

Volunteers and Special Constables Task Group:

Update on Special Constables

Purpose

1. To report the findings of the Task Group having reviewed the current position with Special Constables (SCs) in Wiltshire and Swindon.

Background

2. The Task Group's [final report](#) was endorsed by the Panel in June 2014 and made a number of recommendations to the Commissioner about the recruitment and deployment of volunteers and SCs, which featured prominently in the Police and Crime Plan 2013-17.
3. On 23 May 2016 Cllr Richard Britton (Chairman of the Task Group) and Cindy Creasy (Independent Member) met with the following to review the current picture regarding SCs:

Angus Macpherson
Kieran Kilgallen
Simone Matthews

Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner
Chief Executive, Wiltshire OPCC
Communications Officer

Paul Mills
Phil Staynings

Assistant Chief Constable, Wiltshire Police
Head of Crime Prevention, Wiltshire Police

4. For context, the task group's original final report made the following key points regarding SCs:
 - The Police and Crime Plan included an objective of recruiting 300 SCs, but it was agreed that this was unlikely to be achieved at the time.
 - The task group was not aware of any recruitment or retention strategy in place for SCs.
 - Without a detailed role description for SCs, the task group could not assess the potential impact of not being able to enlist them in sufficient numbers
 - Arrangements for planning, funding and delivering training for SCs appeared not to be integrated with training arrangements within the regular force.
 - SCs appeared to represent good value for money and could play a valuable role in neighbourhood policing.

- There was a need to clarify what role SCs should play, the numbers to be recruited, how this would be achieved, training arrangements and how SCs' contributions

Evidence

5. A contract is about to be agreed with an external company to deliver a SCs recruitment strategy, based on a model implemented successfully in Northamptonshire. The aim of the contract will be to recruit and train approximately 500 SCs who will be volunteers. The contract will commence in August and run for 18 months. The project board is led by ACC Paul Mills.
6. In terms of SCs' role, the vision remains as stated in the original Police and Crime Plan, with SCs essentially forming part of Neighbourhood Police Teams (NPTs), and then the Community Policing Teams, assigned to an area with a regular sergeant. They will be used primarily in that area, but with some use at largescale events elsewhere. They should feel, and be considered, a part of the Force rather than as an adjunct to it and will be a key component of the community policing model.
7. It is also intended to recognise people's different motivations for becoming an SC and deploy them in their particular areas of interest where possible. The Force will look to focus on trying to ensure retention levels remain high.
8. Initial training will include working alongside Regular force colleagues to give them a good grounding in operational police work, further top-up training provided once they are active. This has helped speed the training up to take only 10 weeks, this having been identified as an issue previously.
9. A priority is to ensure that once recruited the SCs are used, monitored and supported appropriately. They will have the same powers as Regulars, but will only be asked to perform duties that they have been trained for. They will also be given the kit they need to do their job, e.g. radios.
10. Approximately 18 months ago it was difficult to assess the numbers of SCs on active duty and their input, but monitoring arrangements have improved significantly. Currently SCs contribute on average 16 hours of active duty per week. Work is being done to develop more sophisticated ways of measuring their value and effectiveness. Quantitative/qualitative data on the input of SCs will be provided at the quarterly senior command meetings.

Findings

11. The task group supports the commitment to recruiting greater numbers of SCs and the acknowledgement of the challenges raised by the task group in its original report. It would like to raise the following issues for attention in order to support the effective use of SCs in helping to deliver the Police and Crime Plan:

12. Recruiting sufficient numbers of SCs is the first step but retaining them will be equally important if the money and time invested in recruitment is to reap rewards. This has proved challenging in the past and a concerted programme of work, along with dedicated resources, will be needed. Maintaining SCs' motivation will be key and the following are suggested as priorities in achieving this:

- Recruitment being specifically targeted at the delivery of the Force's objectives i.e. individuals are attracted and recruited on the basis of having the right skills and interests. It should not be merely a "numbers game".
- Recruitment being clear about the nature of the SC role and the commitment required.
- Having appropriate training in place to support SCs in fulfilling their role.
- SCs being genuinely integrated within the Force and they are recognised as a valued part of the organisation
- SCs being deployed to duties that suit individuals' strengths and areas of interest wherever possible.
- Implementation of a strong methodology for ensuring the impacts, costs and benefits of SC deployment are measured and can be learned from.

13. With the move to a community policing model, the task group would appreciate clarity on the extent to which SCs will be based in specific localities. Giving SCs dedicated, local patches (as much as possible) may increase their retention in the long term.

Proposal

14. The Panel to note the report.

Cllr Richard Britton, Chairman of the Volunteers and Special Constables Task Group

Report author: Henry Powell, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 718052,
henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk