

# The Special Constable in Scotland: Understanding the motivations, expectations and the role of the Special Constabulary within Police Scotland

Dr Andrew Wooff

Graeme Dickson

Dr Jamie Buchan



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## Summary of the Report

This project aims to support Police Scotland's 'Policing 2026' strategy by enhancing the understanding of the motivations, roles and expectations of Special Constables, a group of people largely absent from academic policing discourse in Scotland. This group of volunteers represents an important resource in contemporary policing, particularly against the backdrop of economic constraint (Bullock, 2014). In recent years, the numbers of Special Constables in Scotland – as with the rest of the UK – have been in a general decline (Home Office, 2018; Police Scotland, 2018).

This project sought to examine the nature of the Special Constabulary as a volunteering resource in Scotland, considering the way(s) that the motivations, expectations and management of Special Constables could be understood and improved. As such, the report explores the following questions:

- What motivates Special Constables to volunteer for Police Scotland and does this vary depending on how long they have been a Special Constable?
- To what extent does the role of a Special Constable vary by geography and local policing area?
- What are the expectations of Police Scotland for their Special Constabulary and does this vary by geography?
- What could be done to improve the current pathways between Special Constables and regular officer recruitment?
- What, if anything, will help support the development and retention of Special Constables in Police Scotland?

The study utilised a mixed methodology with a survey (N=165, Response rate = 32%), 8 interviews with Special Constables, Divisional and National Coordinators, trainers and Officers in charge and 2 focus groups with Special Constables.

These questions provide us with an insight into the nature of police volunteerism, and considers the motivations and expectations of Special Constables, their satisfaction and meaning within their policing role. By using mixed methodology, this study provides robust evidence which supports a number of recommendations which we believe, if enacted, would:

- Enhance the future experience of Special Constables;
- Increase the recruitment and retention of Special Constables;
- Allow Police Scotland to target and recruit particular types of Special Constable;
- Improve the training and support of all Special Constables, and;
- Support Divisional and National Coordinators within Police Scotland in managing Special Constables as a resource.

## Key Recommendations

The findings of this report have led to a number of recommendations for Police Scotland:

**Recommendation 1:** Implement a new ‘dual stream’ structure for the management and development of Special Constables: the ‘Route to the Regulars Training Stream’ for those aiming to become regulars within a set timescale (to be defined by Police Scotland) and the ‘Continuing Special Constable Training Stream’ for those considering being a ‘career’ Special.

**Recommendation 2:** Review route(s) into the regulars from the Special Constabulary, enhancing training and reducing the probationer training time required for those on the Route to Regulars Training Programme.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop enhanced training and support for Special Constables on the ‘Continuing Special Constable Training Scheme.’

**Recommendation 4:** Consider using the ‘SOLAP’ (Student Officer Learning Assessment Portfolio) as a tool for supporting the new training structures and introducing minimum numbers of hours for Special Constables.

**Recommendation 5:** Ensure there is capability in the tools and systems employed for the monitoring of Special Constables to be able to track volunteering needs and flag up development requirements and inactive specials.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop a performance framework, with aims and objectives for evaluating the national goals for the Special Constabulary. These should be monitored, measured and assessed at both divisional and national levels.

**Recommendation 7:** Increase the amount of dedicated resources to divisional coordinators for the line management of Special Constables.

**Recommendation 8:** Introduce a short survey during training which asks about the motivations and expectations of Special Constables and asks them to nominate which stream they wish to be on. Then survey Special Constables at regular intervals, perhaps as part of their SOLAP training schedule.

**Recommendation 9:** Begin consultation about imposing a required minimum number of hours for volunteer participation.

**Recommendation 10:** Introduce a new policy for the management and termination of inactive Special Constables.

**Recommendation 11:** Review the local, divisional and national expectations of the role of Special Constables, to create a new definition of the role that volunteers play within Police Scotland. Modernise recruitment materials to reflect these changes, using motivation as a guiding factor in their reconstruction.

# **The Special Constable in Scotland: Understanding the motivations, expectations and the role of the Special Constabulary within Police Scotland**

Dr Andrew Wooff, Lecturer in Criminology and Principal Investigator  
Contact: a.wooff@napier.ac.uk

Graeme Dickson, Research Assistant

Dr Jamie Buchan, Lecturer in Criminology

## **Introduction**

The Special Constabulary – warranted, part-time, non-salaried, voluntary uniformed Police Officers - have been part of Police Scotland since its inception in 2013 and a feature of Scottish policing since the 1800s. However, their numbers are in decline across the United Kingdom which has increased discussions within policing about identifying best proactive measures for the improvement of the recruitment and retention practises of Special Constables (Britton and Callender, 2016; Britton and Callender, 2018; Callender et al, 2018). Much of the research thus far is confined to the English and Welsh policing context. This report explores the first national study of Special Constables in Scotland to explore the context of this decline, and provide a better understanding of the ways that Police Scotland can seek to enhance their Special Constables' experiences.

