

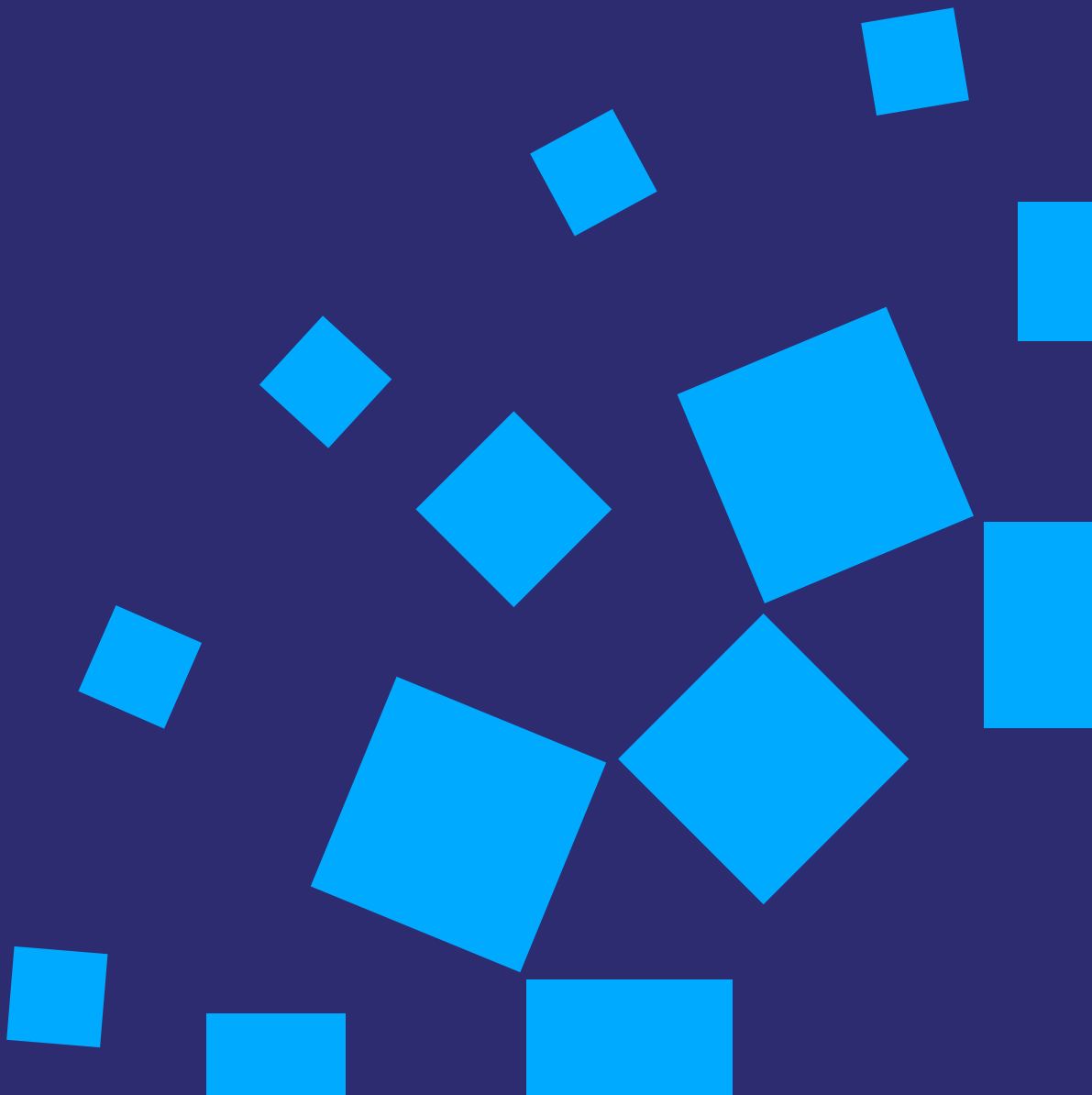


College of  
**Policing**

Working together  
to prevent crime

# PCSO Handbook

2022



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# 1 Foreword

This handbook is for police community support officers (PCSOs), their supervisors, those who deploy PCSOs, chief officers, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and anyone looking to better understand the PCSO role.

This handbook has been reviewed by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead, UNISON and PCSOs prior to publication.

PCSOs have become an integral part of the neighbourhoods policing portfolio since their introduction in 2002. They provide a link between the police and the communities they serve. They bring essential skills, values and diversity to policing. A [role profile for PCSOs](#) can be found on the College of Policing website.

Providing a valuable uniformed presence in our communities, PCSOs focus on understanding and identifying local priorities, solving local problems, tackling low-level crime and engaging with the community. They are often best placed to engage with those who either conduct or are affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB) and disorder.

The community support aspect of the role and effective partnership working with outside agencies should be the focus of the day-to-day activities of a PCSO as opposed to punitive enforcement activities. While enforcement is an important tool, the application of discretion alongside calm dialogue, guidance and support can be a far better instrument to bring about change in behaviour.

