alter the way we did things, and then

mapped that out. And that’s where the business analysts came in.” (Merseyside Police)

“We decided we would only ask the questions that we absolutely must ask and went down that route.” (Merseyside Police)

Representatives from Jobtrain highlighted difficulties that the project team experienced in reaching agreement over certain aspects of the new processes. It was suggested that this was due to the conceptual nature of the early design part of the project, and those not being able to visualise the changes that were being discussed. The problems were overcome when a test platform became available to provide greater understanding of how certain process would work in practice.

“The key challenge we encountered was gaining consensus within the project team about the agreed approach (i.e. full automation of PIR scoring and automated invite to interview). This was an item of discussion which we returned to several times during the implementation as several project team members and other departments not involved within the project challenged the fundamental approach a number of times.” (Jobtrain)

“Initially it seemed that the project team found it quite difficult to visualise the candidate journey, however once the test platform was available to demonstrate, this was quickly resolved.” (Jobtrain)

“...the team may have not always been able to clearly visualise the concept that was being proposed. Again, this can be a challenge with new concepts as the solution is just that – a concept, rather than something that can be seen, touched, tested etc.” (Jobtrain)

When it came to the implementation of the new digital recruitment platform the project team within Merseyside Police made the decision not to use Jobtrain to deliver the new website, and instead utilised the expertise of a Special Constable who possessed web design skills. It was suggested that

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there was a misunderstanding in what the agreed cost of Jobtrain's involvement included, and this is why they did not design and build the website.

“Early on, Merseyside Police decided not to progress with a Jobtrain Content Management System (CMS) to host their information around volunteering with MP and decided to build their own website pages, capitalising on expertise within the project team to do this. This differed from the original agreement with Jobtrain, however we were able to flex and accommodate this.” (Jobtrain)

“We actually ended up having a Special Constable who has those skills designing the website for us and providing the website platform to the company because they wanted additional money to do that.” (Merseyside Police)

Giving the responsibility of building the recruitment website to a Special Constable led to delays in the delivery of the new platform due to the fact that the Special also worked full-time outside of volunteering. There was a suggestion that perhaps a more sensible approach would have been to give responsibility for this aspect of the project to the Communications and Marketing department and allow the Special to assist, so that it was not reliant on his availability to complete the task. However, it was perceived that they would not have had the capacity to deliver the website.

“Obviously because he doesn't work for the police, he's just a volunteer, he's got his own day-job. So he wasn't always able to deliver on the dates we would have liked. So there was some delay because of that.” (Merseyside Police)
“Time slipped as well because we ended up having to design the website, so that took about a month longer than we thought.” (Merseyside Police)

“Because we gave it to [a Special], Comms and Marketing kind of washed their hands of it and

said ‘well you've got someone to do it so we don't need to be involved’.” (Merseyside Police)

However, other comments received suggested that because the new platform used the same software as Merseyside Police's regular recruitment, it didn't involve a large amount of work to implement the new platform. Additionally, the fact that it was a cloud-based system meant that making iterative changes throughout the development process was relatively straight forward.

“Because we already had the Jobtrain software on site, this was kind of a side-enhancement to the system really. So we didn't have to do very much.” (Merseyside Police)

“It's run in the cloud, so the supplier did a lot of the up-front work once we'd started to sort out our business flow. So they knocked up prototypes in test versions of the system and then we just played with it really to see how it flowed, how it looked, how it worked how it interacted with the current process as well.” (Merseyside Police)

Overall, there appear to have been mixed experiences of the delivery of the new digital recruitment platform. The comments above suggest that the initial agreement between Merseyside Police and Jobtrain was not clear in setting out what services would be provided, and this led to tasks needing to be delivered in-house that there was not sufficient resource for, causing delays to the implementation process.

2.3 Barriers

The most common barrier to the implementation of the digital recruitment platform raised in the interviews was the unwillingness of the HR department to engage with the project. It is unclear from the comments received whether they did not have the capacity to be actively involved, were resistant to the introduction of new process that

Learning from the process

require them to relinquish control over certain processes, or were not interested.

“We had a lot of time wasted because we couldn’t get information from our HR department... they wanted to be involved initially but they never stuck to their actions.”
(Merseyside Police)

“HR were a barrier in terms of engagement and their level of wanting to be involved.”
(Merseyside Police)

“HR presented barriers throughout, and still do. That persists. Mainly around capacity.”
(Merseyside Police)

“There was some resistance to changing the overall process within the organisation, in the main from the HR team who were currently managing the specials recruitment process, so the system still holds old and new process statuses, emails, application forms etc.”
(Jobtrain)

There were also technological barriers experienced, in particular in relation to introducing the use of video responses to questions via the online platform. This was experienced after the initial roll-out of the platform and appeared to be a case of not anticipating the variety of devices that would be used and therefore the different file types that would be submitted.

“There were issues with the video interviews not sending the files across.” (Merseyside Police)

“We had quite a lot of technical challenges because of the sophistication of some of the phones and recording devices that some of the applicants were using. Either they were very old, or they were very modern. The supplier hadn’t come across some of those specialities in their testing and when we actually went live, we had a problem with a few of the applicants because we couldn’t view their recordings. But the suppliers did get that sorted out very quickly.”
(Merseyside Police)

“There were a couple of little funnies when it went live, because it’s not until people actually use it for real, they do unexpected things...”
(Merseyside Police)

There was a feeling from some that the new platform, although an improvement on the previous one, perhaps hasn’t met the expectations of some of the project team in terms of being able to completely overhaul the recruitment process. Some comments suggested that there were constraints to what could be achieved due to having to use the same software that is used for Merseyside Police’s regular recruitment, and even that the supplier was chosen based on price rather than product quality.

“We were already using the software [for Merseyside recruitment], so we were constrained really because we couldn’t make as many aesthetic changes as we would have liked to have done because it would have impacted the current recruitment process for Merseyside. So some of the things that have gone into the system now wouldn’t be how you would want it to be...” (Merseyside Police)

“The product isn’t perfect, the frustrating thing for me is that we chose the cheap platform and not the platform that would actually be best for the project, which is not surprising, its typical of policing, they’ll go for the one that costs less and just make it work.” (Merseyside Police)

“...we bring them initially to an engaging and quite visual landing page and then take them to a clunky form that actually asks them questions that they might not be eligible for answer. It doesn’t deselect questions based on previous answers it asks them all anyway. So the user experience is not great to be honest”
(Merseyside Police)

However, in spite of these barriers, a number of successes were highlighted across the interviews.

Learning from the process

2.4 Successes

Many of these were framed in relation to the initial aims of the project in terms of achieving improvements in the applicant experience, including speeding up the process of converting applications into active Special Constables, and the convenience for applicants of completing many of the processes at home rather than having to attend face-to-face sessions.

“We have had some really good successes in relation to the time it’s taken for people from initially applying to joining. We had a (volunteer) who applied on the Tuesday and on the Saturday was at an assessment centre. Previously that would have taken 4 months on average probably but for her it was 3 days, she then passed fitness (assessments) and was then offered the next training intake, so her journey was 4 or 5 weeks.”
(Merseyside Police)

“The PIR test is all online, so they can do it from the comfort of their own home and we don’t have to pay for staff to facilitate that.”
(Merseyside Police)

Similarly connected to the initial aims of the digital recruitment platform were successes linked to the improved efficiency created by the new system for Merseyside Police themselves. The online nature of the application means that more people complete the tests and interviews sections of the process, meaning that more appropriate candidates are progressed and that inappropriate candidates can be filtered out prior to attending a face-to-face session.

“What would happen is we’d do a test once a month at headquarters and candidates would be invited to that. But there would be a drop-out rate, whereby we’ve invited something like 100 people to that test, but only 40 people would turn up depending on the weather or what’s on TV that day. Whereas now we capture about 99% of the people that apply.” (Merseyside Police)

“The main success from what I can see is that we’re actually getting potentially the right applicants coming through for interview and assessment centres, and we’re getting them through in weeks, rather than months.”
(Merseyside Police)

Additionally, there are benefits in terms of the reduction in resource required to manage applications within Merseyside Police. The ongoing nature of recruitment also means that one member of staff can review video submissions rather than requiring multiple staff from across the organisation to be withdrawn from their posts for up to a week at a time, as was previously the case.

“The video interviews are a great success. What we used to do in force under the old specials recruitment process is that we’d have interviews that were held monthly at HQ. We’d have three panels that were running back to back 4 days a week. We’d have three members of staff on the panels plus invigilators. So basically you’d have nine people pulled from across the organisation to do interviews every month for four days in a week... ..The video interviews, the candidates can do themselves at the click of a button at home, dead convenient, whenever they want... ..Because recruitment is constantly open, we’re getting about 2 or 3 a day so it’s a really manageable assessment workload.” (Merseyside Police)

“With regards to the resource required to manage this process in Merseyside Police, it’s far fewer.” (Merseyside Police)

Importantly, the new system captures vital data around how many people complete each stage and what the drop-out rate is. This means that the process can be monitored and improved on an ongoing basis, based on this data.

“The actual software that we’re using actually records all of that information for us. So it tells us literally at every stage, how many people have got to that stage, how many people have just dropped out, how many people have got

Learning from the process

through, how many people have we rejected, and it literally tracks all of that for us so that we can pull reports out.” (Merseyside Police)

Overall, the interviews provide significant evidence of how the new digital recruitment platform has achieved what was intended at the initial outset. However, a small number of opportunities for improvement were raised, in particular the potential to add to the software and to further engage HR staff in the project.

2.5 Scaling up to national roll-out

It is intended that the new platform will be used in the recruitment of other volunteers across the organisation including PSVs and Cadets and that the benefits experienced in the recruitment of Special Constables would translate across easily.

“We’re looking at having a lot more PSV roles across the force, and hopefully we’ll be able to use the platform an awful lot more in terms of encouraging people to volunteer in those roles.” (Merseyside Police)

“We’re not recruiting for cadets until October, but when we do it’ll be through this platform, so it’ll be dead quick, dead easy.” (Merseyside Police)

In terms of scaling up to a regional or national version of the digital recruitment platform, it was suggested that it would be beneficial to use the Merseyside platform as a starting point, mapping out this new process, and then try to agree where further improvements could be made to make it even more efficient. Issues around the security of data-managing processes were raised as something that would need to be addressed.