The volunteering literature around recruitment and retention centres on the concepts of motivation and expectations, with volunteers' expectations being shaped by the motivations they had for initially choosing to become a volunteer (Clary and Snyder, 1999). The environments in which they work also play a role in shaping their expectations and the opportunities they have to fulfil those motivations (Farrell et al, 1998, Phillips, 1982). Volunteers report higher feelings of self-worth when they perceive that their volunteering contributions align with the expectations of the volunteering organisation (Clary, 2004). Furthermore, volunteer organisations report higher levels of recruitment and retention when the expectations of the organisation and the volunteers themselves are aligned (Stevens, 1991). For this project, therefore, understanding the motivations of Police Scotland's Special Constables, and considering the extent to which expectations align with those of Police Scotland, may enhance recruitment and retention. The following research questions were used for the study:

- What motivates Special Constables to volunteer for Police Scotland and does this vary depending on how long they have been a Special Constable?
- To what extent does the role of a Special Constable vary by geography and local policing area?
- What are the expectations of Police Scotland for their Special Constabulary and does this vary by geography?
- What could be done to improve the current pathways between Special Constables and regular officer recruitment?
- What, if anything, will help support the development and retention of Special Constables in Police Scotland?

## Methodology

This study was conducted with ethical approval from the Research Integrity Committee at Edinburgh Napier University and in collaboration with Police Scotland. It adopted a mixed-methodology, with a survey (n=165) of Special Constables within Police Scotland, 8 interviews with Special Constables and Police Scotland staff and 2 focus groups with Special Constables:

<b>National Survey of Special Constables</b>	<b>165 Special Constables</b>
<b>Interviews with divisional and national stakeholders in the operation of the Special Constabulary</b>	<b>8 Interviews</b>
<b>Focus Groups with Special Constables</b>	<b>2 focus groups; one focus group with 3 respondents engaged in urban policing, and one focus group with 8 respondents engaged in a mixture of urban and rural policing</b>

Table 1: Total data collected from across all methods within the study

The survey was developed alongside Police Scotland's Special Constable National Coordination Unit, and distributed online. The survey was distributed to all 512 Special Constables serving within Police Scotland in June 2019 (Police Scotland, 2019), returning 165 responses, a response rate of 32%. This was encouraging given the difficulty associated with response rates from volunteers who are prone to 'over-surveying' (Rogelberg and Stanton, 2007). The survey data was organised using quantitative data analysis software, and analysed to consider any relationship across the variables within the data, testing for correlation using chi-square test ( $p < 0.05$ ).

We interviewed 8 key stakeholders from across Police Scotland. They were typically involved in the divisional management and national oversight of the Special Constabulary. These semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and ranged in duration from 45 to 90 minutes. The participants varied in role, rank and division across Police Scotland, allowing us to consider the national and divisional contexts of volunteer management within the police service. Using qualitative data analysis software, we considered emerging themes within the data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The focus groups were conducted with two groups of Special Constables (one with six participants, and one with three participants) from two different divisions of Police Scotland (one largely urban, and one mixed urban and rural). The Special Constables in these groups varied in age, gender and length of service, and represented a range of urban and rural policing experiences. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, and were analysed using thematic analysis using qualitative data analysis software.

## Findings

The following sections outline the key findings of the study, focused on answering the research questions above.

### Finding 1: Understanding the motivations of Special Constables

Understanding volunteer motivation is important in ensuring that volunteers have experiences which they find enjoyable and meaningful. This section highlights the survey findings in relation to volunteer motivation and shows the ways in which motivation is linked to other features of volunteering.