This supportive, preventative policing approach differentiates PCSOs from their police officer colleagues and promotes community cohesion by building relationships with key partnerships and groups across the community to resolve problems. A key feature of efficient neighbourhood policing is empowering communities to engage in initiatives that benefit them. PCSOs are key in the communication and coordination for this to be effective.

As the police service continues to ensure the highest standard of policing in the most efficient way, there is a need to ensure the wider policing family is fully integrated to meet the requirements of the community. PCSOs are now fully embedded in the police service. But, as with all other

policing roles, fewer resources and newly emerging threats mean they are taking more of a leading role in providing a service to the public.

This handbook seeks to address the PCSO role and functions in the context of modern policing to ensure that they remain effective and to underpin the principles on which they were originally founded.

This updated handbook seeks to reflect the contemporary landscape and the ways PCSOs contribute to tackling new and emerging community issues and threats. It replaces the previous PCSO operational handbook, published in 2019, and reflects the changes and the development of the PCSO role. These include legislative amendments, entry routes (including the policing education qualifications framework (PEQF)), the 2018 [neighbourhood policing guidelines](#), local policing delivery plan 2020-2022 and the ambitions set out in the [NPCC Policing Vision 2025](#). The Policing Vision 2025 set out a road map for policing for 10 years from 2015. It acknowledged:

‘The communities we serve are increasingly diverse and complex, necessitating a more sophisticated response to the challenges we face now and in the future.’

- As with other roles across the service, the Policing Vision 2025 will have a significant effect on the focus of the PCSO role and the underpinning skills required to meet challenges. Five key priorities for reform underpin the Policing Vision 2025. They are the key drivers for transformative change across the policing landscape up until 2025.
- Local policing remains the bedrock of British policing but with far more integration with health, education, social services and community projects to intervene early to resolve the problems that cause crime and ASB, reducing demand on policing and other public services. The ambition is for more multi-agency teams or hubs to pool funds rather than addressing problems in silos.
- Specialist capabilities, such as armed policing, surveillance and major investigations, will be delivered through a network, making them more affordable, with surplus costs available to reinvest in other priorities.

- Police officers will be trained and equipped to respond to the dramatic rise in criminals taking advantage of the internet. The processes for sharing evidence will become completely digital, saving significant resources. The public will have the option to contact the police and report crime quickly and easily online.
- The College of Policing will work with forces to give our workforce the skills and powers they need to meet these challenging requirements. There will be a focus on making policing more representative of its communities and finding a better balance between personal accountability and a bureaucratic fear of making mistakes.
- Business support functions, such as IT and human resources, will be consolidated in cross-force units or integrated with local authorities and emergency services, with more shared procurement to reduce costs.

In 2013/14, the College of Policing consulted forces to understand how PCSOs were used and whether there was a marked shift from their intended purpose. A further survey was completed by the NPCC in 2021 to update these findings.

Extensive consultation with key stakeholders from both inside and outside the service has been carried out to identify the content required for the new PEQF PCSO curriculum.

Although this handbook is intended to define the PCSO role, it also continues to allow police chief officers and PCCs some local flexibility<sup>1</sup> to address neighbourhood problems in innovative and forward-thinking ways, drawing on a clear evidence base of what works.

In 2017, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 was enacted, which affected the discretionary powers that chief officers can designate to their PCSOs. This handbook focuses on the PCSO-specific powers available to chief officers to bestow on their PCSOs. While some give access to additional available powers, research indicates that not all of those currently granted are used.

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<sup>1</sup> Flexibility should be limited to making the best use of the discretionary powers available and not operating outside a PCSO's employment terms and conditions or where they are not trained. They should not be seen as a substitute resource for tasks ordinarily undertaken by a police officer.

Consideration should be made as to whether any power bestowed on a PCSO may cause an increase in enforcement rather than a community-focused non-punitive outcome. The use of discretionary powers by PCSOs, however, should remain a decision for chief officers based on their own policing needs.

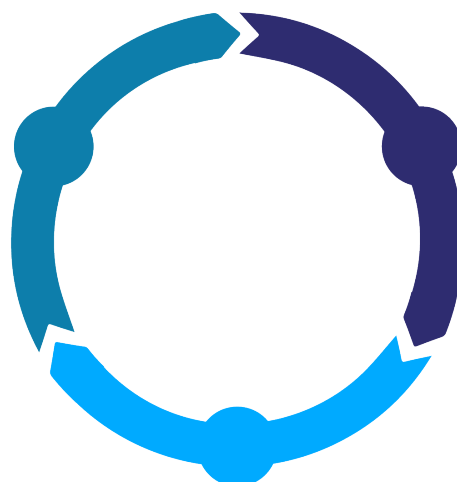
With the introduction of PCCs there has been an appetite to broaden active citizenship in policing, and a number have committed to increase visibility at a time of reducing resources. This handbook relates solely to police employees who remain under the control and direction of their chief officer, with powers granted under statute.

In its 2016 police effectiveness report, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) raised concerns that local policing had been eroded and that many forces had failed to ‘redefine’ neighbourhood policing in the context of reduced budgets and changing demand.

In June 2018, the College of Policing, working with the NPCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) published neighbourhood policing guidelines to directly address this concern.

