

Key Messages

- Overall, there were 1,305 responses to a survey undertaken across England and Wales. This survey therefore is the largest response ever to a survey of PSVs, representing a response rate of 17% nationally.
- The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on volunteer experiences and programmes across England and Wales, with the amount of time volunteered being lower for over half of the sample who continued to volunteer, with around a third undertaking different tasks compared with those normally completed before the pandemic.
- The results from the survey of PSVs are predominantly positive. This reflects similarly positive patterns of response in previous surveys in 2016 and in 2018. There are some improvements in response in the 2021 survey compared to 2018, which reflect some key enduring strengths for the PSV programmes across forces. A third of PSVs say that their experience as a volunteer has been a lot better than they had expected when joining. A large majority of PSVs feel that they are adding value, describe their morale as high, say they intend to stay, feel valued, feel part of a team with good relationships with others in policing, and feel well recruited, trained, supported, and equipped.

Introduction: The purpose of this policy brief is to summarise the key findings the national survey results report (Callender *et al.*, 2021). Overall, there were **1,305 responses** to a survey undertaken across England and Wales. This survey therefore is the largest response ever to a survey of PSVs, representing a **response rate of 17%** nationally.

The survey covered a range of questions about the experience of being a Police Support Volunteer, including:

- Exploring the experience of volunteering during the pandemic.
- The demographics, length of service, and future intentions of PSVs.
- Experience of recruitment and training.
- Experience of their support, management, and treatment as volunteers.
- Relationships between the PSVs and others in policing.
- Outcomes, impact, and potential improvements for the future.



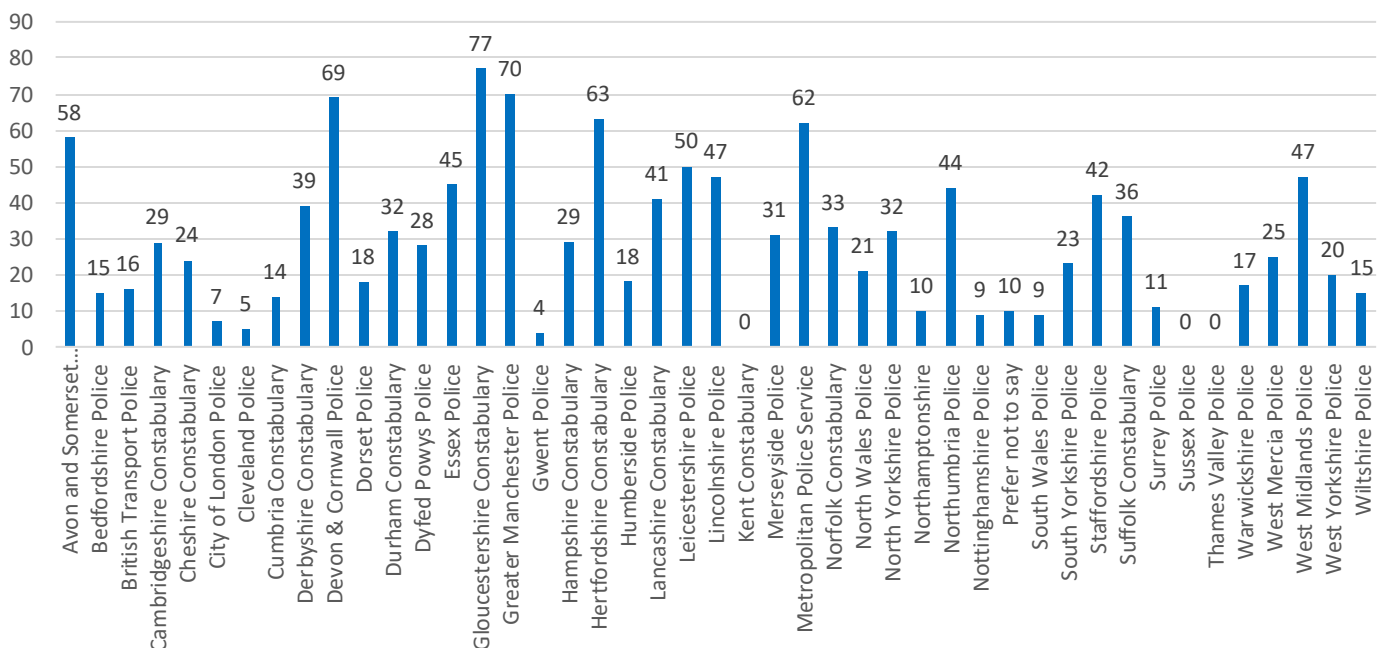
Exploring views of Police Support
Volunteers in England and Wales