Understanding the experience of Special Constables requires us to explore the motivations volunteers have for choosing to join the policing organisation. Motivation is directly linked to volunteer experience and expectations (Gaston and Alexander, 2001), and when those expectations are met, volunteers have been found to have higher levels of satisfaction (Bang and Ross, 2009; Clary and Snyder, 1999). Organisations which recognise these motivations, and provide opportunities for volunteers to see their motivations realised, give their volunteers a sense that their contribution has been recognised, leading their volunteers to feel more appreciated and valued (Ferreira et al, 2009; Jäger et al, 2007). The volunteers surveyed in this study were asked to indicate how far they agreed with a number of statements about motivations for joining the Special Constabulary, resulting in the following findings (table 2):

<b>Motivation for Joining the Special Constabulary</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>To give back to the community</b>	47.8	40.4	8.8	2.2	0.7
<b>To learn more about policing</b>	24.3	47.8	22.1	2.9	2.9
<b>To feel better about myself</b>	14	45.6	27.9	9.6	2.9
<b>To improve my people skills</b>	14	40.4	28.7	11	5.9
<b>To increase my chances of becoming a regular police officer</b>	16.2	14.7	14	32.4	22.8

Table 2: Agreement with statement about joining motivations across respondents shown as percentages of the total respondents

This highlights that ‘giving back to the community’ and ‘learning more about policing’ are the key motivations highlighted by the survey. However, by breaking these data down by age, further trends can be seen.



## Age of Respondents

There was a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the motivations that the respondent had for joining the Special Constabulary, and the age of the respondent. 100% ( $n = 14$ ) of respondents over the age of 56 disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were motivated to join the Special Constabulary in order to join the regular police service. This contrasted with 66% ( $n = 10$ ) of 22-25 year olds who agreed or strongly agreed that they were motivated to join the regular police service. While this may not be that surprising, it is important for Police Scotland to recognise the polarised motivations of Special Constables and consider what 'mix' of Special Constables is desirable for the force.

Following Clary et al's (1999) "matching hypothesis" for volunteer recruitment, marketing that focuses on volunteer motivation can enhance recruitment of volunteers with a particular desired profile. Taking this information and targeting marketing for Special Constables at specific age groups would allow the organisation not only to be more responsive to the needs of their volunteers, but also to develop support for Special Constables at different ages and stages of their volunteering career.

## Length of Service

There was a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the length of service of the volunteer and their motivations for becoming a Special Constable. Those with 5 or more years of experience in the Special Constabulary ( $n = 103$ ) are significantly less likely to have joined motivated by a career in policing, and were more likely to say they had joined to improve their own skills. This suggests that the motivations of Special Constables may shift over time and it is therefore important to know what it is that is motivating the volunteers:

*'We support full time officers the best that we can, and the more experience we gain over time the more useful we can be as we gain more knowledge'* – definition of Special Constables' role from the survey

Skills development is a common motivation for any form of volunteering; police volunteering as a source of personal development has been considered by Jager et al (2007), and this evidence points towards the link between length of service and a desire across volunteers to improve and develop their skills through volunteerism. Reflecting on this, it would be worth Police Scotland presenting more opportunities for Special Constables to learn and develop skills through training and assessing whether further opportunities for professional development for those longer in service might support the retention of these volunteers. This connects with recommendations 1-6 and 8.

## Geography

There is a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between what type of geographic community the Special Constable is policing and their motivations for joining as a Special Constable. Those who identified volunteering in "very rural areas" ( $n = 12$ ) were more likely to strongly agree that they volunteer in order to give back to their community. Although 88% of respondents agreed that this was a motivation in their decisions to volunteer, it seems that this motivation is more clearly articulated by Specials in rural communities. This may underline a correlation between Special Constables in rural environments living as well as working in these environments.

We know that the nature of policing in rural communities tends to be more community orientated and use 'soft power' (Wooff, 2016), and therefore, perhaps these volunteers see more opportunity in rural areas to involve themselves within the community aspects of the volunteering role. Conversely, those Special Constables in urban areas were less likely to state that 'giving back to the community' was their primary motivation for volunteering. This is likely to be as a result of the age demographic of Special Constable in urban versus rural locations, with the former tending to have a larger proportion of younger Special Constables. As noted above, age links directly to motivations. This finding demonstrates that those within rural areas are more likely to be persuaded, recruited and retained by appealing to their sense of community and giving back. Although this is closely linked to the style of policing in these environments, it might be worth considering the motivation of the Special Constable when thinking about where they want to be placed. This is reflected in recommendations 4, 5 and 8.

### **Summary of motivations**

This section considered the motivations that different Special Constables have for joining Police Scotland. The report suggests that motivations vary by age, length of service and geography, and that it would be worthwhile for Police Scotland to consider these intersections when thinking about their volunteers. There are a variety of motivations across Police Scotland's volunteers and certain demographics of volunteer are more likely to be motivated by different desires. Identifying these motivations can allow Police Scotland to tailor the experience of Special Constables to enhance satisfaction and commitment.