The guidelines contain a modern definition of neighbourhood policing. The defining features of neighbourhood policing are:

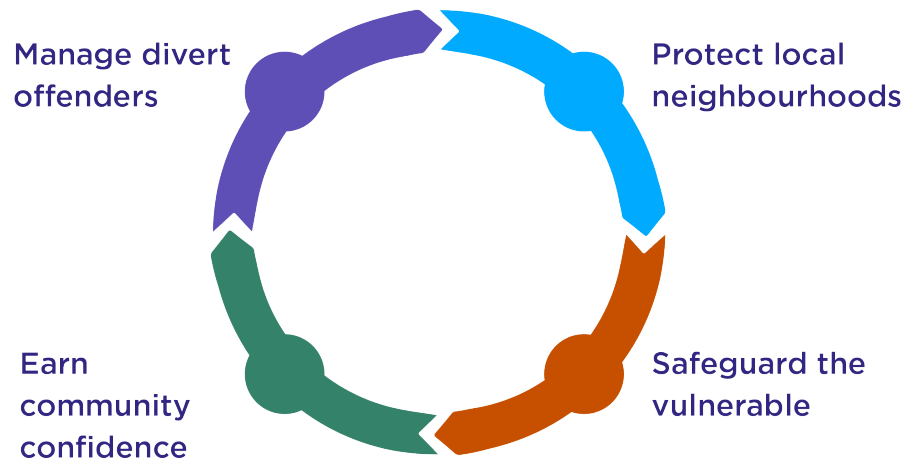
**Collaborative problem-solving with communities supported by intergrated working with private, public and voluntary sectors**



**Police officers, staff and volunteers accessible to, responsible for and accountable to communities**

**Community engagement that builds trust and develops a sophisticated understanding of community needs**

The combination of these features distinguishes neighbourhood policing from other broader policing functions. It is an essential part of the UK policing approach that aims to connect our communities directly and seamlessly to specialist policing services at a local, regional and national level. It recognises that those involved in neighbourhood policing need time and space to work in a proactive and preventative way to:



It encourages the use of locally tailored evidence-based practice, for a sustained impact on reducing harm, repeat demand and increasing community resilience. Alongside community engagement, it requires effective data sharing between different agencies for problems to be identified and properly understood, and for effective decision-making and action at the neighbourhood level. Defining problems with precision helps to better target action, assess the effect of interventions and ensure limited resources are not wasted on ineffective activities – all of which are key features of a PCSO.



## 2 Introduction

The NPCC Policing Vision 2025 sets out a transformative agenda, which will enable the service to meet the challenges of modern policing, the changing nature of crimes and how they are committed and new and emerging threats to community cohesion and harmony. The Police Service Statement of Mission and Values 2025 (set out in the Policing Vision 2015) highlights the significance of the PCSO role in meeting the overall vision:

‘...to make communities safer by upholding the law fairly and firmly; preventing crime and anti-social behaviour; keeping the peace; protecting and reassuring communities; investigating crime and bringing offenders to justice.’

The Vision places providing an improved policing service for the public at the heart of its professional agenda. It states that ‘the link between communities and the police will continue to form the bedrock of British policing’. It also identifies the ‘need to develop a proactive and sophisticated understanding of community needs, to keep people safe, particularly as communities become more diverse and complex’ as a key challenge.

PCSOs were introduced under the [Police Reform Act 2002](#) to allow chief officers:

‘...to appoint suitable support staff (community support officers) to roles providing a visible presence in the community with powers sufficient to deal with minor issues. Such staff would be under the formal direction and control of the chief officer.’

The Act suggested the key function of PCSOs was to ‘provide additional capacity to combat low-level disorder’ and thereby help to reduce the public’s fear of crime. This translates into providing a visible uniformed presence and exercising powers to deal with minor issues in a neighbourhood policing context. It also gives warranted officers greater capacity to focus on more serious crime and disorder and operational policing demands.

PCSOs play an essential role in neighbourhood policing teams and deliver their own unique and valuable contribution to policing. While this handbook explores examples of operational deployment, the fundamental precedents in relation to the role for which they are employed should be borne in mind. These are to:

- undertake public-facing duties in uniform
- be visible in their communities on targeted foot or cycle patrol (vehicle if rural community)
- deal with ASB, low-level crime and incidents, local problems/priorities and quality of life issues
- identify, support and improve service to victims and vulnerable people
- conduct community engagement and problem-solving activity

The [role profile and the underpinning educational requirements of PCSOs](#) have been revised to assist the service in meeting its obligations under the neighbourhood policing guidelines and the Policing Vision 2025. At times of high demand, there is a risk that PCSOs will be deployed outside their role profile to meet operational needs, such as responding to general calls for service from the public. This practice should be monitored, especially where it is likely to remove a PCSO from their community, or places them at risk by assigning tasks to them which they do not have appropriate protective equipment for and powers to deal with. Great care should also be exercised when forces consider additional roles or responsibilities for PCSOs that sit outside of the core role identified. While an innovative approach to delivering improved local policing services is encouraged, the values of a role built on local visibility and problem solving should not be lost.

While chief officers can be flexible surrounding PCSO deployments to ensure the best policing, the following should be considered by those completing a task requested of them:

- Am I responding in accordance with my role profile?
- Is what I am doing lawful?
- Is it proportionate?
- Has a risk assessment been conducted?
- Does it reduce my ability to be visible and accessible to the public?
- Am I trained for the task?
- Have the necessary powers been authorised?
- Is the equipment appropriate for the task?
- Is the deployment likely to have a negative impact on satisfaction and confidence?

## 3 Role and purpose

Every PCSO should do the following.

- Be integrated into a neighbourhood policing team (normally geographic but it could be for a defined community of interest, such as safer transport teams, new and emerging communities, online communities).
- Develop comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the local community in which they operate to identify and effectively support those in their community affected by offending and those who are vulnerable or at risk.
- Proactively engage and develop close working ties with the community, using appropriate communication methods and IT systems for fostering, promoting and maintaining channels of communication.
- Develop close working relationships with key groups, agencies (such as local authority, housing associations, schools, watch schemes) and individuals to identify and tackle issues such as ASB and low-level offending.
- Build rapport, trust and confidence with individuals across the community, providing advice and guidance in support of their needs (such as crime prevention advice and mediation between members of the community).
- Contribute to the planning, implementation, analysis and review of evidence-based policing initiatives to address community problems and share the outcomes of those initiatives with all key stakeholders, both inside and outside the service.
- Gather information and intelligence to assist and support law enforcement and community objectives.
- Respond to incidents of low-level offending and ASB. Where incidents are outside their authority, they should seek to prevent escalation until relieved by a qualified police constable.

- Defuse conflict or threat of conflict using personal safety techniques and equipment learnt in training. If this is not possible, PCSOs should ensure attending constables are informed by keeping a safe distance and using their police radio to provide updates to other colleagues about the incident.
- Attend court and give witness testimony in relation to any incidents where they have personal knowledge or involvement.
- Be motivated critical thinkers and capable of self-deployment. PCSO activity should be targeted through appropriate partnership tasking arrangements.

PCSOs work in local communities as part of neighbourhood policing teams (NPT) to deliver an effective local service as outlined in the 2018 neighbourhood policing guidelines.

The majority of PCSO time should be spent in neighbourhoods engaging with communities and not in the office or police station completing administrative functions.

To be effective, all officers and staff need to be fully integrated, understand each other's role and purpose, and work together towards common community goals.

Supervisors charged with the command, control and direction of PCSOs must be fully acquainted with their terms and conditions and employment as detailed in their force role profile and relevant national and local collective agreements.

The minimum skillset required is listed in the role profile listed on the College website.

The fundamental role of the PCSO is to contribute to the policing of neighbourhoods through targeted visible patrol, with the purpose of engaging with and reassuring the public; increasing orderliness in public places; being accessible to communities; and working at a local level with stakeholders to solve or mitigate issues, problems or safety concerns faced by the community.

It is a decision for each chief officer as to which powers their PCSOs will have. This could be traditional PCSO powers, such as dealing with ASB

or, where chiefs feel it appropriate, any power of a police officer that is not in the list of [excluded powers in Schedule 10 to the Policing and Crime Act 2017](#). PCSOs cannot be designated with powers under the Terrorism Act 2000.

PCSOs help to reduce crime and ASB to make people feel safer in their communities. The principles of neighbourhood policing emphasise the importance of delivering community engagement in partnership with other key agencies.

PCSOs are not substitutes for police officers. They have a distinct role, which avoids high-risk activity and places no duty on them to engage in risk beyond their levels of training. It should be noted that only sworn police officers should be used in the following circumstances.

- **Wherever there is a clear likelihood that a confrontation will arise.** However, PCSOs should have sufficient support, equipment and training to cope safely with confrontations that arise spontaneously during their primary role of patrol, reassurance and tackling ASB.
- **Where there is scope for exercise of a high degree of discretion.** For example, where a situation is complex owing to several different parties involved, where there is sensitivity within a community about police action or where a large range of enforcement options are available.
- **Where police action is likely to lead to a higher-than-normal risk of harm to anyone.**
- **Where there is a clear likelihood that police action will include any infringement of a person's human rights.** For example, intruding into their privacy or deprivation of their liberty (beyond the temporary detention period available to PCSOs).
- **Where the incident is one that is likely to lead to significant further work that has the potential to adversely affect the PCSO's fundamental role in the community.**

Where a policing incident directly links to the need for undertaking a priority, serious or complex investigation.

## 4 Legislation and powers

The method for chief officers to designate powers to PCSOs has been substantially amended through the enactment of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The previous lists of standard and discretionary powers have been removed.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 amended Section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which enables chief officers of police to designate any person who is employed by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and is under the direction and control of that chief officer as a police community support officer.

Chief officers must decide which powers they wish to designate to their PCSOs. All police constable powers are available to be designated, with the exception of those outlined in Schedule 10 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Schedule 3B of the Police Reform Act 2002 details excluded powers from designation under Section 38.

This includes power of arrest, stop and search, powers under the Terrorism Act 2000, those available under the Official Secrets Act, and powers which by virtue require the officer to hold a police officer rank above that of constable.

