

Summary analysis of strategic workshop discussions

SC2016 – National Specials Conference

Chepstow, 22nd - 24th April 2016

Dr Iain Britton

May 2016

Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice



Park Campus

NN2 7AL

(01604) 892514

www.ipscj.org



Task

In workshop discussions based upon findings from the national survey of Specials and PSVs, conference delegates were asked to consider one of two key strategic questions:

- How do we widen the roles Specials perform and the breadth of policing outcomes and activities they contribute to?
- How does the police organisation become better at managing their volunteers?

The output from the workshop has been analysed by the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, and some discussion themes from the workshop have been drawn out and are summarised in this document.

The wider context for Specials

National Survey

The data from the survey was mostly felt to resonate with delegates own experiences within forces. It was also felt to show that "things are not fundamentally broken" and that there are "strong foundations" from which to build.

There was feedback that the workshop exercise materials presented data quite negatively that is actually on the whole quite positive, and that it is important not to lose the positive messages.

Delegates would like survey data at a force as well as national level [that would require higher response rates from most forces to be meaningful], and for us to build up a survey picture that allows trends over time to be clearly understood. It was discussed that whilst there was a good response, "what about the 4/5ths who didn't respond?" It was felt that the national level survey was a start, but that we need to do much more to listen to Specials, to "take the temperature in a more sophisticated way" and at a "local, team level"

Differences between forces

Workshop discussions identified big differences between different forces in terms of the current picture for Specials. Some already utilise Specials widely, others do not. Some have good integration, for others how Specials function remains quite separate.

There was a lot of focus on the lack currently of national consistency and standards, in particular in respect of initial training, and designations of 'independent status'.

This links to perceived issues of a lack of cohesion and inter-operability. This surfaces in issues such as cumbersome and duplicating HR processes when a Special moves geographically, and a lack of skills and specialism recognition across force boundaries.

Learning and sharing best practice

There were views that there is too little opportunity to share and learn from best practice. Reviews always seem to identify the negatives, "rather than what we get right", and this knocks the motivation of both regulars and Specials.

Problems with culture and particular problems in some force areas...

It was also discussed that not everybody in policing is “pro-Special”, and we need to be mindful of that. There are some pockets of really poor practice and leadership in some forces around Specials, and nationally policing should engage those issues rather than ‘sweeping them under the carpet’. Some forces were seen to be “so far behind the times” and still operating “in the dark ages” in respect of Specials.

This links with some fears that an expanding Specials concept (e.g. into specialist areas) will risk “stepping on toes” and come up against a “tribal resistance” from some regulars. One table discussion identified that “when Specials ask, they’re told no”.

There were patterns identified in some forces of a committed chief officer level of management in respect of Specials, but of an un-cooperative middle management who do not see the value.

The discussions revealed that in some areas the experience of being a Special is currently felt to be less rewarding: “we don’t feel that we are contributing”.

Some of the table discussions identified that there can be problems with “a policing mindset” – there is a need for change, but cultures and traditional ways of thinking get in the way. Some of the workshop table discussions saw that policing is struggling to change quickly enough to keep up with a fast changing world.

There was some discussion of how Specials can help to change problems in regulars culture.

And there was recognition that sometimes there are problematic issues around regulars and culture for Specials which are not specifically about regulars issues or attitudes towards Specials, e.g. there are “lots” of regulars and front-line supervisors (Sergeants and Inspectors) who have “wholly negative attitudes towards the job and to the force” which can be demoralising for those who work with them, whether Specials or other regulars.

Perceptions of the decline in ‘career’ Specials

There were perceptions of a decline in ‘career’ Specials, with a sense of a declining longevity of careers, and with a greater proportion of Specials being on a track to join the Regulars [without data it is unclear how much this perception matches with the reality across Specials cohorts in forces]. This perceived need to “redress the balance between career Specials and applicants to the regulars” was seen as important so as to enable longer Specials careers which then allow greater opportunity to gain experience, training, specialisms, etc.

