



Institute for
**Public Safety
Crime and Justice**

2030 Vision

Specials and Police Support Volunteers - At the Heart of Policing Reform

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Introduction: The time is now

Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) already have a big impact. This paper is about a possible future which takes the impact of police volunteering to a whole new level. The paper sets out a future in which police volunteering becomes a central agenda in policing reform, in which police volunteers play a major part in changing the face of policing, and in which the experience of volunteering in policing is as good as it can possibly be.

Policing is changing fast. Society, the nature of crime and threats to public safety, technologies, public expectations, the wider thinking about public services, levels of funding; all of these critical factors are changing fast. If policing does not change, it will be left behind. This challenge of police reform is being grasped by the profession and some big changes are taking place. This paper argues that police volunteering should be seen by police strategic leaders as an important and central part of their transformational change agenda. Policing must evolve different models for leadership, organisation and delivery. There is a need to reset relationships with communities, open up the police to new ways of thinking, find new ways to boost capacity and capability, and adapt quickly to doing new things. All of these elements are necessary for policing to keep up with the changes around it. Police volunteering can play a major role across delivering them all.

This future ambition for police volunteers needs to be 'business led', 'needs led', driven by outcomes. Enhancing and expanding police volunteering is not a goal in itself; it is a means of achieving policing outcomes which will simply not be achievable without it.

Police volunteers can provide critical skills and capacity in helping to manage and reduce risk and harm. Police volunteers can provide a step change in the available front-line visible policing resources, and with that the public engagement, problem-solving, quality of service, reassurance and confidence building which otherwise can't realistically be afforded any other way. Volunteers can provide a very wide variety of skills and experience which aren't otherwise available to policing. Volunteers can help policing connect in new and better ways across the full diversity of communities. Volunteers can help 'open up' policing, and bring in different perspectives and ideas. Police volunteers can provide capacity and capability which in turn can help refine and refocus the roles and contributions of Regulars and police staff.

What might be in the DNA of a long-term, '2030 Ambition' for police volunteering? Some of the core, defining features of a long-term genuinely strategic vision for police volunteering might include:

- Police volunteering is seen as a core, integrated, embedded, critical element of policing delivery. Volunteers are central to policing models, core to how police organisations see themselves, and fundamental to organisational development;
- The police are recognised as being very good at leading, managing and supporting their volunteers. The ability to lead volunteers is seen as a critical capability for senior leaders in policing. Police organisations provide a great experience for those who volunteer with them. The cultures of police organisations are ones in which volunteers can grow, develop and flourish;
- There are many more volunteers playing a much broader role across policing, public safety and criminal justice. A future in which volunteers significantly outnumber paid police roles. And a future where police volunteers are seen as a primary delivery mode for many aspects of policing;
- There are imaginative approaches to 'non-warranted' volunteers, and many more of them. Volunteering is thought about differently – different people are able to contribute in very many different ways. Some may volunteer for a few hours, others over a lifetime. 'One size fits all' is a distant memory. This broad pool of volunteers

- deliver across community engagement, early intervention and prevention, and partnerships, as well as across a range of specialist areas of policing delivery;
- The approaches to volunteering are genuinely multi-agency and collaborative;
- Volunteering is fully professionalised. There are evidence-based core skills programmes. There is the development of an evidence-base for maximising the effectiveness of volunteers;
- Leaders prioritise the agenda to ensure success. There are big ambitions of what is being delivered through volunteers, but it is also properly recognised that volunteering is not 'free'. Investment is critical. Growth in volunteers is managed well. Costs and benefit are well captured and understood.

Seeing it differently

We need to move the Specials and PSV agenda out of the 'side issues' box. We need to shift the agenda into the core conversations around policing models and organisational change. We need to see police volunteering and citizen involvement as a priority in discussions on police reform.