“If this is going to be rolled out as a national system then I would think you would need to set up a project team again and go through that design and process-flow again to work out where

you could actually improve it further.” (Merseyside Police)

“There are certain things that perhaps aren’t quite as secure as you would want them to be if you were rolling it out nationally that our security team have accepted as risk.” (Merseyside Police)

Furthermore, advice was offered for other police forces considering implementing their own version of a digital recruitment platform, which included points around engagement with Human Resources departments, planning, time management and process development.

“Be clear about your user requirements. Be very clear about your tender bids. And make sure you get early buy-in from HR, and that they are linked in to the process at every single point because you’re unlikely to achieve success without making significant policy and process changes.” (Merseyside Police)

“Really think about what you can get remove from your process and what you want to achieve long-term. Where possible, prepare application forms, statuses, email content, etc in advance. Put plenty of time side for review and testing. Keep in regular contact with your Implementation team. Communicate with other departments about the change before, during and after the project.” (Jobtrain)

Outcomes for recruitment

Outcomes for recruitment

3. Outcomes for recruitment

The evaluation of the impact of the digital platform against the previous model is undertaken by comparing the 'pilot campaign' – 12th December 2018 to 30th April 2019, with the previous 'last campaign' – 3rd April 2018 to 13th August 2018. This provides a comparable 132-day period, however it is recognised that seasons may impact upon factors which affect decisions to apply for voluntary roles. However, comparing 'like for like' was not possible due to the timing of the previous recruitment campaign.

3.1 Numbers of applicants

Last campaign
288 Submitted applications

Pilot campaign
303 Submitted applications

In the pilot campaign, the PIR test is included in the application with an automated invite to video interview sent to those who pass this test. As candidates who submitted their application in the last campaign have only submitted an application (not completed their PIR test or been invited to interview) the two above numbers are not directly comparable. However, it does show that a slightly higher number of applications were made during the pilot campaign.

The automatic PIR test and interview invite on the digital platform saves a considerable amount of resource and time as there is no need to invite candidates to complete a paper PIR test or use time and resource to administer, mark, and feedback test results.

Last campaign (Job ref 4384)

- Completed PIR: 47% of applicants
- Invited to Interview: 40%
- Completed Interview: 32% of applicants

Pilot campaign (Job ref 4865)

- Completed PIR: 98% of applicants
- Invited to Interview: 39%
- Completed Interview: 23% of applicants

More candidates have completed the online PIR test in the pilot campaign as it forms part of the early application process online, which is easy to access. In the last campaign, the test was paper-based and carried out by inviting candidates to attend a face-to-face testing environment, then test results were manually reviewed and recorded and candidates were informed of their results. A significant time and resource saving is made here. The convenience of completing the PIR test online, at a time and location convenient to the applicant appears to result in a larger number of candidates completing it and moving to the next stage of the process.

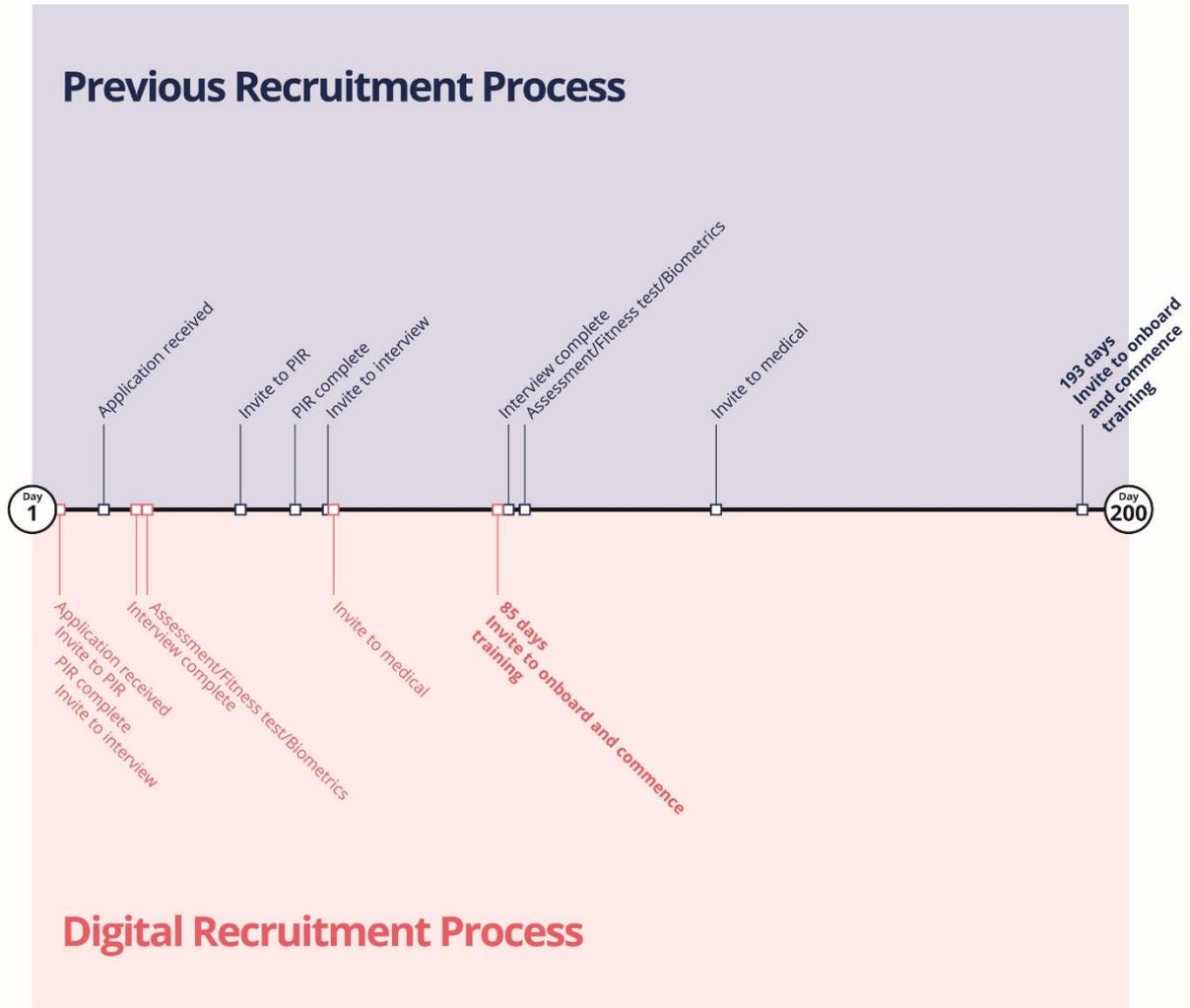
The proportion of candidates invited to interview based on application and PIR has not been affected by the new platform. However, the proportion completing the interview has reduced from a third, 32%, to a fifth, 23%.