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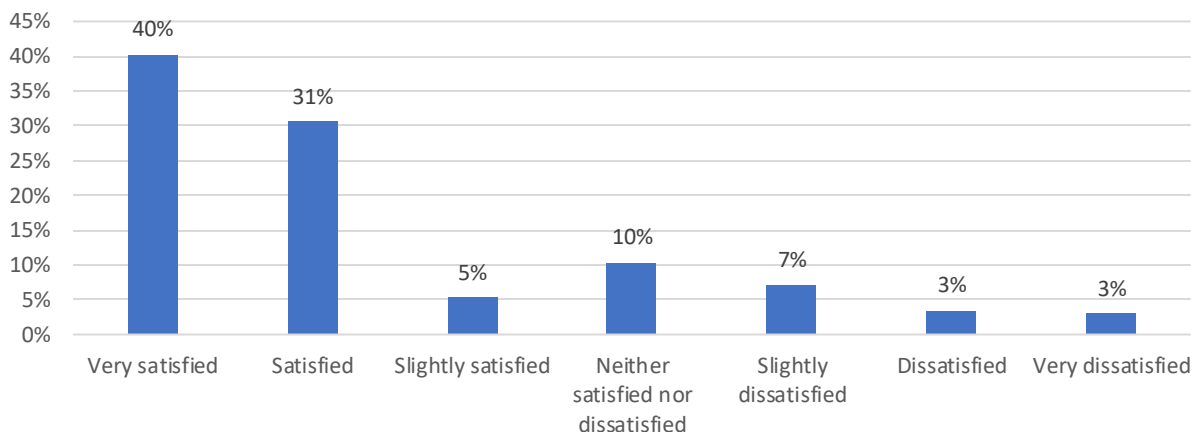
PSV Survey Responses per Force



Impact of Covid: Participants were asked in the survey whether they had volunteered in the last year. There were 846 participants who said that they had volunteered in the last year, which equates to two thirds (66%) of the sample. COVID-19 had a range of different impacts on the experiences of PSVs over the past year, responses most frequently related to:

- **Volunteering suspended** – The most common (48% of respondents) way in which coronavirus impacted on PSVs was that it caused many of their volunteering roles to become suspended.
 - *COVID has made it impossible to carry out my role as it relies on face-to-face contact*
- **Desire to support** – 17% of PSVs who specified how COVID-19 had impacted on their volunteering experiences highlighted how they had wanted to continue volunteering throughout the pandemic.
 - *Disappointed I couldn't volunteer and help aid the force's efforts and would have been nice to have something to do*
- **Social impact** – Some volunteers (9%) felt COVID had impacted on the social interaction they got from volunteering, many missed their colleagues and the teamwork.
 - *The negative side (was) not being part of a team or making new relationships, not feeling useful or a part of the local community*
- **Poor communication** – 9% of PSVs who answered this question had experienced poor communication from their force during the pandemic and this was a way COVID had impacted on their volunteering experiences.
 - *Haven't been offered any opportunity despite wanting to. Haven't had any direct contact except for the general notices. Don't know if I'm a volunteer anymore*

Satisfaction with communication during the pandemic for those who had not volunteered in the last year.



