

Managing special constables

The roles and activities of special constables, and common management processes.

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The role

Special constables primarily take part in frontline police work. They can spend much of their time on the streets, doing intelligence-based patrols in crime hotspots or taking part in crime-prevention initiatives. This could mean anything from keeping town centres safe at night to conducting house-to-house enquiries or helping prevent vulnerable members of the community from becoming victims of crime. Some special constables may have the opportunity to focus on particular policing specialisms which draw upon skillsets they possess from their primary employment. Effective deployment of special constables is a local matter for a police force.

Being a special constable is demanding and requires commitment and dedication – but from the first time on duty it has an impact. It is also extremely varied.

Possible activities

A special constable could be part of many different activities.

Ensuring public safety

- Assisting at the scene of accidents, fires or incidents – helping control situations, ensuring people are safe.
- Providing security and crowd control at major public events – preventing injuries and disorder.

Preventing crime

- Carrying out high-visibility foot patrols to deter and detect criminals.
- Educating businesses and the community about crime and how to avoid it to reduce crime and people's fear of it happening.
- Talking to schoolchildren about crime reduction and community safety to help them stay safe and make the right choices.

Tackling crime

- Confronting anti-social behaviour on the streets such as gangs or intimidating behaviour.
- Managing alcohol-related incidents such as public drunkenness or violence.
- Enforcing road safety laws in local communities.

Investigating crime

- Conducting house-to-house enquiries to gather information and support larger enquiries.
- Taking part in police operations to disrupt and arrest offenders.

Securing convictions

- Presenting evidence in court to support the justice system in prosecuting offenders.

Tasers and firearms

Special constables are currently deemed ineligible to be issued with CEDs (Tasers) or firearms.

Policing driving

Special constables can train to become qualified to drive police vehicles. However, individual police forces will have their own local driving policies, which may vary dependent upon the force concerned.

Other management considerations

The College has put together responses to common questions from forces on managing special constables.

Payment

Unlike members of The Army Reserve or retained firefighters, special constables are volunteers and are not paid for performing the role.

Employers and paid time off for volunteering

Special constables are volunteers, and cannot be compelled by law to report for duty (unlike people in The Army Reserve, for example). This in turn means employers are not required to provide paid time off for members of staff to perform Special Constabulary duties in cases of emergency.

Expenses

Special constables are provided uniforms free of charge. They are entitled to be reimbursed for any reasonable expenses incurred while performing their duties. All expenses payments/claims should be in line with [Home Office guidance on expenses and allowances](#) for members of the Special Constabulary, and adhere to HMRC rules.

Hours

There is no nationally mandated figure for the number of hours of duty a special constable is required to perform. Forces can set their own parameters in terms of the hours of duty and how they describe this figure (weekly, monthly or yearly). When setting these parameters forces should be mindful of the [Working Time Regulations](#) and possible limits on volunteer time which do not apply to regular officers.

As an indicative guide, most forces currently expect their special constables to perform about four hours' duty per week (roughly equating to about 16 hours per month or 200 hours per year). Special constables are free to volunteer in excess of the basic requirements, although the limits set by the Working Time Regulations must not be exceeded.

Types of training

Forces are responsible for the ongoing training of their officers, and for making training available to their special constables. Find out more about the [special constable learning programme \(SCLP\)](#).

Ethics

Special constables are required to adhere to the behaviours and practices set out in the [policing Code of Ethics](#).

Disciplinary measures

Special constables are subject to the [Police \(Performance\) Regulations](#) and the [Police \(Conduct\) Regulations](#). Additionally special constables' involvement may be required as part of an [IOPC](#) investigation.

Forces will have their own local policies in place, eg, to address attendance issues.

Managing promotions

The process for promotion in the Special Constabulary is a matter for individual forces to consider. Currently there is not a nationally agreed promotion process for special constables.

Transferring between forces

It is recognised individuals' personal circumstances may change while serving as a special constable. If this change is of a permanent geographical nature, eg, moving house, starting a new job but the individual wishes to continue to serve as a special constable, then guidance is available which sets out a national protocol to facilitate the transfer of special constables between police forces in England and Wales. It is for forces to decide whether to apply the protocols to individuals who want to transfer from non-Home Office forces

Serving in more than one force

In a small number of cases it may be that an individual spends part of a year in one force area and the rest in another force area, eg, university students, or because of the nature of a particular job. Guidance has been produced for forces on this issue.

Moving from being a special into the regular police force

Being a special constable gives a valuable insight into what a career in police work might be like. However, serving as a special constable does not mean that someone will automatically become a regular officer.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing