

A DAY IN THE LIFE...

... of a Police Community Support Officer

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are a relatively new addition to the policing world. They are uniformed staff whose role is to support the work of Police Officers and work within their local community. They are currently operating in police forces in England and Wales, and in the British Transport Police.

Stephen Hunter is a newly recruited PCSO working for South Yorkshire Police. He has been providing policing support in the Woodseats area of Sheffield since the end of November 2006.

Prior to starting as a PCSO Stephen worked as a personal trainer in a local gym. He says:

“It’s not as different as you’d imagine. I still consider my role to be primarily about customer service. It’s public facing and it’s about listening and responding to the needs of people in the local community.”

Before starting out on the job, Stephen underwent a four-week training course, combining classroom learning with practical sessions and mentoring, providing him with essential skills and knowledge such as:

- Powers of a PCSO
- Current legislation
- Basic first aid
- Self defence
- Diversity
- Roleplays

The role of a PCSO differs greatly from that of a Police Officer. They do not have police officer powers of arrest and can’t perform many of the functions of an Officer. Many of the powers PCSOs have relate to anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance.



Duties include:

- providing a visible presence within communities
- attending incidents of disorder, nuisance and anti-social behaviour, including issuing fixed penalty notices for disorder
- dealing with community issues such as littering and dog fouling
- checking out abandoned vehicles
- seizing vehicles in relation to off-road, and dangerous driving
- helping with missing persons enquiries
- speaking to young people who might be drunk and causing problems, confiscating alcohol and tobacco, if necessary
- crowd control and directing traffic at public events
- helping direct traffic at road blocks or scenes of accidents

By dealing with these issues, PCSOs help to free up police time, enabling officers to focus on more serious crimes.

Despite the fact that they have limited powers, the impact of having PCSOs out and about is still significant.

“The majority of our work involves being out on patrol, ensuring we are highly visible to the people in the area and providing them with reassurance. We talk to local business owners and members of the community about any concerns they may have. Generally, the response is positive. People want us around.”

So what does a typical day for Stephen involve?

“There is no typical day – everyday is varied although we will have a morning briefing in which we’re told of any issues in the area including anti-social behaviour, car crime, and theft within the area. We do a large amount of foot patrol within the area and occasionally have the use of police vehicles to enable us to cover more ground.”

According to South Yorkshire Police, a good PCSO should have:

- good communication skills to deal with all types of people, some of whom may be drunk, hostile or upset
- a confident, mature and assertive manner
- a willingness to get involved in a range of possibly difficult situations

There are currently five PCSOs working in the Woodseats area, although South Yorkshire Police plan to increase that number, depending on funding.

“At the moment it’s early days. There have only been PCSOs in the Woodseats area for a couple of months.”

Stephen is certainly enjoying the experience though, and intends to progress within the force. He applied to become a Police Officer initially but was turned down due to lack of experience. He is hoping that will change now he is a PCSO:

“I see this as a stepping stone, but the trouble is, there’s no set structure for PCSOs who want to progress in their career to become a Police Officer. But I’m gaining valuable experience and doing this will also help me to clarify whether the job is really for me.”

Ian Bates is a PCSO working for Thames Valley Police. Coincidentally, Ian started his career in the same industry as Stephen, having spent eight years working in leisure.

Ian was one of the first 100 PCSOs to be recruited in Thames Valley. He has been a PCSO for two years, starting out in an affluent area of South Buckinghamshire. However, he soon grew frustrated and transferred to a more culturally diverse area. Ian says:

“I find the work so much more interesting and rewarding now. No two days are the same. I’m able to talk to a wide range of people with different needs and concerns.

“We try to respond to those needs in the best and most appropriate way for them. For example, attending coffee mornings for elderly people who perhaps struggle to get out.”



Ian cites partnership working as an important aspect of his role as a PCSO. He regularly deals with the Community Safety Teams within local councils, as well as working closely with housing associations and Neighbourhood Watches and residents’ groups. They are also about to launch drop-in ‘surgeries’ to enable members of the community to talk to the police about any concerns they have.

Working so close to London brings its own set of issues. PCSOs in Thames Valley were very busy in the period immediately after the 7/7 London bombings. They were despatched on ‘reassurance patrols’ in high-risk areas such as train stations. Their presence provided an important sense of security among frightened commuters and travellers.

In his two years as a PCSO Ian has been able to work closely with Police Officers, assisting in arrests and even attending sudden death. He says:

“The great thing for me has been the opportunity to follow through on those incidents, such as sitting in on an interview. It’s great experience – you can see where the role of a PCSO differs from that of a Police Officer. It provides a good insight into what they do.”

Like Stephen, Ian is hoping to make the transition from PCSO to Police Officer. He has applied once but was unsuccessful. He intends to apply again once the mandatory 6 month waiting period is over.

In the meantime, he is developing his own role as a PCSO. All new PCSO recruits in the Thames Valley force are assigned a mentor. Ian is now going on a course to train as a mentor to other new recruits, helping them to settle into the role.

Like Stephen, Ian is frustrated by the lack of a structure when it comes to progressing beyond the role of PCSO, but despite his concerns over his career progression, Ian says:

“I do enjoy the work. Making a difference to people’s lives is incredibly rewarding.”

Skills for Justice has developed a range of National Occupational Standards to support the role of PCSO, which can be found on the Skills for Justice website. The Integrated Competency Framework (ICF) also features a PCSO role profile. Work has commenced on developing a qualification for PCSOs, which is currently in consultation. Progress on this will be communicated via The Standard, the e-briefing and the Skills for Justice website.