For those who had volunteered in the past year, the amount of time volunteered was lower for over half of the sample, with around a third undertaking different tasks compared with those normally completed before the pandemic. Just under a third of those who had continued to volunteer during the pandemic had stopped volunteering for at least a short period of time. Evidently, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted and reduced the volunteering patterns of PSVs. The challenges will be to effectively re-engage, whilst also learning from some of the good practice developed in terms of models of communication with volunteers.

Recruitment and Training: 92% (1040) agreed that the PSV recruitment process was a positive experience and 412 (36%) strongly agreed. Those who had served less than 2 years were slightly more likely to strongly agree that it was a positive experience 41% (128) compared to 35% (276) of those that had served 2 years or more.

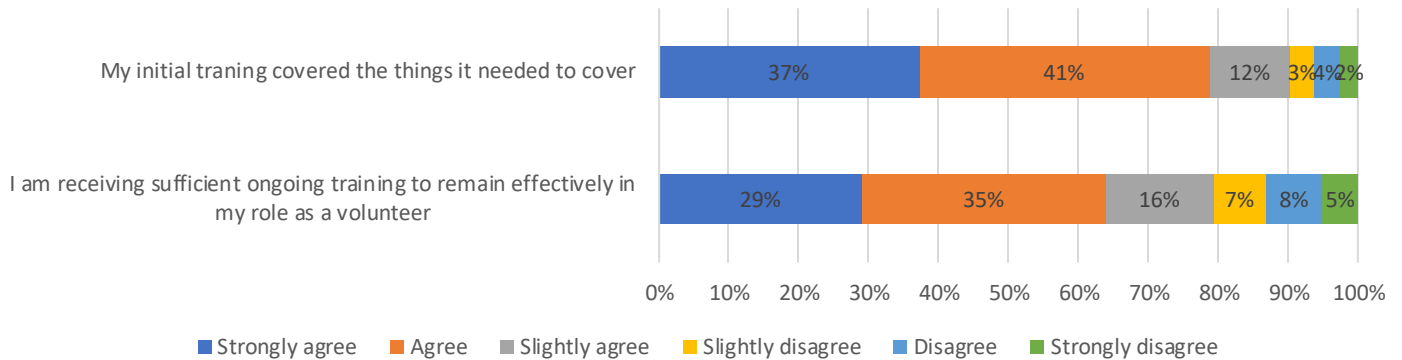
Recruitment was positive < 2 years service:



2018: 35%
2021: 41%

Agreement was high with the statement ‘my initial training covered the things it needed to cover’ at 90%, which was slightly lower than in 2018 when it was 95%. However, agreement with the statement ‘I am receiving sufficient ongoing training to remain effective in my role as a volunteer’ was higher at 80% in 2021 compared to 66% in 2018 (and with 29% strongly agreeing compared to 20% in 2018).

Agreement with statements relating to training.



Management, Treatment and Relationships: Results relating to management were positive. 84% of volunteers agreed that the force is good at managing volunteers (although 14% said that they slightly agree) and 16% said that they disagree. In the 2018 survey 22% disagreed that the force is good at managing volunteers. Of those who disagreed, the most frequent responses related to:

- **Poor communication** – Most PSVs who felt their force was not good at managing volunteers attributed this to poor communication, for example, receiving very few updates during the pandemic.
 - *Despite chasing my line manager and the officer in charge I have yet to have an answer from them*
- **Lack of support** – The second most common reason for disagreeing with the statement was due to experiencing a lack of support, this resulted in PSVs feeling unappreciated, undervalued, and as if the force did not truly understand volunteers.
 - *Everything we try to do, we face hurdles and blockages - when staff see we are volunteers, we get ignored or put to the very bottom of their to do list.*
- **Lack of opportunities** – Many PSVs spoke of having very few volunteering opportunities, some of them had had no opportunities at all, whilst others felt the opportunities which were available had little meaning and did not utilise PSVs’ skills and experience.
 - *I don't feel the volunteers are used as effectively as they could be, and tend to be used as a last resort*