Expanding the role and impact - embedding Specials and volunteers right at the heart of operating models and organisational development - will take some radicalism, reinvention, and courage. And it will carry some risks. There is a need to stop looking in the rear-view mirror for what roles Specials and PSVs have played in policing in the past. Instead there is an opportunity to look forward to a new future. To be bold and courageous in reimagining the possibilities for what roles volunteers could perform in a transformed, rapidly changing policing. At a radical end of thinking, it is possible to think of a future where voluntary delivery models are the major part of policing delivery.

As the more ambitious forces across this agenda expand their Specials and PSVs, they are becoming one of the larger voluntary organisations in their local areas. This creates new leadership and organisational development challenges – how do forces become better at being 'voluntary organisations', alongside being good at 'command and control' and being good employers? It is becoming increasingly common for a Chief Constable to be leading a thousand and more volunteers; this aspect of the leadership challenge for policing does not seem to attract much attention in debates about the future of police leadership, but if police volunteering is to flourish it needs to.

What things can we do to help make this exciting new future – this change in paradigm - come about? Some possibilities include:

- We need a long-term and genuinely strategic approach. Making the kind of radical shift in police volunteering this paper proposes, and very importantly doing so safely and doing it well, is a decade-and-more agenda. We need a substantial, long-term, seriously thought through and properly invested approach. If police volunteering is to grow, it needs to 'grow well';
- Policing needs to 'get out more', and understand what excellence looks like across different sectors in terms of volunteer attraction, volunteer engagement and empowerment, and volunteer management. And to appreciate what it is possible to deliver with volunteers;
- We need to burst the artificial glass ceiling of assumptions about what it is and isn't possible or safe for volunteers to do. The national survey shows our current volunteers, both Specials and PSVs, want to get involved in much more, across the breadth of policing. With very few exceptions we should encourage and enable them to do so;
- Volunteers need to be properly put on the policing strategic change agenda nationally. Forces need to bring in or train up expertise in volunteer management, both at senior

leadership and more tactical and operational levels. Police volunteering needs to be high on the agenda of the Strategic Command Course and wider senior leadership training. The College of Policing needs to see police volunteers – their support, their development, their professionalism - as core to its mission, purpose and membership;

- There needs to be a serious investment in regional and national infrastructure, to help ensure the massive potential of police volunteering is fully realised;
- We need to build the evidence-base across police volunteering. This agenda is largely absent from academic and policy thinking around policing. We need to build a ‘what works’ centre model for police volunteering;
- True transformation rarely occurs one agency at a time. We need to be thinking more broadly and collaboratively than just ‘police’ volunteers. Across blue-light services. Across public safety. Across criminal justice. Across preventative services. So much of our current thinking, language, structures and processes constrains us from doing so;
- The Government is opening up a big opportunity around powers. Stepping up to the plate and responding to that call to action is going to be an important moment to seize for the strategic development of police volunteering. By 2030 the forms that police volunteering takes will be radically different to those we know today;

Being attractive

There are two ways of looking at the current picture of who is attracted to volunteer in policing.

One way of looking at it is that who is attracted currently to volunteer more or less represents the totality of who might be interested, or who policing would wish to attract. In other words, that to seek to widen the net of who we attract into police volunteering is *unrealistic*, taking things beyond the reality of how many people are ever going to want to volunteer, and it is *undesirable* - risking drawing in the wrong sort of people, less skilled, less motivated.

The other way of looking at it is that who we currently attract into police volunteering is principally limited by how attractive (or not) we make police volunteering, and how well we reach out and connect with those who might, in a myriad of different ways and to a myriad of different degrees, wish to voluntarily contribute. Looked at in this way, the question becomes how do we make police volunteering more attractive, and importantly more attractive across broader demographics and within all communities?

The best possible experience

Any high-quality volunteering programme focuses on making the volunteering experience as good as it can possibly be. Our future strategic ambition for Specials and PSVs should be no different.