Powers to enforce local authority bylaws remain unchanged but require these to be specifically designated.

Research carried out by the neighbourhood policing programme indicates that most powers issued are seldom used, and this is particularly the case when large numbers are designated. There is also variation between forces.

Chief officers should satisfy themselves that there is an operational requirement to designate specific powers. Any increase will have additional training/cost requirements, potential personal safety implications, create possible public confusion and blur the roles between PCSOs and warranted officers.

To prevent confusion, it is helpful for PCSOs to have consistent powers throughout a force area but there is nothing to prevent PCSOs in different parts of a force area from being designated with different powers, depending on local need.

However, this may cause confusion among the public and absolute clarity is needed so that those supervising and leading PCSOs understand any anomalies across geographical boundaries.

Good practice indicates that powers should be set force-wide and, where collaborative opportunities with surrounding forces are extant or being considered, there should be commonality.

The term community support officer is widely used to describe a variety of staff from differing agencies fulfilling a community safety function. The term police community support officer (PCSO) should be used to describe staff in all forces who are designated by chief officers under Section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002.

Further information on PCSO powers can be found in the [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#).

The duties of PCSOs are discussed elsewhere in this document, but it is important that their role in individual forces is determined before the powers that are to be designated are chosen. Overall, the powers of PCSOs need to be set in context. PCSOs, like police officers, will spend much of their time undertaking street duties without recourse to their powers.

It is likely that chief officers will wish to restrict the powers designated to those necessary to meet the envisaged deployment of PCSOs. This will help to minimise training requirements and ensure that PCSOs are focused on their core role of engagement.

Section 42 of the Police Reform Act 2002 requires PCSOs to produce a 'designation' upon request when exercising any powers under the Act. The designation is not prescribed but it should list which powers have been designated and must describe the approved uniform. This section also gives the chief officer power to modify or withdraw the designation as appropriate.

PCSOs are not under a duty to act in any given situation, unlike the duty falling to police officers. Although PCSOs do have a duty under [paragraph 2\(4A\) of Schedule 4 of the Police Reform Act 2002](#) (when designated) to remain with a police officer when transferring control of a detained person to his or her custody until the police officer has the person under control.



PCSOs retain the powers of arrest of a citizen under both common law and Section 24A of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. They also have the power to use reasonable force in defence of themselves or another.

Section 46 of the Police Reform Act 2002 creates offences relating specifically to designated persons (including PCSOs), namely:

- assaulting a designated person in the execution of their duty
- resisting or wilfully obstructing a designated person in the execution of their duty
- impersonating, or falsely claiming to be, a designated person with intent to deceive
- being a PCSO and making a false suggestion that one possesses powers that exceed those designated by the chief officer

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 and the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 created additional powers. Chief officers should decide which they will grant to PCSOs in their force areas based on community need. For example, granting the power to deal with an offence under Section 5(1) or 8(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 involving a contravention of a prohibition or restriction that relates to stopping, waiting or parking at or near a school entrance may be wholly appropriate given local public feeling and what is a regular community problem in many forces.

## **Community safety accreditation schemes**

The Police Reform Act 2002 allows a chief officer to designate powers to individuals who are employed by a **third-party organisation involved in the delivery of community safety**. They are not part of the extended police family but may wear a uniform to identify themselves, for example housing wardens, security officers and local authority staff. While their powers are conferred by the police, the individual is not a police employee nor are they under the direction and control of the chief officer – both of which are very different from PCSOs.

## Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The issuing of incapacitant spray, handcuffs and batons can be considered as options for PCSOs but it is not expected that forces are required to do so as a matter of course.

The issue of handcuffs may have merit when a PCSO has been designated with the power of detention, but issue of this equipment should only occur after a detailed threat and risk assessment process and supported by appropriate and approved training and assessment.

The role of a PCSO, the geographic area covered, and availability of police officer assistance should all be considered when deciding what PPE should be issued.

Section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967, Section 117 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and common law (breach of the peace and self-defence) provide legislation around reasonable force.

Incapacitant spray is a prohibited weapon under Section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968. Section 54(3) of the Act states that a person is exempt from Section 5(1)(b) if they are:

- a member of a police force
- a civilian officer
- included in certain categories specified in the Act

A PCSO is exempt from firearms legislation, under Section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968, by virtue of subsection (b). It is lawful for a PCSO to possess CS spray under the direction and control of a chief officer.

A baton is an offensive weapon by virtue of Section 1(1) of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 as it is specifically made for causing injury.

But possession does not constitute an offence where lawful authority exists. Therefore, possession of a baton by an on-duty PCSO when authorised by a chief officer will be lawful.

## 5 Finance

From April 2013, ring-fenced funding for PCSOs in England was subsumed into the police main grant<sup>2</sup>, giving chief officers and PCCs freedom and flexibility to make decisions regarding resourcing in their force areas.

Following this change, several forces have allocated significant sums to fund PCSO posts, either entirely from the main grant or using that money to attract matched funding from partners. This should be encouraged as it shows forces and partners recognise the positive contribution PCSOs make in neighbourhood policing as they become further embedded in the wider police family.