Across aspects of experience, there is also a consistent minority (between 10% and 20% of PSVs) who reflect a more negative experience. Whilst this does not take away from the primarily positive picture, it does draw attention to the need to consider those factors that appear to underpin these less positive experiences as a PSV for some. The factors that appear to drive less positive experience as a PSV are: (i) opportunities to deliver and to develop, to utilise skills or to undertake training and develop new skills, (ii) support, and (iii) communication. Underlying both positive and negative experience are elements of wider culture within police forces towards volunteers. Attitudes of officers and staff to why volunteers are there, the importance of their role, and their integration as a core part of the policing family rather than ‘outsiders’, are important in shaping the experience.



c. **1 in 5** felt more a burden than a help

Disagree that force maximises use of time:

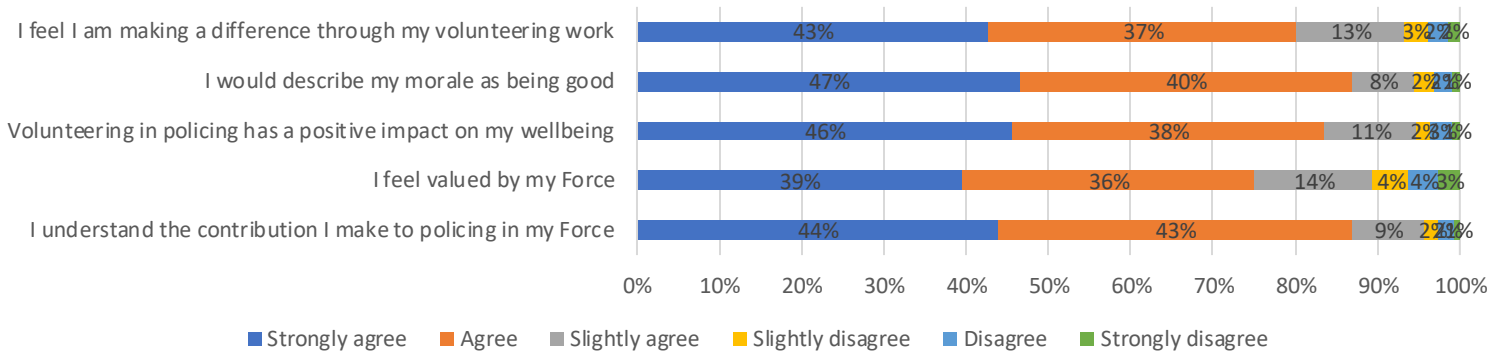
2018: 22%

2021: 16%



Outcomes and Positive Impact: As with the 2018 survey 94% of volunteers agreed that their morale was good. In addition, 96% understand the contribution they make to policing, 95% agreed that volunteering in policing has a positive impact on their wellbeing and 93% agreed that they make a difference through their volunteering work. A slightly lower proportion agreed that they felt valued by their force at 89%.

Agreement with statements relating to personal benefits from volunteering



Retention and Improvements: Two thirds (66%) of volunteers could see themselves in it for the long term and expect to be a volunteer in three years-time. 6% were planning to leave in the next 6 months, this group were asked to state why they were planning on leaving:

- **To focus on paid employment** – The majority of PSVs likely to be leaving shortly stated this was due to needing to prioritise, or focus on, their paid employment.
 - *Due to work commitments not fitting around the time of the meetings*
- **Due to lack of opportunities** – The second most common reason for leaving within the near future was not having enough opportunities to volunteer, for some this meant they were uncertain whether they still had a role as a PSV.
 - *I don't honestly think the police have anything for us to do and have struggled with using us since they recruited us. Wouldn't be surprised if we were let go*
- **Feeling poorly treated** – The third most likely reason for the PSV likely leaving was due to them feeling poorly treated by the force.
 - *I feel undervalued, under-utilised and irrelevant. There is a strong feeling of a them and me situation with the officers*

How long PSVs intend to volunteer for.