## **Finding 2: Police volunteering and the operational environment**

At both a national and divisional level, the focus groups and interviews highlighted that the operational environment has an important effect on what Police Scotland expect of their volunteers. This is important for Police Scotland to think about in relation to which volunteers are best suited for what roles within the force. This can be about Special Constables in some situations taking on initiatives themselves:

*'We do have some things ongoing at the moment. Specials doing speed checks in rural areas because that is quite an issues, and those areas can be overlooked purely because of logistics... regular officers are busy in the town areas, and so they don't always get to these areas that the specials can help out and do things for themselves'*  
– Divisional Level Interview

*'I think in rural areas they operate differently from urban areas or city centres, the role changes dramatically... a lot of the time you need to work off your own initiative with no supervision... the special can find their niche...'* – National Level Interview

The relative lack of policing resource in rural areas compared to urban often meant that rural volunteers were asked to do other supporting tasks. This was not always a negative experience, because (as noted in the section above) many Special Constables in these environments are motivated to help the community and having more direct policing involvement in jobs can help with this:

*'If you come in on duty in the town, in [the city], I would suggest that it might be a busy shift, whereas you're going to have a lot of downtime in rural areas... a lot of our rural specials fill in the downtime, take out citations... there isn't the same levels of calls outstanding'* – Divisional Level Interview

Arguably, having more discretion about what activities they do due to lower demands meant that the Special Constable derived more meaning from these mundane activities:

*'When you're out in the countryside you don't have... you don't have the same back up and resources. Sometimes you and another guy are covering a huge square areas. There's no "oh, someone else can do that," you've got to go and deal with things'* – Focus Group 1

*'On the islands, on two or three of the islands, if you call the police, the person turning up is a Special Constable, which is pretty unique... the rural areas rely on them heavily and they become an embedded part of policing the local community'* – National Level Interview

The expectations and responsibilities carried by Special Constables in these areas therefore mean that they are often more integrated with the fabric of the local community. This means that rural Special Constables oftentimes carry the additional risks that come with being a police officer in a more isolated location with a lack of nearby backup and support (See Wooff, 2015; 2016 for discussion on this).

The feeling of 'worth' in volunteering activity is associated with the idea of 'role identity' (Finkelstein et al, 2005). The way that volunteers understand the value of their contribution alters the way they construct their identity as a volunteer. If a Special Constable feels that their contribution and responsibility amounts to more in rural areas, those Special Constables

may have higher feelings of worth, even when only involved in the desk-based tasks. This holds true even when the acknowledged risks can also be greater. This relationship between role and environment may not be surprising when we reflect on previous studies around the geographies of policing in Scotland (Wooff, 2016; Yarwood, 2007, Smith, 2010).

The links between volunteerism and community were articulated as being more present in rural and island communities, with one national level stakeholder reflecting:

*'There is a positive and commendable volunteer mentality which does encourage people to volunteer... it's almost what you do in these island communities... I think in [more remote] these divisions, they have 70 or 80 specials that are actively volunteering regularly, whereas I think it's around 30 in Glasgow... I think that there is certain parts of Scotland where there is more a tradition of volunteering...' -*  
Divisional Level Interview

If there is a culture of volunteering within rural communities, then perhaps to be part of the policing organisation as a Special Constable is an appealing concept, and the esteem and status that this might carry in these communities could enhance feelings of worth and satisfaction. Conversely, it is important for Police Scotland to acknowledge the different role(s) a Special Constable will have in different communities and tailor training accordingly. In the Highlands for example, the Special Constable may need to be more prepared for independent decision making (and shouldering the additional risks of working remotely) than those in urban locations. Whereas Special Constables in urban locations may be involved in more varied types of police work which again requires specific training.

## **Summary**

Taken together, these findings suggest that because different local communities have different needs for policing, they also have different needs for Special Constables. It is therefore important that Special Constables understand their role in relation to the local policing environment, and the specific demands of each local environment. Furthermore, Special Constables in rural areas are more likely than those in urban areas to be motivated to volunteer by altruistic and communitarian instincts. Developing training and articulating the expectations of a Special Constable in different environments more clearly would help match the reality of volunteering with the prior expectations of the Special Constable. This finding is captured in recommendations 1-7 and 11.

### Finding 3: Understanding the Role of the Special Constable

There is a link between volunteer satisfaction and the alignment of the volunteer's expectations with those of the organisation. Hence, understanding how the role of the Special Constable is defined by both Police Scotland and the Specials themselves is helpful for understanding how the volunteer experience can be improved.

#### Special Constables understanding of their own role

The national survey of Special Constables gave an opportunity for them to define their primary role in their own words. The verbatim answers were thematically analysed and grouped, giving the following results:

Primary role as defined by Special Constables	Frequency	Percent
Providing support and assistance to regular officer	57	47.1
Increasing resources available for Police Scotland	41	33.9
Enhancing links between the police and the community	15	12.4
Improving public safety	5	4.1
Providing free labour	3	2.5
Total	121	100

Table 3: Role as defined by respondents in the survey, with frequency and percentage of total respondents shown

It should be noted that some responses given could be categorised into more than one category, but we coded based on what Special Constables highlighted as their primary role.

This data shows that the perceived dominant role, as described by Special Constables, was to provide support and assistance to regular officers. If we look at the other data, we can flesh out the findings from the table further.

#### *Providing support and assistance to regular officers*

Special Constables often described the importance and value of their role in terms of supporting regular officers:

*'Special Constables support their regular colleagues by carrying out a wide range of policing duties'* – definition of Special Constables role from the survey

Over a third of the Special Constables expressed, directly, the concept of 'support' or 'assistance' within their verbatim responses of their role within the police service. That so many Special Constables feel that supporting regular Police Scotland officers is a primary part of their role is perhaps unsurprising. For this group, the function of the Special Constable and the nature of their role is defined in relation to the work of the regular police officers adjacent to them whilst on duty. This reinforces the frustration voiced by Specials about

feeling underused by Police Scotland, and therefore not providing as much support as they feel they could. Although this is linked to feelings that Specials help increase the resources available to Police Scotland (below), the terms ‘support’ and ‘assistance’ here tend to mean that these Specials reflect on the *quality* of the Special Constable’s contribution rather than simply defining it in terms of *human resources*.

### ***Increasing the resources available to Police Scotland***

The second most cited role of the Special Constable in our survey was ‘increasing the resources available to Police Scotland’. This was highlighted in the following verbatim responses:

*‘Special Constables play a massive part in adding resource to local policing teams, and allowing the service to function even when officer numbers aren’t as high as they should be on any given shift’* – definition of Special Constables role from the survey

*‘We play a large role in the policing of Scotland, bolstering the numbers when required, which can be the difference between a colleague getting a kicking or not. We are a valued member of the team’* – definition of Special Constables role from the survey

This category highlights the importance that Special Constables attribute to adding ‘boots on the ground’, with a belief that from a purely resourcing point of view, they can enhance the capability of the force. They assist Police Scotland to carry out its function as a police service, citing low numbers of regular officers and high demand on regular officers as the justification for the use of Special Constables. Notably, this 41% are distinct from the ‘support and assistance’ category (discussed above) because they simply define their role from a human resources/additional resource point of view *from an organisational perspective*, rather than reflecting on the *quality* of their contribution *at an individual level*. For this group, it is about providing an extra body and simply being there on shift which amounted to a positive contribution, rather than the nature and quality of that contribution in the context of policing.

For a small number (n = 3) of Special Constables in the survey, they saw their role as amounting to providing ‘free labour’ to the police service by means of their contribution. In essence, this is similar to the ‘additional resources’ role description.

### ***Enhancing links between the police and the community***

As the motivations of the Special Constable section highlighted, enhancing police-community links is an important part of being a Special Constable:

*‘We are an important link between the police and the community’* – definition of Special Constables’ role from the survey

*‘We contribute to the communities that we live in, we enhance the transparency and community ownership of policing, and add to the diversity and richness of life experience within Police Scotland’* – definition of Special Constables’ role from the survey

Some Special Constables focused specifically on being the ‘link’ between the public and the police, emphasising the function that Special Constables could play in bolstering policing knowledge of local areas, engaging with local communities, and being the face of the police

service in those communities. What is perhaps interesting here is that although 88% of the Special Constables agreed that they were *motivated* to give back to the community, only 12.4% of those respondents who answered this question linked their *role* back to the community. This suggests that the reality of being a Special is somewhat different to the motivations that underpin their desire to become a Special and perhaps amounts to an indication that there are few practical opportunities for Special Constables to feel that they are enhancing links between the police and the community. By structuring training opportunities in a more coherent way, improving the support for Specials and tracking their motivations and expectations this could be improved. This feeds in to Recommendations 1-8 and 11.