The continued assistance of matched funding from partners is critical in maintaining and increasing the number of PCSOs as necessary. The police main grant is not the only source of funding that should be relied on. Specifically recognised under the local policing priority of the Policing Vision 2025, neighbourhood policing and community safety is an outcome shared by other partners. It is important to think about how partners can be engaged and contribute. Creative problem solving could lead to partnership working with, for example, schools, housing developments and shopping and business parks.

It should be noted that external funding for the recruitment of PCSOs is predicated on the understanding that the chief constable retains the ultimate decision on where they should be deployed, based on the local strategic assessment as part of the community safety partnership collective leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Funding is different in Wales, with the Welsh Government providing additional money to support PCSO numbers.

## 6 Duties

PCSOs should be fully included in the work of the neighbourhood policing team (NPT) wherever possible. The practice of assigning PCSOs mundane and isolated tasks which may not form part of their core role or for which they are not trained should be avoided. This undermines their role and may lead to low morale and team exclusion. An NPT that works as an integrated team (at all levels and within all roles) creates a more successful and enjoyable working environment.

Local commanders, contact management staff, frontline officers and supervisors need to be aware that PCSOs have a different level of duty and expectation and will be within their rights to decline to perform tasks for which they are not trained. For example, a PCSO might reasonably observe and follow a shoplifter rather than intervene and detain them.

While PCSOs can be granted powers to seize property, given their status in the community, their participation in search warrants and other enforcement activity should be carefully considered. However, consideration can be given at a local level to deployment in the immediate area to offer a visible presence and reassurance, and minimise concern in the locality.

Recognition that a PCSO must be more prepared than is traditionally the case with police officers to walk away from a situation is essential.

Line managers supervising PCSOs should acquaint themselves with the range of learning undertaken before deploying PCSOs to active duties, to maximise their potential and avoid placing PCSOs in situations they are not equipped to handle.

Forces should consider the burden placed on supervisors of excessive numbers of staff, and the management training they require to lead PCSOs, police staff and volunteers. Using an NPT model may assist the process of supervision, as well as integrating PCSOs in core policing.

There must be a clear command structure to supervise, develop and inspire PCSOs.

As they generally lack avenues for promotion, there should be opportunities for them to develop their role, skills and experience. For example, supporting PCSOs to lead and develop projects, to work with specific groups or to address specific issues in the community may help to avoid stagnation, increase their sense of worth and ownership, decrease boredom in the role and reduce turnover. Within limits, as PCSOs will generally patrol independently, enabling them to act independently and autonomously in the community will not only benefit the self-esteem of the PCSO, but may also significantly enhance the profile and public perception of PCSOs in general.

PCSOs will ordinarily report to a neighbourhood policing team sergeant or a neighbourhood police officer line managed by an inspector or neighbourhood sergeant with responsibility for a neighbourhood policing team or sector. This allows close alignment and use of the role. In all cases, it is essential that supervisors are trained in the management and supervision of PCSOs and that they fully understand the role, benefits, limitations and available powers, as well as terms and conditions. This will ensure they have the means to assess the workloads of their staff and that staff understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed.

There have been two examples of forces creating 'PCSO supervisor' roles.

In one force area, this was introduced to decrease staff to supervisor ratios and improve the quality of supervision for PCSOs and other neighbourhood policing officers. The example provided resulted in PCSO supervisors taking over the supervision of PCSOs from the neighbourhood sergeant and became responsible for tasking, performance reviews and all other aspects of supervision of the PCSOs. The PCSO supervisor was managed by the neighbourhood policing inspector.

The force found the implementation of the PCSO supervisor role resulted in positive and measurable improvements in supervisory crime review quality and timeliness, quality of briefings, decreased sickness absence and increased community visibility.

The PCSO supervisors were given personal development review objectives like the neighbourhood sergeants and they led on problem-solving and engagement activity. Their implementation for the trialling force has resulted in better quality submissions and evaluation. A single 'bar' was placed on their epaulettes to signify them as a first line supervisor.

They have attended partnership meetings as supervisory representation and inclusive terminology is used throughout the neighbourhood team to refer to all PCSO supervisor and sergeants as 'first line supervisors'.

Understanding the PCSO role will greatly increase their effectiveness and ensure that they are not used inappropriately. Forces may consider integrating the work of neighbourhood and response officers to facilitate a better understanding of the work that PCSOs do and the value that they can bring to the organisation. Alternatively, forces could require all officers to spend a certain amount of time working on an NPT as part of their training or professional development to gain a better understanding of the work that these officers and staff do.

## 7 Operational deployment

The primary role of a PCSO is to contribute to the policing of neighbourhoods through highly visible targeted patrols to reassure the public, increase orderliness in public places and be accessible to communities and partner agencies for problem solving at a local level.

The College of Policing role profile for PCSOs is aligned to the neighbourhood policing guidelines and the Policing Vision 2025.

The mission of policing is to prevent crime and protect the public. The Policing Vision 2025 applies to the whole police service, setting out what policing will look like in 2025 and beyond. It is underpinned by the police [Code of Ethics](#). PCSOs, who are often the first point of public contact, are crucial to the delivery of a professional service and maintaining public satisfaction and confidence in policing.

