



Institute for
**Public Safety
Crime and Justice**

Citizens in Policing – A new paradigm of direct citizen involvement

A paper presented to the 'Justice and Penal Reform: Re-shaping the penal landscape' conference, Keble College, Oxford, 16-18th March 2016.

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The deep roots of citizen involvement in policing

The British model of policing remains in many respects the envy of the world; many countries send their officers to the College of Policing here in the UK for training and development. This model of policing is based on some fundamental principles: 'policing by consent'; the concept of the police as being citizens in uniform; 'the police are the public, and the public are the police'. Transparency, integrity, accountability.

These concepts that underpin our model of policing also support the fundamental idea that we are talking about today. The importance of the direct involvement of citizens in policing.

There is a long tradition of voluntarism across criminal justice and public safety, and policing is no exception to that. Volunteers exercising the office of Constable can be traced back to at least the 13th century. Special Constables – volunteer police officers - can be found in legislation as far back as 1662. Much of what we still recognise today as the role of Specials was formalised into legislation in 1831. Both World Wars saw a huge scaling up and massive impact for Specials. This agenda of direct citizen involvement is not a new idea nor a new reality on the ground.

Building on these deep historical roots, enhancing how citizens are directly involved in policing is a critical success factor for police reform, in the context of the challenges policing faces today.

Citizen involvement is crucial to meeting the challenges facing modern policing

Policing faces new challenges and opportunities.

There is a need to embrace a 21st Century policing models. Society is changing fast, as are the crimes and threats to safety that we look to the police to protect us from, for example the increasing proportion of criminality which is 'cyber' in its nature, the

challenge of child sexual exploitation, and the growth in online radicalisation. This stretches traditional policing skill sets and ways of operating. In simple terms budget cuts make traditional ways of thinking about citizen involvement and the police workforce unsustainable. Without change the only option is (much) less for less, with a retreat into a very narrow and response-based model of policing focused upon a much more sharply defined role for the decreasing number of Regular warranted officers that can be afforded.

There are significant developments across police reform embracing new ways of working. New technologies. New operating models. There are radical reforms to structures, such as forces collaborating regionally. There are significant collaborative developments across 'blue light' services, with particular progress in bringing policing and fire & rescue services more closely together.

New models for how policing is delivered need to embrace a reconceptualising of how citizens are directly engaged and participate in policing. This needs to include resetting and reinvigorating relationships between an active citizenry and the police, optimising the contribution of direct citizen participation from volunteers including Special Constables, and exploring the optimum operational design and workforce to maximise citizen engagement and achieve desired outcomes.

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 '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.

Volunteers in policing can provide a direct route to enhancing police contact and engagement with communities. Volunteers represent a means of achieving much greater involvement in policing from a diversity of people much more quickly than do changes in the diversity of those in paid roles, particularly in these times of very limited police officer and police staff recruitment.

Direct citizen involvement creates greater capacity and capability. This is about additionality, not direct replacement. This capacity and capability provided by volunteers in policing is going to be critical going forward to meet these changes and challenges.

There is an emphasis on achieving a significant 'opening up' of policing, not least through the advent of PCCs. Police volunteering is a core means by which to achieve this.

There is an important role for direct citizen involvement across this whole wider agenda of police reform. Whilst there is some recognition of this across policing, and some movement in the direction of greater levels of citizen involvement, a step change is still needed to truly realise the potential of direct citizen involvement in policing.

A new picture of citizen engagement in policing is emerging

There is an exciting pattern of developments in ideas and practice underpinning a greater citizen involvement in policing.

There is the growing concept of the '*police family*' – a widespread involvement of different roles and individuals in delivering policing in communities. Police volunteers represent a key part of this 'policing family', as do the wide array of community organisations and activists who impact upon crime and public safety. There is a need to forge stronger links across all these actors who are now involved in delivering safer

communities, to create a greater sense of cohesion and team, but collectively the broadening of range of roles and widening of participation marks a significant change in policing models over recent times.