Change

It was recognised that policing is changing, and Specials need to evolve too. The greater emphasis in policing practice of safeguarding, exploitation, mental health, fraud, cyber, etc. were all identified. And greater needs for technical, business and social work type skills sets. And the sense that the police service is losing paid capacity and absorbing new demands, so needs to find new models in how it operates and fills that capacity gap to survive.

New technologies are changing the way the wider world works, and changing policing - and this needs to also be the case for Specials, both how Special Constabularies operate and the roles Specials undertake. It was felt that much more could be done across social media in terms of Specials – both in managing/supporting existing Specials and in attracting new ones.

Some of the discussion identified the importance of the police working in partnerships, “we cannot respond to and solve every problem”.

Some of the discussions talked around the need for a shift from a ‘task-oriented’ model of policing to new, more corporate and business-like models, with more sophisticated understandings of need and demand and

much greater professionalisation of skills and capability. Specials were seen as having a lot to contribute to this new world, but it was recognised that Specials would also need to change.

Diversity and an inclusive model for Specials

There was some flagging of concern about diversity and Specials, and some talk of a need for more “positive action” in recruitment. There was a feeling that initial training models in particular are highly onerous, particularly for older applicants who may have more family/work etc. commitments to balance with the training. This was seen by some to exacerbate tendencies towards a “regulars applicant”, “ex-student type” skewed cohort of Specials.

The relationship between PSVs and Specials

The relationship between PSVs and Specials was felt to be complicated, with some lacking of clarity of roles.

The concept of ‘policing family’ was felt to be under-developed, and impacted by issues of status. Delegates reflected that real success lay in working as a team across regulars, Specials, PCSOs, police staff, PSVs, cadets, etc., but that this rarely was achieved at present in reality.

Some delegates were concerned about a blurring of role and identity between PSVs and Specials – seeing Specials first and foremost as police officers rather than as volunteers, and PSVs as first and foremost to assist police officers and provide mainly administrative tasks. Other views saw much more of a merging and blurring of concepts of police volunteering, particularly with the emergence of new powers.

Some delegates worried that merging everything into ‘Citizens in Policing’ risked losing the distinctiveness of the Specials.

Employer supported policing

It was felt that ESP has great potential, but that this has not been realised over a long period of time. “Take ESP more seriously – widen scope and give it proper ownership.”

HMIC

Some of the table discussions identified that HMIC could play a bigger role in terms of championing the importance of Specials and wider police volunteering, identifying key expectations and standards, etc.

Improving the management of volunteers

The workshop discussion identified several key elements of how management of Specials could be strengthened:

- Clearer sense of purpose, and clarity of purpose. At a strategic level – a clear CiP and Specials strategy at force corporate level that understands priorities, purpose, focus, direction etc. for the Special Constabulary. And at an individual level - so that every Special understands their role, task, purpose and how it fits into the wider picture. Start with the ‘why’: identify need, understand it, recruit and deliver to it. Have clear “role offers”, where the value and contribution is understood;