Local officers and neighbourhood policing teams will build relationships and confidence with local communities to support them and work with partners to prevent crime and deal with local issues. They will also solve problems and protect people through a focus on victims, offenders and locations. A greater emphasis on evidence-based practice will equip the workforce with the advanced skills needed to do this.

Centrally mandated operating models and national performance targets have been removed by the Home Office in favour of the overarching priority to reduce crime. It remains a matter for chief officers to control and direct their staff in accordance with their local police and crime plan objectives as set by the PCC. These should reflect the views of local people, help police officers reduce crime and be underpinned by the neighbourhood policing guidelines.

Effective PCSOs can directly affect police performance and public reassurance. They have a clear role to play in helping forces to achieve performance priorities on the fear of crime, feelings of public safety, public satisfaction levels and supporting overall performance.

Effective deployment of PCSOs will need to take account of national, force and local policing priorities. PCSOs should receive regular intelligence briefings relevant to their area and be tasked in accordance

with these. They should not, however, be deployed to perform tasks for which they are not trained.

Forces need to equip their PCSOs in accordance with their different plans for deployment and with health and safety considerations.

Access to vehicles in rural areas may be necessary, although the clear emphasis of PCSOs is high-visibility foot or cycle patrol. In urban areas, walking, cycling or public transport should be sufficient to allow PCSOs to patrol effectively.

Where PCSOs are allocated force vehicles, these should be liveried so that the public recognises them as belonging to the police.

While HMICFRS does not recommend the use of PCSOs to investigate crimes, it is recognised there is an investigative element to both initial reports of crime and ASB. This creates a paradox, as PCSOs become part of the investigation. There will always be a clear reassurance, crime prevention and deterrent role for PCSOs. With comprehensive crime prevention training, they are well placed to conduct follow-up reassurance patrols and provide victims and neighbours with crime prevention advice. However, by this very activity a PCSO may become involved in the investigation process, for example where information/intelligence is offered by a victim or neighbour. Training should be in place to support how such information is managed and processed so that, while the recommendations of the inspectorate are observed, this does not frustrate investigating the crime.

There may be a false expectation that PCSOs, like police officers, have a duty to engage in almost any situation or perform any task asked of them. To preserve their core role, and to ensure clarity for all concerned, it will need to be made clear that PCSOs have a limited number of powers and tasks, outside which they should neither stray nor be expected to.

Forces, local commanders and PCCs may wish to raise public awareness of the boundaries of the role that PCSOs carry out.

Tools to help avoid these pitfalls include publishing and agreeing intervention guidance and training PCSOs to deal with incidents through consideration of the situation, their powers and safety. Application of



the [National Decision Model \(NDM\)](#) as part of daily interaction will assist PCSOs and those charged with their supervision to ensure the role is preserved and risks are minimised.

PCSOs will be in a position to gather considerable intelligence, which will need to be processed, in accordance with the [intelligence cycle](#). The potential for PCSOs to gain access to people who might ordinarily resist giving information to a police officer should not be overlooked. Forces will need to ensure that information sources are handled and overseen in accordance with the prevailing legislation and local procedure.

PCSOs should not be used to convey detainees to, or from, custody in the absence of a police officer, or to enter a custody suite to book a prisoner in. Such activity detracts from their main role and erodes the trust and confidence that PCSOs seek to build with the community. It also carries significant health and safety and legislative risk.

Examples of local good practice should be shared among forces through the [Knowledge Hub](#) (login required) where there are communities both for neighbourhood policing and problem solving.

## 8 Recruitment and employment

The recruitment of police staff and their terms and conditions is a local matter for chief officers and PCCs. There will always be relevant collective agreements locally and in both England and Wales with recognised trade unions. This should be carried out in consultation with force HR departments and recognised trade unions to ensure legal compliance. Recognised trade unions can provide advice and support to PCSOs who are their members as appropriate. Further information should be sought by referring to the **Police Staff Council for England and Wales where the force applies the agreements of the Council and/or to local force collective agreements and guidance.**

## 9 Training and development

Before designating a person as a PCSO, a chief officer (or director general) must be satisfied that the person:

- is suitable to carry out the functions of the PCSO role
- is capable of effectively carrying out those functions
- has received adequate training to carry out the core functions of the PCSO role, as outlined in the national standard for PCSO learning and assessment in England and Wales under the PEQF

This places a clear duty of care on forces to ensure that all PCSOs can fulfil their role and that they are trained effectively before they are deployed to their duties.

The College of Policing, in partnership with higher education (HE) and key stakeholders across the service, has developed a full national curriculum to support the initial learning of PCSOs under the PEQF. This curriculum is accredited by national qualifications offered by either HE or Ofqual-regulated national awarding organisations.

The curriculum is based on the national policing curriculum for police constables, which will enable any PCSO who transfers into a PC role to gain recognition of prior learning (RPL), meaning they will only need to cover a percentage of the first year of the PC degree apprenticeship (PCDA) or degree-holder entry programme (DHEP). The College has provided RPL guidance and details of the additional learning required to complete the first part of the PC initial learning programme.