Police Support Volunteers mark a radical recent change in direct citizen involvement. With roots back to Kent Police in 1992, with origins as non-uniformed and without policing powers. Intended to provide additionality, and primarily within 'back-office' functions to better enable Regular officers and police staff to concentrate on their front-line duties and provide more visible policing in communities. Whilst PSVs remain a relatively new addition on the policing scene, it is estimated that their numbers approach 10,000 nationally, so they do represent a major formation on the policing landscape. Increasingly, they undertake a wide variety of roles; recent data nationally suggested in excess of 100 different roles across policing. PSVs do some really important things, impacting for our local communities.

Police Cadets are another area that has seen recent expansion in many force areas. Again, numbers are estimated in the region of 10,000 nationally. It is also estimated that 25% are drawn from vulnerable backgrounds. The Cadets involve young people directly in policing. Learning new skills. Connecting with the police. And undertaking work which has a real impact into their local communities.

Special Constables – volunteer police officers – remain probably the single most visible element of direct citizen involvement in policing. There are over 16,000 Specials across the police forces of England and Wales. Special Constables make a huge impact. They are warranted officers, and as such have the same powers as a Regular police officer and do many of the same demanding challenging things. They are generally indistinguishable from their Regular officer colleagues by members of the public. There is a tremendous potential for further development – broadening of the roles Specials get engaged with across policing, and in a planned way further expanding of their numbers. So far we have talked mainly about those who volunteer within police forces, but there is a vast amount of wider community-based activity which sees citizens engage directly

in making their communities safer. For example, Neighbourhood Watch is the largest voluntary organisation in the country, in terms of membership. There is a huge amount of local, charitable, faith-based, voluntary activity to help make communities safer.

In all of this the role of Police and Crime Commissioners is important. Citizen involvement is in the DNA of the reforms that brought about Police and Crime Commissioners – about making the police more open and accountable, involving people much more directly in policing. Independent Advisory Groups. Custody visitors. But so much more, some major innovations have taken place led by PCCs during their first terms. And many first term PCCs have been passionate and effective champions of police volunteering and wider citizen involvement. It feels highly likely that themes of citizen involvement are going to be very visible in the upcoming elections for PCCs across England and Wales.

Government is also playing a big part in all this. There are important legislative developments coming up through the Police and Crime Bill. These legislative proposals include greater flexibilities to give new powers to volunteers. In particular this will open up the opportunity for volunteer Police Community Support Officers.

Evidence-based police volunteering

The Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice is working nationally across a programme of work developing the evidence-base for police volunteering. There are two key interlinked questions underpinning this work: Firstly, how can forces further enhance the impact of police volunteers? And secondly, how can the experience of volunteering with the police be improved? This work reflects the first time a 'what works' approach has been systematically engaged across police volunteering.

This work is timely. As we have said, it feels like this is a significant moment for police volunteering. A time of significant commitment, ambition, investment and innovation.

But there is a risk that all that commitment and investment may be undermined by limitations in the evidence-base, limited analysis and evaluation of current police volunteering programmes, and limited sharing and learning around best practice across forces.

The evidencing work is heavily focused on practical questions. How to target and attract volunteers? What are the most effective training and induction models? How to identify, develop and utilise skills? How to best integrate and embed? Better understanding activity and outcomes. Understanding and managing the 'whole career span'. How to improve visible diversity and outreach? Managing the whole police family cohesively together.

The approach is aiming to be innovative and collaborative. Aiming to engage a range of interested academics across a range of institutions. Developing an online, interactive knowledge hub for police volunteering. Focusing on the translation of evidence into real change in practice on the ground – through toolkits and guidance, diagnostics; continuous professional development, solutions workshops.

Across researching 'what works', diversity is important – the importance of being able to 'reach' into hard to reach communities around engagement in police volunteering. Building insight on 'what works' in terms of gender and volunteering.

It is important this work engages with better understanding of costs and benefits. Making the 'business case' for police volunteering will be a crucial part of taking what it can contribute to the next level. Volunteers are not free – it is important to understand the 'whole career value' of a Specials or volunteer.