3.2 Diversity

The dataset is not large enough to provide reliable analysis of the impact of the new recruitment model on the diversity of applicants. However, based on the 30 applications included in this analysis, no effect can be seen for ethnicity, age or religion. An apparent 7% increase in female applicants can be seen, however as stated this result should be treated with caution and followed throughout the year.

Outcomes for recruitment

3.3 Overall outcome for efficiency



108
days quicker

56%
reduction in
time

Experience for applicants

Experience for applicants

4. Experience for applicants

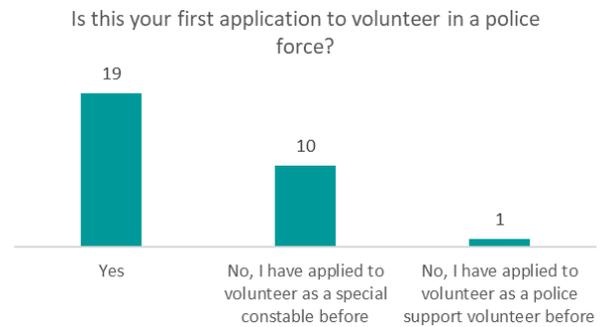
An online survey was completed by 30 applicants who went through the online recruitment process, including the initial application, the PIR test and the interview. Whilst this number is small, it does provide some insight about the first phase of the new model and this feedback can inform further development of digital recruitment processes.

4.1 Who volunteers

Survey participants were made up of 50% female and male. As anticipated, 16 participants were aged 18 to 24 years old, 5 between 25 and 29, 3 between 30 and 34, 2 between 40 and 44, 2 between 45 and 49 and 2 between 50 and 54. 1 participant reported a disability. 2 participants were from a minority ethnic background. Almost half of those who took part in the survey reported having a full-time job (12), 9 were students, 5 were working part-time, 3 were self-employed and 1 person was unemployed. Whilst the sample is small, it shows a fairly accurate reflection of the spread of characteristics found in the wider Special Constabulary.

To provide further insight into the group that participated in the survey; the majority of applicants reported to not volunteer anywhere at the present time (26), whereas 4 are currently volunteering elsewhere and are planning to continue even in the case of a successful application to become a Special Constable. A small minority had already worked in a police force before, as a member of staff (2), with the majority being new policing (28).

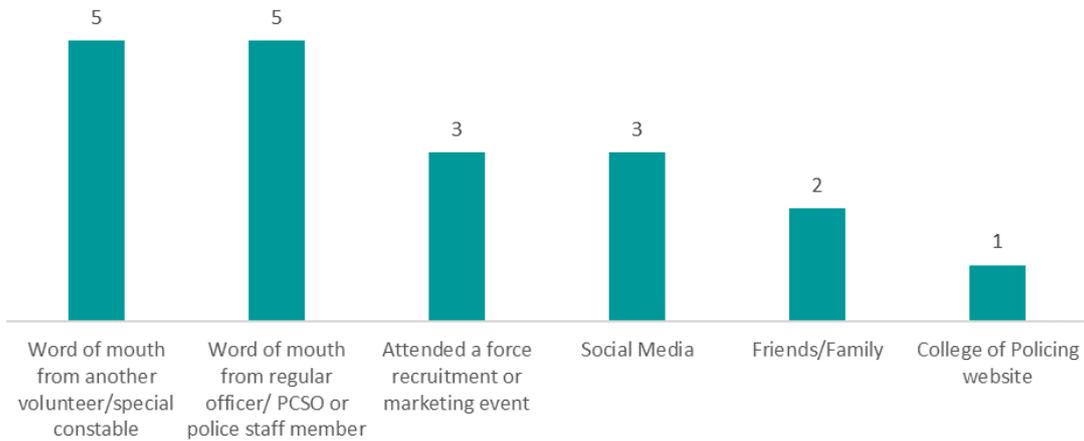
Two thirds of applicants had already applied to be a volunteer Special Constable before (19), whereas for one third this was their first attempt (10). Only in one instance the applicant had applied to be a Police Support Volunteer before applying to become a Special Constable.