The national survey reflects some real positives around how police volunteers experience their volunteering but there is still a lot that could be done to make the experience even better:

- Improving supervision and support;
- Better understanding and engaging with the motivations for why people volunteer, and recognising the diversity of reasons which bring people to volunteer with the police and which sustain their volunteering;
- Improving culture, relationships and integration;
- Making recruitment quick, efficient and a positive first introduction to the field of policing;

- Bring in peer assessments and benchmarking against organisational diagnostics, to drive the leadership, culture and skills in policing organisations required to manage volunteers better. Such processes need to engage expertise from outside policing, they need rigour and to be evidence-based, and they need to directly involve volunteers;
- Some of the most important progress that we can make around those who volunteer in policing is actually to get more of the ‘little things’ right – the human touches, recognition, appreciation, basic organisation, communication. Most importantly of all the gold-dust of Specials and volunteers ‘feeling an important part of policing’;
- Remove many of the separations, such as ‘police awards’ and ‘police volunteer awards’; we know from research that volunteers want to feel a valued part of policing so bringing recognition and award ceremonies together will reduce the gap between paid and unpaid people and bring together that collective sense of achievement;
- Stop focusing on ‘retention’, and focus instead on maximising the quality of experience and the ‘whole career impact’ of those who volunteer. Retention (and lack of it) is simply a symptom of other things;
- The skills of those who volunteer in policing need to be better understood, recognised and utilised;
- Understanding how volunteers careers can develop, to keep them interested and engaged by doing new things and developing new skills. The current picture sees too many of those who volunteer in policing stagnate in terms of their activities and development. For example, too many Specials live-out a kind of perpetual apprenticeship, never quite making it to more independent functioning or development into more specialist competencies. Too many police volunteers become stuck in a rut after a year or two of undertaking the same roles and activities, and are left with no options for moving their volunteering careers onwards in ways equivalent to how many Regulars and police staff engage a variety of different roles during their professional careers.

Making every hour count

As with any group of volunteers when giving up their time those who volunteer in policing want that time volunteering to have the maximum impact it can possibly have, to be as worthwhile as it can possibly be.

We need to move on from the limited measures of success of headcount and hours worked, this is no longer acceptable for Regular officers and should not be acceptable for volunteers either.

Beyond counting the number of hours contributed by Specials and volunteers and cross-referencing them with broad categories of activity such as ‘night time economy’ and ‘community policing’, activity should be measured and valued against strategic priorities, including assessments of both outcomes and benefits. The table below gives an example of robust measurement of voluntary contribution.

Activity	Output	Outcomes and benefits
Time spent with vulnerable communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High crime locations; - Vulnerable people; - Vulnerable victims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of hours visible; - Delivery of crime prevention activities; - Engagement activity and time; - Reassurance activity and time; - Engagement with other public services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased organisational understanding of vulnerable geographies and people; - Increased reporting of incidents and crime; - Increased public confidence in policing; - Reduced demand on control room services.

Numbers

Policing needs to get beyond the numbers game; to grow out of a world of politics, vested interests and media soundbites in which the headcount of warranted officers is the ‘currency’ of policing. This applies just as much to Specials – the headcount of Specials is a weak metric for capturing the impact Specials have in making local communities safer. What is measured is seen to matter, so it is important that we do not frame our strategic aspirations for the future of police volunteering around the one-dimensional metric of how many Specials and PSVs we have.

That does not mean that the growth of numbers of Specials and of PSVs is not important. Quite the opposite. The benefits of having a much larger-scale, well-managed volunteer base in policing are clear. By 2030 100,000 and more people volunteering in policing across England and Wales is not an unfeasible goal, and would be truly transformational in impact. But such growth would only be possible with sophisticated investment in recruitment and training, remodelling supervision and management and thinking very differently about roles and resources. Such growth would not be a ‘side issue’ for the organisational development of police organisations; it would instead need to be grasped as core to their growth and development.

Any such numbers growth must not be seen as yet another policing arbitrary target. Numbers growth needs to be seen not as an end in itself. But rather as a key enabler for achieving the maximum impact across police volunteering. Such growth needs to be managed over a strategic period of time, and to emphasise ‘growing well’.