- HE-administered qualifications will have the title Level 4 HE Certificate in Community Policing Practice.
- Ofqual-regulated awarding organisation administered qualifications will have the title RQF Level 4 Diploma in Community Policing Practice.

All programmes are scrutinised by the College of Policing during the quality standards assessment (QSA) process to ensure that, regardless of the learning organisation delivering the programme, the same assessment criteria and learning outcomes are used.

All programmes need to meet the core requirements set out in the national programme specification for PCSO programmes, which is available through [College Learn](#) (formerly the Managed Learning Environment – login required). Compliance is tested through the aforementioned QSA process. Please refer to the programme specification for more details on how the programme can be delivered.

Initial learning PCSO initial learning under the PEQF can be delivered as an apprenticeship or as a stand-alone programme. Forces should note that apprenticeships in England are governed in a different way from those in Wales and ensure that any implications are considered. The main differences are in respect of funding and the requirement for an end point assessment.

All programmes, apprenticeships or non-apprenticeships are based on the same curriculum, incorporating the same learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Where a force delivers the programme using in-force training resources (as opposed to contracting with an external provider), they will need to engage with a suitably approved awarding organisation to accredit the programme and award the qualification. However, all PCSO training delivered locally must be accredited by a confirmed national qualification. Therefore, in all other circumstances, forces will need to develop partnerships with either an awarding organisation or HE to accredit the learning with one or other qualification previously mentioned.

The duration of all the programmes is 12 months – dictated by the volume of curriculum content and the academic credits (120 at level 4) associated with the programme. All programmes should:

- meet all the learning outcomes of the national PCSO PEQF curriculum
- contain a confirmed national PCSO qualification (outlined previously)

- contain learning and assessment (related to both knowledge and understanding and the application of skills in the workplace)
- require participants to provide evidence against the full PCSO competence criteria, collated in an operational competence portfolio (OCP)
- include a structured monitoring and development process comparable to that of police constables. Appropriate monitoring documentation, such as an OCP, should be used

In addition to the learning programme, all PCSOs should undertake regular continuation training in self-defence and first aid, as recommended by local force procedures and College of Policing directives.

Further training aimed at enhancing and building on current skills should also be designed according to local need, then evidenced and subject to a learning-needs analysis.

Whenever new powers become available, individual forces need to ensure that PCSOs have been adequately trained and can use those additional powers effectively before the chief officer designates them.

Some forces have trained and appointed current PCSOs as tutors or mentors. This should be seen as good practice, particularly as it develops PCSOs laterally in the absence of a career pathway beyond their core role. They should be able to undertake a coaching/mentoring role, such as a tutor constable, having received the relevant training and accreditation.

## 10 Uniform and appointments

PCSOs should be recognisable to the public as police staff but visibly distinct from regular police officers. This is to ensure they are separated from police officers so they are not confused by the public. It has been clearly expressed by UNISON PCSO members that there should be no difference in the style and design of the force crest on their headgear/uniform to that of warranted police officers in the same force. It is our understanding that most forces outside the Metropolitan Police Service already provide the same force crest to PCSOs as are provided on police constable uniforms. However, if the handbook were able to address any deficit in this regard, our members would be very grateful. Providing PCSOs with a badge that is not the force crest does not accord these staff the same respect as police officers.

The Home Office preference is that PCSOs look similar across the country.

Forces should also note that there are special safety considerations about headgear (for example, level of head protection) and reflective wear (for example, European standard EN471). A rigorous health and safety risk assessment should identify the safety standards which apply. Forces should also be able to respond to any national changes in relation to head protection as they emerge.

The issue of additional badging, for example, to reflect that a PCSO has been provided via a local source of funding such as a local authority should be avoided. This has the potential to lead to confusion with local authority funded wardens so is not recommended as good practice. This position should be outlined to any partner agency prior to the start of any partnership agreement.

Appointments need to be considered regarding the type of duties envisaged. PCSOs will need access to:

- communication (airwave terminal or mobile phones in rural areas with poor coverage)
- a means of recording evidence in respect of offences they deal with or witness (a pocket notebook, incident or offence booklet or equivalent)
- equipment for their protection in accordance with health and safety risk assessments

Each force will need to consider what level of PPE will be appropriate to its PCSOs. Passive protective equipment, such as body armour, has become commonplace and forces should consider issue of this equipment considering local health and safety assessments.

Body-worn cameras should be made available to PCSOs wherever possible.

The current assessment of the PCSO role indicates there is no requirement for the issue of incapacitant spray and baton. Where the power to detain has been conferred, appropriate PPE should be available to meet their safety needs and in accordance with the outcomes of a thorough risk assessment. For further information on legislation surrounding the issue of PPE, please refer to Community safety accreditation schemes of this handbook.

There are considerable officer safety training requirements associated with the issuing and use of PPE. Forces will need to commit resources to both initial and regular refresher training. Training is, however, essential and forces must demonstrate adequate levels of competence in the event of any subsequent complaint, challenge or litigation.

Forces must clearly define the role and powers of their PCSOs prior to making decisions about PPE.

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## About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)



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