

PCSO supervisor role in Avon and Somerset

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Avon and Somerset Police has introduced PCSO supervisors in all their neighbourhood policing teams

Case study 4 mins read

Avon and Somerset Police conducted a staff survey in the Somerset East area in 2019. The force noted areas of concern amongst their police community support officers (PCSOs), PCs and sergeants working within neighbourhood policing.

The survey showed concerns about increasing workloads, lack of supervisory oversight and welfare provision. Sickness absence was increasing across the force due to the pressures of the role, but particularly for sergeants.

Performance and case management were also slipping and sergeants stated the teams were too large to supervise effectively. Performance reviews between staff and sergeants had not taken place for long periods of time.

The sergeants to staff ratios were high – in some areas it was as high as one sergeant to 23 staff, with an average of one supervisor to 18 staff. Critical contact with key individuals in the community was found to be declining and cover could not be provided for leave periods.

PCSO supervisor pilot scheme

A business case was presented to address the disproportionate supervisory ratios in Somerset East by introducing five PCSO supervisors as a pilot.

The pilot began in September 2019, with posts funded by converting vacant PCSO posts and the use of an underspend. This reduced the average supervisor to staff ratio in Somerset East to one supervisor to eight staff.

In November 2019 a Somerset East sergeant delivered an intensive three week induction package to the five new PCSO supervisors, all of whom had experience as full time PCSOs.

Their level of knowledge and skillset enabled them to quickly and successfully learn the PCSO supervisor role. Coming from a PCSO background benefited the staff enormously as they were aware of what the PCSO role entailed and their powers and appropriate deployment.

After the pilot

The Police Federation was consulted about implementing the PCSO role across the force rather than increasing the number of sergeants. They supported the role to relieve pressure on the neighbourhood sergeants and police constables.

Consultation with UNISON resulted in internal and external advertisement and the PCSO supervisor role profile being agreed.

There was a view that restricting internal advertisement to current serving PCSOs would exclude previous PCSOs who had sought upward development in police staff roles within Avon and Somerset.

The PCSO supervisor role was designed as a new role and required the successful applicant to resign from their current role, submit a vetting application and then start the PCSO supervisor role.

Avon and Somerset Police highlights this is problematic when the role is not viewed as a promotion. This approach has highlighted the risk of losing PCSOs due to lack of development opportunity and remains a national issue for consideration.

Recruitment process

Avon and Somerset Police recruited 16 more PCSO supervisors to make a total of 21 PCSO supervisors.

The new PCSO supervisor roles generated a lot of interest, including from PCSOs working for other organisations such as the British Transport Police. The strong number of applications naturally led to some Avon and Somerset candidates being unsuccessful, so development plans were put in place to assist them in future applications.

The candidates all undertook the vetting process and then a two week in-force induction course. The curriculum included HR role plays, intelligence, crime recording, social media and rural crime.

After the course they continued to receive support in a peer group every month and feedback was given as a cohort rather than individually. The PCSO supervisors have individual performance review (IPR) objectives similar to that of the neighbourhood policing sergeants.

Implementing the role across the force

PCSO supervisors have been given a single bar on their epaulettes to signify their role as a first line supervisor.

They line manage all the PCSOs in each neighbourhood policing team. They lead on problem-solving and engagement activity and their implementation has resulted in better quality submissions and evaluation.

PCSO supervisors attend partnership meetings as supervisory representation. Their inspectors use inclusive terminology to refer to all PCSO supervisors and sergeants on their team as first line managers.

There were initial cultural barriers about the introduction of the PCSO supervisors and adjustment to them as first line managers. However, the teams saw the benefit of them completing administrative tasks such as leave authorisation and low-level crime reviews.

It allowed the PCs, PCSOs and sergeants more time to patrol, manage workloads and maintain their community engagement commitments.

Officers, staff and volunteers from across Avon and Somerset Police have now adjusted to their implementation. A post-implementation survey showed that the PCSO supervisors are viewed in a very positive way by all across the force and partners.

Evaluation

Once the trial PCSO supervisors had been in place for a sufficient time, the neighbourhood policing staff survey was repeated with the same questions.

Avon and Somerset Police reported that implementation of the PCSO supervisor role had positive and measurable improvements in supervisory crime review quality and timeliness, quality of briefings, decreased sickness absence and increased community visibility.

At present, Avon and Somerset Police does not have any formal ongoing continuous professional development for the PCSO supervisors, but a portfolio of competency is being considered.

The PCSO supervisors are now established on every neighbourhood policing team in Avon and Somerset. No further evaluation has taken place as yet.

PCSO supervisor series

Read more about this new role.

- [Being a PCSO supervisor](#)
- [PCSO supervisor role in Kent](#)

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Neighbourhood policing PCSO