### ***Improving Public Safety***

Only 4.1% of Special Constables defined their primary role of improving public safety. For most Special Constables while this is part of what they do, it wasn't highlighted as their primary role. This heading highlights a challenge with looking at self-defined primary role - it is perhaps more appropriate to talk about *roles* in relation to Special Constables rather than strictly grouping them together as performing a single *role* - because improving public safety is an outcome associated with all the primary roles defined above by the respondents. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider what Special Constables report as their primary role and to then think about how this maps on to what Police Scotland articulate as the role of the Special Constable.

### **Police Scotland's understanding of the Special Constable's role**

Police Scotland defines the role of the Special Constable, as a 'member of the police force' (as defined by the 2012 Act), while the Police Scotland website highlights their role as the 'bridge between the public and the police'. While these definitions hold true to an extent, the voluntary nature of the Special Constables mean that neither is true all of the time. The responses of the participant Police Officers in response to the role of a Special will now be explored.

### ***The Special Constable as a member of the police force***

A key point highlighted by many of the Police Scotland participants related to how useful it was to have Special Constables supporting the organisation. Although it was understood that Specials did not have the same regularity of shifts as regular Constables, there was agreement that they could help support the regulars:

*'There's certainly a realisation that there's not as many [regulars] out there as we might like, and we obviously have the Specials as a resource...within reason, obviously, we can't expect these people to come in...be reporting people to the Procurator Fiscal, because they have day jobs.'* – Divisional Level Interview

*'Ultimately, a Special Constable comes out when they want to come out when it suits them... it becomes difficult to get them into a role or a specific thing because there's no guarantee that they're going to come out... we should just accept that they're an additional pair of hands when they do appear.'* – Divisional Level Interview

Despite an understanding of the role of Specials from Police Officers who work with them regularly, there was a suggestion that some regulars remain sceptical about why a Special

Constable might choose to volunteer despite the lack of material benefit or reward. Furthermore, there was a suggestion that the competence of some Special Constables - or regular officers' perceptions of their *lack of competence* - was seen as a barrier to their integration:

*'I think... there's a credibility issue amongst the police because a police officer relies on the person next to them in a car in a high pressure environment... I don't think that anybody that's only coming out one or two days a month could be expected to be that responsive... some might expect them to be the same standard operationally as they are, and that will never be the case because that operational deployment frequency isn't there' - National Level Interview*

These opinions, though not universal, are pertinent enough within the force that it is important to remember that although the Special Constable may exist as a 'member of the police force', they are volunteers. As such, the unpaid, ad-hoc, part-time nature of their work can undermine their perceived competence and the contribution they make. In addition, the findings from this study suggest that the majority of Special Constables *do not* perform the same role as their regular counterparts:

*'They do say that a Special should be given the same opportunities as a regular, that's not going to happen. The course is very intense, you cannot say to a Special that you're going to [be] a firearms officer, it's a 12 week course and you've got to do at least two training days a month. They couldn't do that... its might be back to how you word stuff and managing expectations...' - Divisional Level Interview*

For some participants, the competency of the Special Constable is intertwined with the voluntary nature of the role; because they aren't full time, there is an argument that they will never be as competent as their regular counterparts:

*'I've got someone who would struggle to take a statement... I think no matter the training they got it would always be too much for them...' - Divisional Level Interview*

*'Before I took over the job, one shift a number of specials went out tougher, arranged a bus to go out and do an initiative.... They were going out in a group, and basically they went to a couple of calls and they were not dealt with properly. There were complaints put in. They were going about doing speeders, more complaints got put in. They didn't report a serious assault properly. There was a lot of stuff that came out of it... and it took a good 18 months to break down barriers' - Divisional Level Interview*

These perceptions are important because as highlighted above, if the Special Constable believes their primary role to be 'supporting' or 'assisting' regular officers, then the Special might experience a situation where the regular is unwilling to risk relying on their operational support because they don't have enough information about their skill set. The default expectation of the regular is that they are a 'volunteer' as opposed to a 'competent' full time officer. Thus, rather than being considered a core part of the police force, there is a sense that Special Constables are, at best, considered to be an additional resource, or, at worst, a liability to the operational safety and capacity of Police Officers. This clearly can impact on the relationship between the Special and Police Scotland, with the Special potentially becoming disheartened and disillusioned with their role.

It is important to note that these opinions are not universal; rather in some circumstances where Specials have been volunteering for a long period of time or have 'proven their worth'



trust between the Special Constable and the regular develops. However, in places where Specials are joining different shifts, where they are not out so regularly, where they are inactive or where an officer has had a poor experience with a Special Constable in the past, negative attitudes about capability are more likely to prevail. A more structured training regime for Specials once they deploy may help to counteract some of these attitudes and give Special Constables more confidence in their ability. This finding feeds in to Recommendations 1-8.

