Volunteer PCSOs in Lincolnshire

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Context of UK Policing

- Funding cuts, political austerity.
- Changing nature of the ‘crime problem’.
- Public and political expectations.
Lincolnshire Police

• V1000 Project.
• Creation of uniformed Volunteer Police Community Support Officers (VPCSO).
Our Project

• To evaluate the volunteer roles across Lincolnshire police.
• Staff/student collaboration in research.
• Mixed methods.
• Limited time frame of research & in the sample.
VPCSO views on their role:

• “To be the best help to the police and PCSO’s that I can be. Because we haven’t got exactly the same powers as them, so we can’t detain people, we can’t search people, we can’t, we’re not meant to direct traffic so I kind of help them wherever I can.”

• “It’s like an extra body on the street, if you know what I mean”.

• “...when you can go home at night and say, I’ve helped someone today, you know that you can’t do that in a normal role...”
VPCSO views on public perceptions:

• “I think the public treat me exactly the same cos our uniform is the same...I suppose if people did know I was a volunteer...maybe they would have less confidence in me, cos I don’t really know what I am doing. I’m not trained as regulars.”

• “…its just people just love to see you on the streets, it’s a safety thing”.

• “The public want...to see police bodies about, I mean they are always saying ‘oh there’s nobody on the streets’…”
PCSO Mentors on volunteers

• “It is effective, together we gain a decent understanding of more issues in surrounding areas and if the VPCSO is from a background in which we have no connection to, we gain knowledge, which is fantastic.”

• “I don’t mind the VPCSOs, the public are seeing double and as much as they may not be able to do anything...people don’t know that. It’s another uniform.”

• “ when they turn up...four hours a week she’s enthusiastic, willing to learn, she’s chatty and she’s not one that you have to walk around and struggle.”
Views on volunteers (Uniformed Police)

• “...we should be policed by consent because it integrates communities into policing.”

• “Volunteering is a great way for people to develop themselves for careers and give something back to the community. With the financial difficulties faced by public sector organisations these individuals are able to be the eyes and ears on the street that the police and regular PCSO’s will be struggling to provide.”
Problems (PCSO mentors)

• “I feel like the VPCSO’s are just coming out with me, I’m just taking them out and even though they’re shadowing what I am doing, I don’t really feel like I can give them anything to do.”

• “...if a job comes in and you’ve got a VPCSO with you, there’s certain jobs that I won’t go to because you’ve got to look after yourself, but also you’ve got your volunteer with you and I just think its harder having them.”

• “…they can go from really fantastic ones...but some of the ones, you may be thinking ‘why are you out in police uniform because you shouldn’t be.”

• “[mentors] shouldn’t have to be trying to make conversation, they (VPCSOs) should be the ones asking us because of our experience”.
Powers:

• “...the public are aware that special constables are afforded the same powers as regular officers. VPCSO’s have no powers and are just glorified walkers/members of the public in uniform.”

• Due to the lack of powers that VPCSOs have, they are just a uniform used to add numbers to the force and practically cannot be classed as another resource due to not being able to patrol alone’

• “As they don’t have any powers, they cannot see the process through and inevitably the work will fall to a regular officer...VPCSOs do not complete any of the administration they tend to want to ‘patrol’ only.”
Potential...but teething troubles...?

- Role: Public perceptions.
- Role: Staff perceptions.
- Development?
Concluding thoughts:

• Communication
• Powers and Identity
• Greater awareness
• Training for mentors

Uniqueness of Lincolnshire?
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