When asked about how they learnt about the role of Special Constables, the majority found out about the role through word of mouth (see figure below). 5 applicants stated that they became aware of it after speaking with somebody who was already a volunteer for the police or a Special Constable. A further 5 gained awareness of the role through connection to a regular, a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), or a police member of staff. 3 applicants reported to have attended a force recruitment event and 3 found out about the role through social media adverts. 2 applied after speaking to a friend or a family member, and only 1 participant reported having learnt about Special Constables on the website of the College of Policing.

Experience for applicants

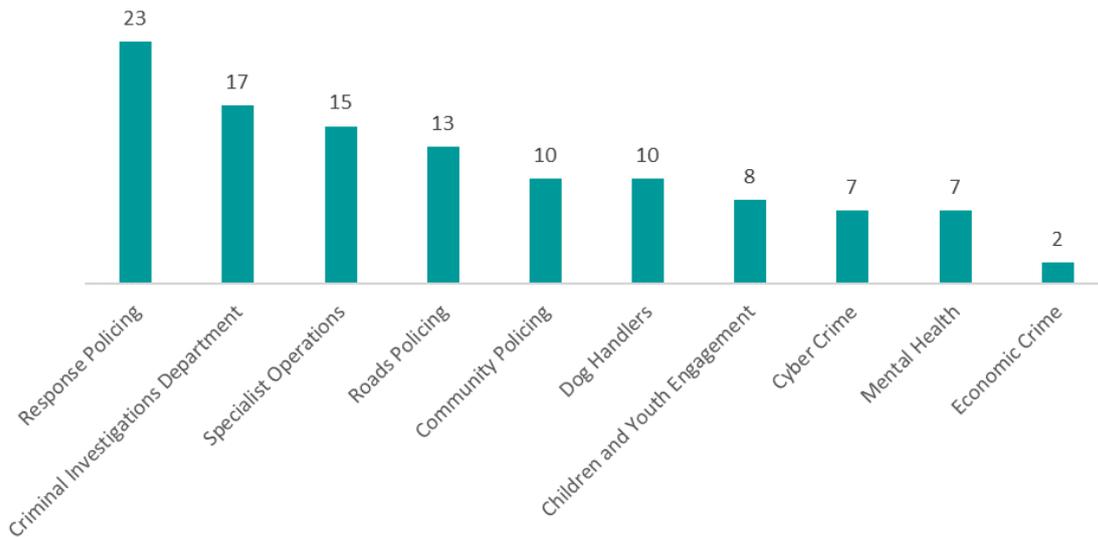
How did you learn about the role of a volunteer within the police service?



The majority of applicants that participated in the survey expressed an interest in response policing (23). The second most popular area of interest in policing was criminal investigations (17), followed by specialist operations (15), roads policing (13),

community policing (10), and dog handlers (10). Approximately a fifth of applicants were interested in children and youth engagement (8), cybercrime (7), and mental health (7), and only 2 individuals were interested in economic crime.

Which areas of policing you are interested in volunteering in?