- There was a discussion that “expectation setting” is important, Specials may be volunteers but they are not amateurs and they are doing important and challenging things. The argument that a culture of expectation goes hand in hand with one of professionalism, and we shouldn’t be scared to set high expectations of volunteers, it is a sign that we value them and the work that they are doing;
- Make Specials feel like professionals and to be part of the bigger team, not distinct from it. A good example of integration was identified to be Specials integrated and represented in tasking and threat & risk meetings. Big differences can be made in how much Specials feel part of the team by small actions of involving, thanking, engaging etc. by front-line supervisors and regulars in the team. Some delegates had worked in teams as a Special where the regulars hadn’t even bothered to know their names, whilst other force and team contexts were clearly very different and near fully integrated culturally;
- Visibility of force leadership teams to Specials. Senior leaders need to “take an interest” and “own it”. Where it works best there is Chief Constable level ‘buy in’, a dedicated senior officer rank lead with time to devote, the Specials Chief Officer has status and access and integration, and there is a lot of integration into policy, procedure, support departments. etc. Where it does not work well, the Specials are not visible to or on the agenda of most senior officers, and seen as a parallel function, often as part of the brief of a less senior ranked officer, and the Specials Chief Officer is seen as separate and less senior to the wider chief officer team. “The problem is policing is an organisation with a lot of volunteers in it which doesn’t understand volunteers” – there are key symbolic and practical things which leadership teams can do to turn around that perception;
- Planned duties which are worthwhile and visibly contributing to greater aims. (In contrast to ad hoc poor deployments: “because the Specials have turned up we need to give them something to do” and Specials “suffering repetitive duties syndrome”);
- Volunteering and its value as a “golden thread” across the force and everything that it does. Akin to the Equality Impact assessment type model, one table’s discussion argued that there should be a similar systematic consideration of impact on Specials of all force strategy and policy decisions, and this should also be mirrored at national level. A negative example given by delegates was around ‘agile working’, where forces were investing in mobile ICT etc. equipment and linked new working models, but not investing in their Specials being enabled to work in that way. Another example was given of a force having assessed the demand and shrunken accordingly its learning and development functionality, without any assessment of Specials training and development needs;
- ;
- Actively sustain and maintain the volunteers we have invested in, before focusing on having more of them. “If you grow something which isn’t done very well, it will simply be bigger, and still not done very well”;
- Create (and genuinely utilise) databases, e.g. skills databases, so that deployment and utilisation become more scientific and effective, and to allow much more structured and systematic approaches to ‘talent management’;
- Provide higher standards of pastoral care and people leadership – welfare, development, conduct etc. issues dealt with well, and as well as they would be for paid staff;

- Develop reward and recognition programmes. These should be integrated with the organisation as a whole, and jointly run with regulars rather than being in parallel or distinct;
- Develop better communications strategies, so that everyone across the organisation and the public are aware of the contribution Specials make;
- Understand need for investment, and have greater capability to identify return on that investment;
- Clearer sense of 'standards frameworks', and a recognition that more needs to be done on that consistently and at a national level;
- Education of Regulars, on Specials role and motivations, and more effort to fully integrate culturally;
- Retention often requires ongoing development and continuing interesting and new opportunities; without those things some individuals will still stay, but with them many more will;
- "Thank the Specials..."

Rank structures in the Special Constabulary

Specials ranks are seen presently as representing a confused and unhelpful picture. There were a variety of views: some favour a greater 'equivalency', (e.g. like reserve forces models, with degrees of inter-operability and equivalence of status between Specials and regulars of the same rank), and some would prefer Specials ranks to largely disappear, and see them as a barrier against fuller integration of Specials into the police force as a whole. There was a clear strength of opinion that this is an issue that needs to be considered and resolved nationally and that it has been talked around for a long time with little appreciable consensus or progress.

It was identified in the discussions that many Specials have leadership and management experience in their 'day' jobs, and that a lot of this experience is not known about, and drawn upon.

There were concerns identified in some forces about the quality and fairness of promotion and progression arrangements in some Special Constabularies. In particular, concerns about how fair and transparent promotions to Special Sergeant are. Linked to that, there were concerns that in some forces there were promotions to Special Sergeant of Specials who had very limited experience.

There was identification that role design for some special Sergeants is poor - including unsustainable 'spans of control' for part-time volunteer roles. And also that training and support models for Special Sergeants are often perceived to be inadequate.

Style, trust and inclusion

There were discussions around force missed-message approaches to their volunteers. Examples were given, such as a Special who was giving of their time working for free several shifts each week, and undertaking essentially very responsible policing operational tasks, but who felt they were treated like they were "still just a volunteer not to be trusted" with a car fuel card. There was a sense of a dichotomy of Specials being treated like all other police officers and having operationally huge levels of responsibility, but then almost in the same breath being seen as "just volunteers" who weren't "proper officers or employees".