### ***The Special Constable as ‘a bridge between the public and the police’***

This definition places the volunteers at the intersection between the communities that they are part of, and the local policing resources which serve those communities. It implies that Special Constables are at the heart of ‘community links’, with the Special Constable serving as a representative for the community within the police service, and vice versa:

*‘If a member of the public can see, you know, that people (Special Constables) are willing to put that extra time in and do a policing role then that’s got to be positive engagement with the community at large... I think it’s a good thing’ – Divisional Level Interview*

*‘The Special Constabulary and the notion of volunteering and helping in Scottish communities is a well-established part of the psyche of communities in Scotland, and the specials can tap into that’ - National Level Interview*

At a national organisational level, the idea that the Special Constable represents a source of community knowledge and can facilitate local links within the police service is seen as a core area for the Special Constables contribution to policing. This expectation, which draws upon the civic importance of Peelian principles of policing (Loader, 2016), is an appealing case for the Special Constabulary, particularly in relation to representative and democratic principles of police work:

*‘I think it becomes easier to talk to people and form relationships with hard to reach groups through Special Constables... young people and BAME communities, people that have English as a second language... We’ve seen in the PSYV [Police Scotland Youth Volunteers] that we can be nimbler and keep up and be more reflective of communities’ – National Level Interview*

This is an important point as it highlights the importance of Special Constables for improving legitimacy and representativeness within Police Scotland. Due to the voluntary nature of Specials, they have been described as somewhere between a citizen and a Police Officer and therefore can be utilised in more community facing roles where ‘softer’ forms of police power can be utilised (Bullock, 2014; Wooff, 2016; Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019). However, an important point must be made here about the nature of that expectation. In order to retain the motivation to play that role, the volunteer must have their own expectations met:

*‘It’s slow paced stuff. Do they really want to come and sit with me in primary school on a Tuesday morning because some kid’s used some swearing language or something, or going to a group of pensioners to talk about scams? Or do they want to put on a uniform and jump in the car and blue light it all through the countryside driving fast and attending incidents and fighting folk?’ - Divisional Level Interview*

*'They start off in community teams... they do quickly find themselves moving on to want to deploy with response as well though, purely because of the nature of the jobs they are going to get. The community team obviously have problem solving, and, you know, community-based events, which are nice for Specials to do, but that's not the only part of the job, and Specials obviously want to see the whole area of what we do'*  
– Divisional level Interview

So understanding the motivations/expectations of Special Constables before deployment and then checking in with them on a regular basis is an important part of ensuring the expectations meet the reality of the role. This is particularly relevant to ensure that Special Constables are aware of the role they are expected to play within the organisation, including the expected standards of behaviour, and the associated perception that the public may have of them in specific communities:

*'They might say 'I'll work in [the city], but I'm not too sure, I've got a lot of family there'. I usually say to them if they are quite young just bear in mind that if you go into pubs or parties in [the town] you may be bumping into people that you know. Have a think about it...'* – Divisional Level Interview

*'Normally I'll start them in [the town] because some people might not want to go [in the place where they live] if they're not comfortable with, you know, knowing too many people in their local area or whatever.'* – Divisional Level Interview

Although it is understandable that Special Constables might be used in this way, our findings suggest Special Constables may be uncomfortable acting as the face of policing in local urban communities. It is dependent on the context, so in rural communities, Specials may be more willing to take this community-facing role. More experienced Specials may also be more willing to take on more proactive community roles.

At a divisional level, some participants highlighted the complex role of the Special Constable, with some challenging the idea that the Special Constable is a 'bridge' between police and community at all:

*'My expectation would be the volunteer... comes out for whatever reason and does shifts without being paid for... [Are they] a bridge to communities? No, they're not. I don't know what that means... they're someone that gives up their free time to come out, and is generally with response because that's the bulk of policing...'* - Divisional Level Interview

*'... You're not doing local policing... I mean for most of our specials who are currently living in [this division], they live in [the city] where they volunteer, so arguably you could say that there are policing their local city [not their local community]...'* - Divisional Level Interview

This position was based on the understanding that 'community' or 'localism' was not only a feature of police volunteerism, but of policing generally. Claiming that the expectation for the Special Constabulary was to provide a link between the police and the public they served, for some stakeholders, undermined the nature of the work that regular officers do to foster and create those links:

*'I think that [calling them the bridge between police and the public] would be doing an injustice to the division... suggesting that work isn't being done by regular officers in the whole to be ingrained in the community' – Divisional Level Interview*

Continuing the 'bridge' between the community and police analogy, there are several features we must consider in the construction of this role for the Special Constabulary.