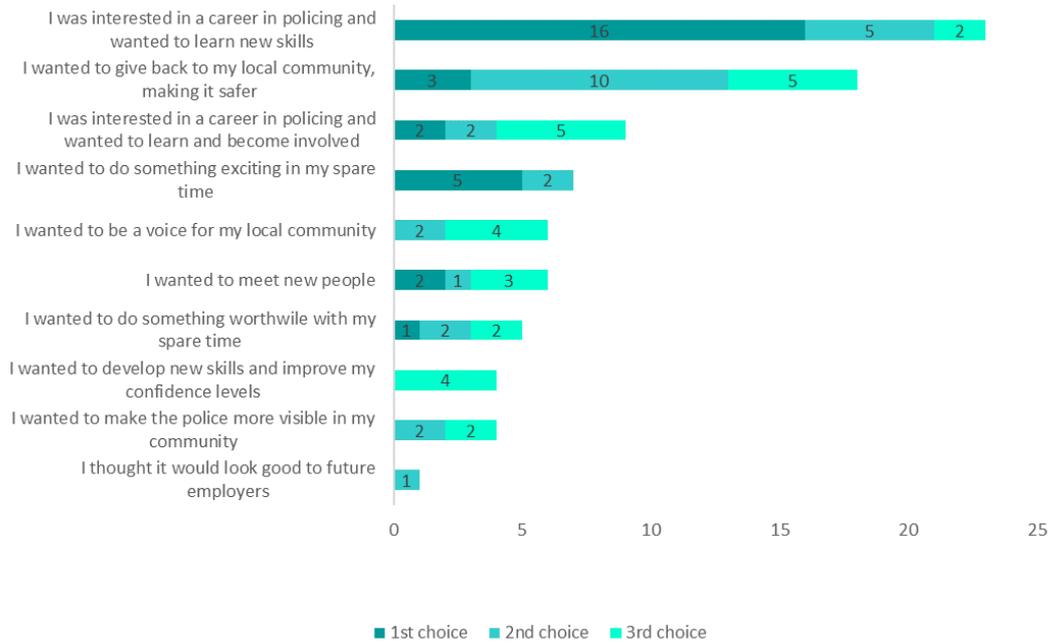


When asked to pick three most relatable choices around the reasons behind joining the Special Constabulary, most respondents to the online survey reported that they were interested in a career in policing, and wanted to learn more about it, and/or to gain skills and experience to strengthen a future application for a paid policing role; out of 30 participants, 16 checked that as their first choice; 5 as their second, and 2 as their third (see figure below). Secondly, applicants reported wanting to

join the Special Constabulary because they wanted to give something back to their local community, and to play an important part in making their local community safer (18). The third most common reason for joining the Special Constabulary was being interested in policing, wanting to learn more about it and becoming directly involved (9). Another common reason was hoping to get to do something exciting with one own's spare time and wanting to meet new people (7).

Experience for applicants

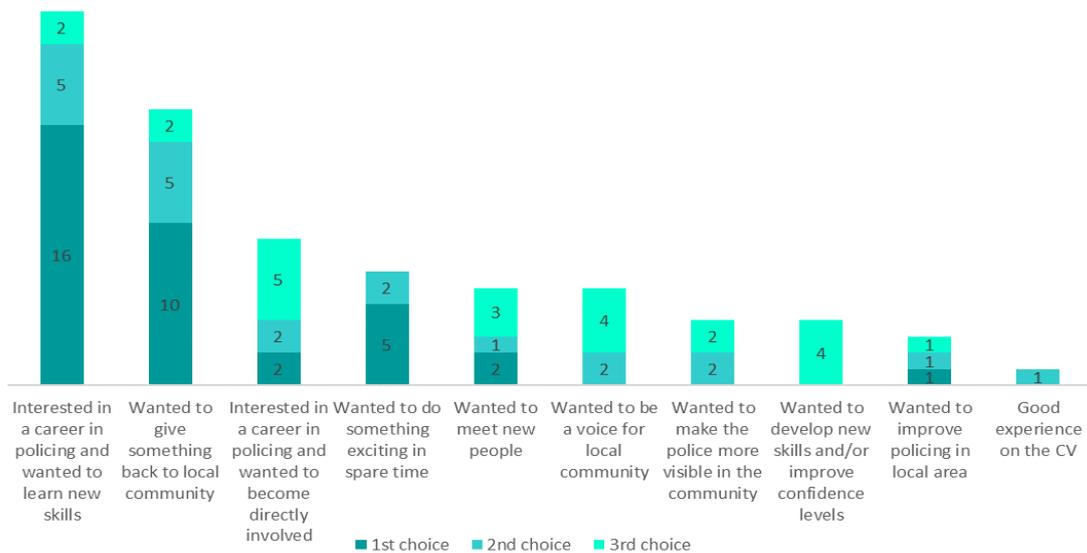
Reasons for joining the Special Constabulary



When asked to pick three choices that summed up their expectations and hopes when joining the Special Constabulary, the most common choice, picked 23 times in total, was related to starting a policing career, showing that they were hoping to learn more about policing, and/or to gain skills and experience to strengthen a future application for a paid policing role (see figure below). This reflects the

high number of people who embark on the Specials journey as a starting point to become a regular. Giving back to the community and making it safer was the second most popular option (17). Becoming directly involved with the police force was important to some (9), whilst several others expressed that they were hoping to do something exciting with their spare time (7).

What did you most hope to achieve from the experience?



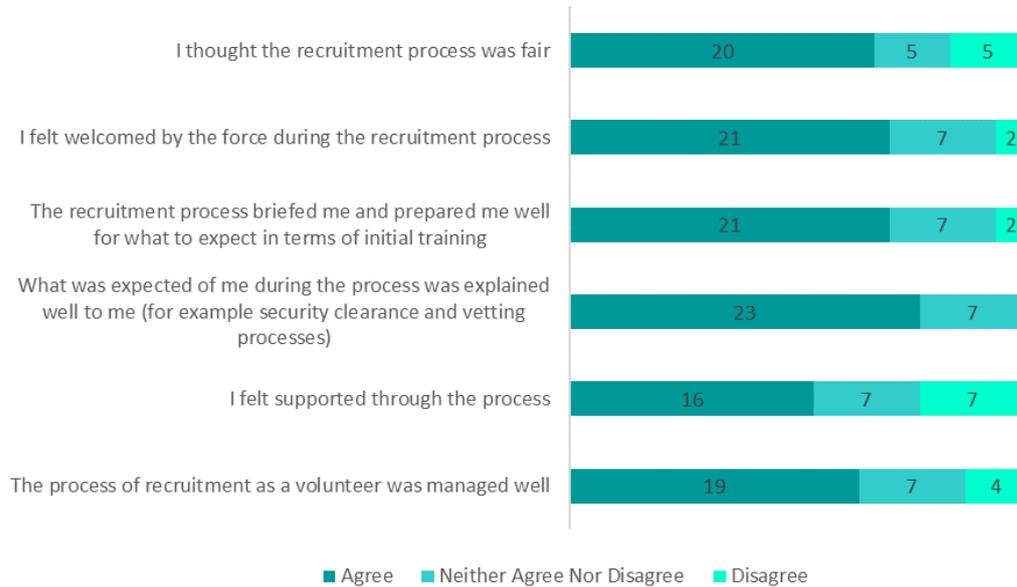
4.2 Experience of using the new platform

Two-thirds of applicants (21) felt welcomed by the force during the process, felt that the process was fair (20), and agreed that the recruitment process briefed them and prepared them well for what to expect in terms of initial training (21). Nearly two-

thirds also felt that the process of recruitment was managed well (19).

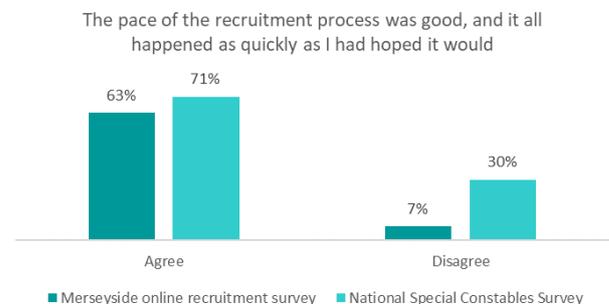
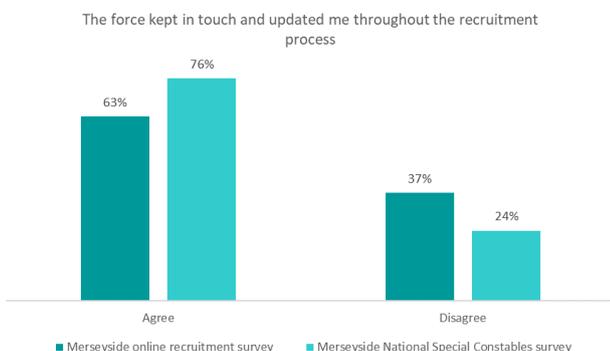
Slightly less positively, just over half of applicants felt supported by the force (16), whereas almost one quarter of them felt they were not supported enough. This suggests there is an opportunity to identify what would encourage applicants to feel supported and seek to improve this as part of the experience moving forward.

The recruitment process



Compared to the response by Merseyside Special Constables to the National Special Constables survey (2018), respondents that completed the application process to become a Special Constable online were less happy with the level of engagement the force kept with them, with 63% of them agreeing that the force kept in touch with them enough, as opposed to 76% in the National Special Constables survey. Caution must be exercised as these are not comparable datasets (30 participants in Merseyside, and 89 in the National Survey).

Similarly, a smaller proportion of participants felt that the pace of the recruitment process was good when applying online in Merseyside (63%) compared to the Merseyside respondents to the National Special Constables survey (71%); however, participants were much less likely to disagree with this statement: only 7% of them did when applying online as opposed to the National Survey (30%) (see figure below).



Perceptions and preferences about the experience of using the platform were varied.

Experience for applicants

Over four-fifth (25/26) of applicants were very positive about having an application profile that they could use again, that the information they needed was available on the platform, that the platform looked professional, it was reliable to use, and each stage of the application process was made clear (see figure below).

Over three-quarters (23) of applicants felt the platform was easy to use and easy to navigate and they would happily use the online platform again.

More than half (18) of applicants would have preferred to participate in a face-to-face interview rather than online, and one-fifth (6) disagreed, suggesting they preferred the online interview. Over half (16) of applicants felt comfortable completing assessment tests online, and slightly fewer (13) felt comfortable using online videos when answering interview questions. Several applicants were neutral about this, suggesting they neither feel comfortable or uncomfortable, (10 and 9 respectively), which may reflect wider feelings about being assessed, beyond the online/face-to-face comparison.