Many forces have policies for police officers which do not apply to Specials, leaving their Specials in an ambiguous status and position given that they are police officers. Examples were given of a force wellbeing

policy that only applied to paid employees and ignored the volunteer workforce. And there were examples of even the most basic support structures, such as welfare support and counselling after traumatic incidents, being inaccessible to volunteers. Most forces engaged staff and officer representative associations and organisations in consultative meetings, but these organisations often do not embrace or represent their force's volunteers.

Developing and utilising skills

Skills not understood

The overall perspective across the workshop was that not understanding the skills Specials have was a problem area. There were strong feelings that “we don’t”, and that much more needs to be done. “Specials have skills which the organisation knows nothing about”. There was a sense that utilising Specials individual skills will make them feel more valued, but that it isn’t done enough.

There is beginning to be realisation in policing that there are probably “untapped” skills within Specials – so this realisation is developing, but the delivery mechanism to identify and deploy those skills is not yet understood.

It was felt that whilst there are some local initiatives around skills assessment and audit, these are rarely maintained or followed through, and because there is no consistent methodology they do not contribute into a bigger national picture.

There was some discussion that the focus on skills can sometimes be a bit one-dimensional, focused on harder and more specific technical skills. Meaning that skills audits and assessments miss out on vital but slightly less tangible skills sets such as leadership, people skills, etc.

Need for tight definitions and rigour around skills identification

There was an argument that there needs to be “tighter definition” of skills requirements: what are the needs/issues, what skills are available in existing Specials to meet those needs/issues, and what skills need to be prioritised to be recruited into the Specials in the future? The skills identification and management frameworks need to be in some depth and detail, e.g. speaking a language can be a useful skill, but also will be at a wide range of difference levels of fluency and competency. If skills frameworks in the future fail to capture that depth and detail they risk being of little practical use.

The importance of communication and engagement with Specials

Skills utilisation links with general issues of good practice in engaging Specials. If Specials aren’t communicated with, involved, consulted etc. it is unlikely that the contexts will be created in which skills are understood and utilised. There were feelings that many Specials do not have a forum, representation, access etc. to engage in decisions or shape policing.

Volunteers need to be genuinely engaged in job design and service design.

Initial skills and the (slow) path to independent status

The large proportion of Specials who are not 'independent patrol' status, and the very long periods of time it takes many Specials to progress through PDP processes, was seen as a barrier to wider development of skills, roles, etc.

The design of PDP processes was seen in many forces as cumbersome and bureaucratic, and not well matched to the actual realities of what Specials are required to do.

There were concerns about the lack of a national picture, and lack of consistency of definitions around 'independent patrol'.

It was felt that there was much more scope for 'tutoring' and 'mentoring' of Specials, and that this was quite under-developed in a lot of force areas.

Not all Specials want to bring their day job to their volunteering

There was a lot of recognition that not all Specials will want to engage broader skills, or skills relating to their day job, into policing. A sense of 'busman's holiday', and that what attracts some to being a Specials is that it is distinct from their day job.

Scepticism that real action will ever happen

Gathering knowledge about skills is one thing; actually making a difference to how skills are utilised is another, and many Specials will bring a degree of scepticism as to whether the police service is serious on the agenda of better utilising their skills, as it is an issue that has been discussed for a long time with little real progress.

Broadening involvement

Understanding demand and need, and then meeting it through the Specials

There was a lot of discussion of the need to understand gaps in policing delivery/unmet need, and undertake SWOT analysis of Specials, and then seek to match the unique selling points of Specials capacity/capability with prioritised needs.

Specific and targeted recruitment

There was a recognition of the benefits of more specific and targeted recruitment around Specials, identified against particular needs.