The wider context

We are at a point of real potential transformation through police volunteering and wider citizen involvement.

It is important to understand the wider context to citizen involvement in policing. Volunteers and wider forms of involvement have key roles to play across many public services and public sector organisations – not just policing. Real transformation rarely occurs in isolation,. There is a need to embrace this whole agenda of citizen involvement across the CJS, across public safety, across public services. Too much of what we do around volunteering, both in policing and across the wider CJS and public safety terrain, remains single agency. There are huge potential benefits from being brave enough to think and act across those traditional boundaries.

Baroness Neuberger, undertaking a review of CJ volunteering as part of her role as volunteering champion back in 2009, talked of the amazing contribution and dedication of volunteers across the CJS. In many ways volunteering roles have come on a long way since that point. She talked about the importance of putting people at the heart of the CJS, and that volunteers are a great way of doing that.

It is clear that volunteers can and should play a key role across the CJS. But we need to take to heart some of the more challenging messages from the Neuberger review too. The importance of recognising the uniqueness of what volunteers bring, not just their additional capacity, but how what they do is special, distinct, and specifically value-adding. This is not about delivering criminal justice on the cheap, to work well it needs serious investment. And that the review found deep cultural and attitudinal barriers to be overcome.

Internationally, the scale of police voluntarism is big. In the USA alone, some estimates place the numbers of police volunteers in the region of 250,000. These volunteers represent a massively under-researched group, they are largely missing from policy

discourse, and they are often invisible in debates around police reform, internationally as well as in the UK. Looked at on a worldwide scale, volunteering in policing is already an enormous phenomenon, regardless of aspirations for significant growth. It deserves more attention.

Looking internationally, there are interesting different models to learn from. As with many aspects of CJ and public safety, there is much that compares favourably in respect of police volunteering when looked at comparatively across different jurisdictions. But there are also things we can engage and learn from elsewhere to improve our approach and practice in the UK. For example, there is some evidence that police forces in the USA are better at attracting ex-Regular officers into volunteering roles than is the experience in the UK. In a profession where retirement ages are low, it is a key strategic question how to maintain that experience and skill within the system when people leave their paid careers in policing behind – volunteering could be a big part of the answer.

Future possibilities

This is an important moment for citizen involvement in policing. Several factors come together. The new challenges for policing – big changes, new threats, changes to society, less money and bigger expectations. A greater recognition of the potential for citizens in policing. Broader themes of greater community engagement in public services and the wider rise in interest in voluntary activity.

Volunteers are already playing a much bigger role. Volunteers already do a huge amount across policing, way more than most people realise. The wider range of community-based activity beyond the police, mostly charitable and volunteer in nature, again has an enormous impact already on policing outcomes. But there is a huge potential to do so much more. Expand numbers. Broaden roles. Upskill and further

professionalise. Better integrate and embed. Above all, majorly increase the impact from volunteers, and place them central to how policing operates and delivers.

This growth in police volunteering and wider citizen involvement has big implications for policing. For police strategic culture. A continuation of growth across police volunteering will see police forces becoming one of the largest volunteer organisations in their areas. It will see forces where there are more volunteers than there are Regular officers and police staff. It requires policing to rethink its relationship with its volunteers and to do things very differently for them and with them.

More widely, citizen involvement is at the core of a fundamental rethink of the relationships between policing and local communities. This rethinking can have profound implications. Resetting some of the relationships. Rethinking issues of responsibility. Redefining policing as being much more about working together, about co-producing, about doing things 'with' communities rather than just 'for' or 'to' them.

Police voluntarism and wider citizen involvement needs to become seen as central to the wider police reform agenda. This growth in citizen involvement in policing heralds a much more open and engaging era in policing. This can take us in radical new directions, but it is important to return to where we started – such developments are firmly rooted in the history of policing, and the principles of policing by consent. Citizen involvement in policing – and at the core of that the huge impact that those who volunteer in policing can have – has a huge potential to transform the ways that we are policed in the future, and to play a major part in achieving safer communities.



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