Telling the story

There is already a truly amazing story to tell about Specials and PSVs and the work they do. There is a fundamental question for policing as to why this story, much of the time, goes largely untold. Leaders in policing need to get much better at talking about how important those who volunteer in policing are, the scale of their commitment, and how great they are in what they deliver.

HMIC has an important role to play. HMIC assessments drive activity and improvement in police forces, and are often key to narratives locally and nationally in the media. If we see volunteers as central to police reform and the future delivery of policing, the full volunteer programmes across forces should become a part of HMIC inspection. The HMIC focus on the ‘how’, assessing against criteria of ethical, evidence-based and ‘best’ practice for policing delivery can add real value.

The new approach towards building a national website also presents a big opportunity. A national website would provide a single platform on which the opportunities for volunteering in policing in England and Wales will be explained, advertised and routed through to local processes. This is one location which can begin to share case studies, stories, infographics and videos about the contribution and importance of volunteers to public safety and community wellbeing.

The need to engage the public in a debate about volunteering

There is a real irony that there has been surprisingly little real public engagement about Specials and about volunteering in policing; and there is very little research about how the public views and experiences police volunteers.

If our strategy is one of 'upping the impact' of police volunteering, and that impact is about delivering through a more involved public and delivering to the needs of the public, we need to engage the public much more in all of this than we have done to date.

A national consultation should be undertaken to engage the public across issues of citizen involvement in policing. There would be merit in a national 'Commission' on police volunteering and citizen involvement.

In conclusion: shake it up

There now needs to be some new leadership to shake all this up, and get on with realising the full potential for police volunteering. Success in this area will always be founded on a mix of local enthusiasm, innovation, investment and enterprise, and national drive and planning. Nationally, there needs to be a strong interest and ambition. We need to be able to translate our detailed strategic thinking into elevator moments and pledge cards; to be really clear what it is we intend to achieve, and the key things we will do to achieve those goals.

Nationally there is an important agenda of a stronger framework for volunteer professionalism. Nationally, much more could be done across the coordination of evidence and dissemination of best practice. There are clear scaling advantages for delivering marketing and media on a national scale. It is imperative that police volunteering becomes much more central to national thinking on police reform. To achieve all these things, an exciting bold future for police volunteering requires a vibrant and cohesive national leadership and support.

Locally, we need to recognise the different pace and commitment in different places, and to be honest about that. There are a number of forces which just need to catch up, and their developmental needs in coming years are different to those forces leading the field in respect of realising the value of police volunteering. The future of police volunteering will need those PCCs, Chiefs and forces that are prepared to be trailblazers; and we need a broader strategic environment for those trailblazers to flourish which is a lot more supportive and less censorious of those who dare to be exciting and different across police volunteering.

Both nationally and locally, sustaining our agenda towards the future of Specials and PSVs is the important thing. The last thirty years are littered with initiatives that have come, and have gone. The scale of ambition that is possible to be realised through police volunteering is not a six month project or a three year strategy; this agenda needs a consistent strategic commitment, over a decade and more. This feels like it is a key moment for police volunteering. The next generation of Police and Crime Commissioners and of Chief Constables have the opportunity to put this agenda centre stage, to be prepared to think differently, and to provide the leadership to unlock that enormous potential.

The Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice

The Institute was launched in April 2014. Our work is focused on the reform of public services to meet the needs of victims, witnesses and communities. We aim to fuse expertise in research with experience across policing and criminal justice. The focus of the Institute's work is in increasing understandings of 'what works', translating knowledge into new and effective practice, revitalising relationships between active citizens and their police, meeting the needs and enhancing the wellbeing of victims, and improving working practices and environments of those delivering frontline services.

Our Citizens in Policing work...

Our 'Citizens in Policing' programme within the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice wants to walk side by side with those Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners who are prepared to seize the moment to do things radically differently and better across police volunteering and wider citizen engagement. We are committed to working strategically with forces to develop the evidence-base across police volunteering, and translate that into real improvement in volunteer experiences and impact. And we want to help stimulate the professional debate in policing around those next big, radical ideas for police volunteering.

About the authors...

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