Being risk averse

There was felt to be a lot of focus on the risks relating to Specials doing more specialist things, utilising skills, etc. But less focus on the upside, the potential to make a difference through doing those things that are needed, to balance the focus on risk exposure concerns.

Training, supervision and support in respect of specialist roles

Specialist roles will require specialist training and will need to be delivered at times that Specials can attend. Such specialist training doesn't always need to be delivered by the police force, or by a regular officer. More imagination could see Specials themselves delivering some such expert training inputs.

Policing was viewed as needing to get much smarter at recognising externally accredited qualifications and skills. There were some strong stories to illustrate this point, e.g. a fully qualified paramedic who was still required to undertake force first aid training, which was delivered by someone less medically qualified than they were. A Special who was an HR recruitment executive, and within that a specialist in recruitment interviewing, who was required to attend the force's interview skills workshop before they could engage in interviews of Specials. "Its like any experience or qualification from outside policing has no value, doesn't matter at all." There needs to be greater thinking about the "portability" and "transferability" of skills and experience from other sectors and roles.

Specialist roles require greater emphasis on supervision and risk management around Specials. This exposes the current gaps in both supervision and support for Specials, which will need to be addressed if Specials are to operate safely in some of the more specialist arena.

Giving the Special Constabulary ownership for issues

It was identified that there are some great examples in forces of giving the Specials ownership for particular issues, areas, problems, operations, etc. but that this seems to be a mixed picture, with such models quite developed in some places and not really tried at all in others. A general perception was that this is a good way of developing the overall contribution and role of Specials in a force, with recognition of the real benefits of giving Specials room to get involved in design, in problem-solving, and in real ownership.

Many key areas where Specials can get involved

There was a sense that the skills that could be identified and realised around Specials are far broader than current debates which primarily focus around niche areas such as 'cyber' and 'fraud' type specialisms. Skills to engage communities. To work with young people. To work around mental health. Researcher skills. Business management skills. Policing needs to understand future threats and challenges more, and to see Specials potential in meeting those challenges. 'Cyber' is an obvious example, but there are also many others, and this should not just become about cyber.

Whilst the focus is often on emerging and specialist areas, one contribution of Specials can be towards the "vast unmet needs around minor crime and disorder" (i.e. policing is not able to meet the demand and the public expectations for response and action, and has to prioritise not doing some things that communities want it to do – Specials can help plug the expectation and confidence gaps by delivering to some of those elements of demand and need).

Another area where delegates flagged they felt Specials could play a big role but felt isn't talked about enough is in road safety, and combating the 'fatal 4'. Visible roads policing, pro-active enforcement operations, etc. Again this was seen to be an area that some forces work in well with their Specials already, but that others don't seem to involve their Specials much in such activity at present.

Restorative practice was seen as another area of potential development for Specials.

Broad overarching themes

There was a great deal of content across the workshop discussions, and it is difficult to distil it down into a handful of key themes.

However, some of the overarching messages that can be taken away from the workshop discussion include:

- Being 'need', 'demand' and 'business' –led in developing the Specials; focusing on purpose, value and professional delivery and becoming smarter about targeting roles and about recruiting, developing and utilising skill sets;
- Genuine integration and ownership, at all levels from executive leadership and corporate strategy through to front-line teams, tasking and culture;
- There is much more that Specials can do and want to do, across many aspects of policing, and there are a lot of skills and experience that they can bring. Policing just needs to get smarter at finding the ways to make this happen;
- Nationally, there is currently a lot of variation. There is a need for greater standardisation and cohesion. And there is a need to engage and challenge less progressive thinking and practice around Specials, and those forces perceived to be 'behind' on this agenda;

Workshop analysed by:

Dr Iain Britton, iain.britton@ipscj.org, 07415 874532

Centre for Citizens in Policing, Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice

www.ipscj.org





Institute for
**Public Safety
Crime and Justice**

Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice



Park Campus

NN2 7AL

(01604) 892514

www.ipscj.org