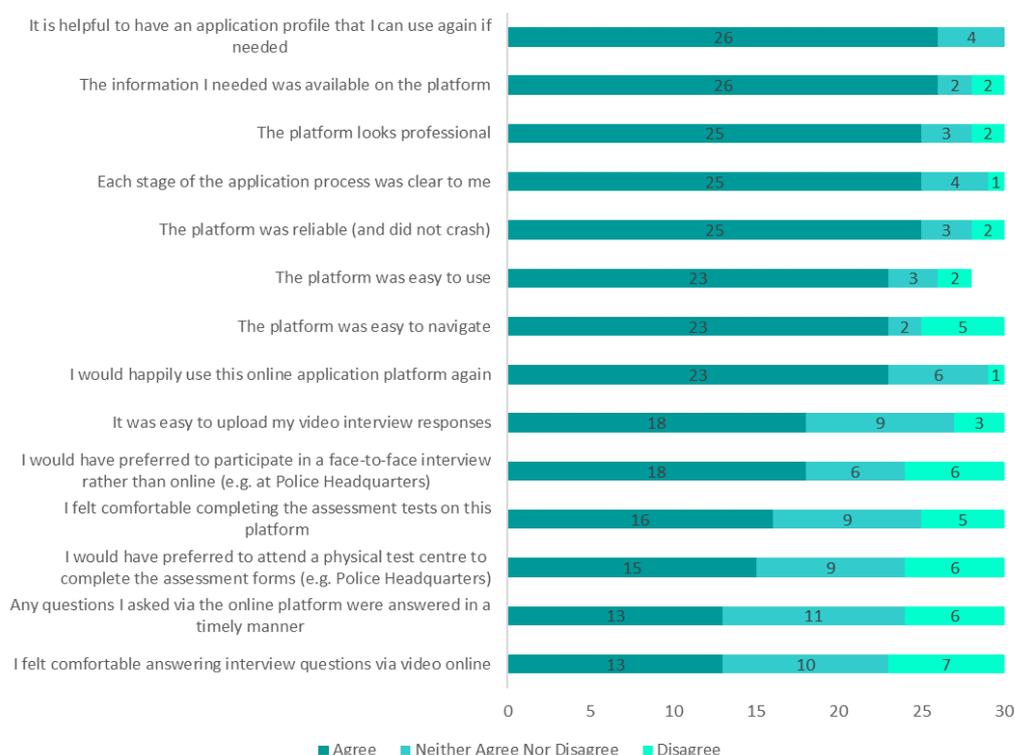
Over half of the participants (18) indicated that uploading videos onto the platform was easy, while and only 1 in 10 respondents disagreed to this instead. It is possible that these applicants were part of the first few weeks of the platform being live, where a number of snags needed to be resolved with the system successfully interacting with different devices.

Half of applicants (15) would have preferred the physical test to be held at Police Headquarters, whereas a minority of them (6) were happy with current arrangements and one third of them (9) were neutral.

Almost half of applicants (13), felt the questions they had posed in the platform's chat were answered quickly.

These results provide areas for further insight to be captured and point to potential opportunities for improvement in applicant experience.

Perceptions of the platform



4.3 How the recruitment process could be improved

22 applicants out of 30 provided suggestions in an open-text response. A quarter of the comments stated that they could not think of any improvements for the recruitment process. Suggestions for improvement were therefore small in numbers, but included:

- interview process would be better conducted face-to-face (mentioned by 4 applicants)
- have an individual as a single point of contact for them with the force
- better management overall
- improved email communication, including avoiding sending the same email multiple times (which was a mistake in the use of the system, and appears to be a one-off issue)
- more time to complete the interview questions
- more help with preparation for the interviews, including adequate support for non-native speakers to apply.
- communicate the date of the fitness test more promptly
- a faster response to the application
- use easier, more accessible language in the interview questions

Participants were also given the opportunity to provide further comments on their experience of the online interview. 21 applicants out of 30 provided a comment, which were pulled together into these main themes:

Positive:

- having an interview online was more comfortable and took away the stress of standing in front of a panel
- the online interview model was easy to use
- Opportunities for improvement:
- have the option of doing the interview face-to-face (mentioned by 5 applicants)
- it would be more helpful to have direct feedback on the other end of the online interview, instead of speaking in front of a monitor only

- some of the questions were difficult to understand
- there is not enough time to reply appropriately to each question

Conclusions

Conclusions

5. Conclusions

This report shares the findings from interviews with key stakeholders in the digital recruitment platform project delivery, data from the platform pilot in comparison to the last recruitment campaign, and an online survey with applicants that have gone through the new process. Overall, the findings point to a successful design and implementation of the platform, positive integration with existing systems and processes in Merseyside Police and a broadly positive experience for the applicants using the system. Throughout the report, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement have been identified, recognising that this is a very early first evaluation of the digital platform. These overall points are summarised here, ending with a number of considerations going forward:

Main achievements

- Significant reduction in the time it takes from application to beginning volunteering;
- More applicants complete the tests and participate in interviews;
- Reduction in staffing and resources needed for managing the administration of the application and selection processes;
- A broadly positive experience was shared by participants; the platform was perceived to be professional, reliable and easy to use; the expectations and stages of the process were made clear; the process was perceived to be fair and managed well.

Key factors for success

- Good range of stakeholders actively involved in the process, from each area of the business;
- Having a Special Constable involved in the project team was a positive decision in

terms of drawing on their experiences of recruitment;

- Having the involvement of the right managers who could overcome barriers quickly;
- The support provided by senior leadership to members of the project team was valued in terms feeling empowered to make decisions and progress the project;
- Main point of contact for service provider.

Key opportunities for improvement

- Involvement of HR throughout the project design and delivery;
- Further development of data security in the software, if the model is to be rolled out across forces;
- Further flexibility to change the imagery/visuals of the platform;
- Applicants suggest that more support could be provided throughout the process, including answering questions fully and quickly via the portal.

Need to examine longer term

- Some applicants would have preferred a face-to-face interview and to attend Police Headquarters for the fitness test; this needs to be further examined to identify if there are specific needs or issues that could be addressed;
- The impact of the digital recruitment model on diversity of applicants, particularly in relation to those with disabilities or additional needs;
- The impact of the video introduction to policing and volunteering opportunities, particularly on the diversity of applicants and on the reach to applicants that have not heard about the Special Constabulary/volunteering opportunities through word of mouth;

The background is a solid teal color with several overlapping, semi-transparent hexagonal shapes in various shades of teal and light blue, creating a geometric pattern.

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