Firstly, consideration needs to be given to the extent to which Special Constables should be leading on the police-community links or whether they should be more in a supporting role. Our findings suggest that in some (particularly rural) communities, Specials step into a more prominent bridging role. This is not necessarily a problem if it is a proactive decision made at the local level. As the regulars become more stretched, there is a risk that Special Constables may be relied upon in the longer term as a police-community bridge.

Secondly, we would suggest that the foundations of the bridge must be correct – the structure must be adequately defined and laid out from the beginning, to ensure that the support and management is in place to ensure that Special Constables are supported in this role.

Lastly, the resources from which the bridge is built must be fit for purpose – that is to say that the Special Constables themselves must be willing to be part of the bridge that Police Scotland is building. Much of this - as with other recommendations - relates to properly communicating and taking stock of the values, motivations and expectations of Special Constables and ensuring at the local level these are managed appropriately and harnessed where possible. This feeds in to Recommendations 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9.

## **Summary**

By reflecting on the evidence given by the stakeholders at divisional and national level within Police Scotland, and the data gathered from the Special Constables themselves, this report considers the way in which the role of the Special Constable is defined within the police service. This report notes:

- There is no definition of the role that Special Constables play which is shared across the volunteers, and divisional and national levels of management within Police Scotland.
- Whereas motivations, environment and experience construct the volunteers perception of their own role, operational priorities and managerial considerations factor into the construction of the police services' understanding of the Special Constables role.
- Regular officers often do not know the competence levels of a Special Constable, and therefore, can have difficulties trusting or relying on them in an operational environment.
- It is important to consider the bridging function of the Special Constable between the police and the community. The foundations and structures need to be able to support the Special and the Specials themselves need to be part of the discussion about their role and function.

## **Finding 4: Addressing the falling numbers of Special Constables**

This section focuses on the high attrition rate of Special Constables across Police Scotland. This issue is best summarised by one national management level member of Police Scotland staff:

*‘At the inception of Police Scotland, there was around 1300 specials, and now we have about 500... I think there are two [reasons]. One has been that a number of specials for a number of reasons have become inactive over time, for a variety of reasons. We haven’t been particularly good at breaking the relationship with those individuals with isn’t necessarily helpful for anyone in that situation. The other has been the strong path of recruitment into the regulars.’* – National Level Interview

This section will explore each of those issues in turn - inactivity and Special Constables as a route to the regulars - before concluding by exploring the challenges around managing volunteers in the specific context of policing.

### **‘Inactive’ Specials**

There are a number of Special Constables who complete their training, gain their warrant card and then complete only a few shifts before becoming inactive. The current Police Scotland definition for an inactive Special Constable is:

*‘A Special Constable who has not undertaken duty for a period of 6 months or more, without providing an explanation/reason.’*

There has been a recent focus on inactive Special Constables, with a report going to the executive in October 2019. The group of most concern are the Special Constables who have remained inactive for long periods of time, but still retain their status as a Special Constable and have a warrant card. They represent a potential security risk for Police Scotland:

*‘...from the point of like a security point of view, they’re sitting there with a whole uniform, a warrant card, baton, cuffs, everything else and they can get access to any police building.’* – Divisional Level Interview

Having access to equipment and knowledge, but being distanced from the oversight of the policing organisation does represent a potential security risk for Police Scotland. Not only could warrant cards be used in unscrupulous ways, but they could be used to cause harm. As of August 2019, there were 514 Special Constables throughout Scotland, 121 which of these are classed as ‘inactive’ as defined by the definition above. Of that 121, 74 of such have an explanation for their inactivity e.g. Maternity, Seasonal employment, Injury/illness. The remaining 47 are regarded as having fully disengaged with the Special Constabulary and Police Scotland but have yet to formally resign. These are the Special Constables who are most risky for Police Scotland.

Additionally, inactive Specials are a financial drain on the service, particularly if they have not completed many shifts. There appear to be two solutions here: resignation or redeployment. However, neither is necessarily straightforward in practice.

It is difficult to persuade a volunteer to resign, because (as yet) ‘inactivity’ does not constitute a breach of the terms and conditions<sup>1</sup> which would force the resignation of the volunteer:

*‘So, they might have been inactive for two, three or maybe four years even. I’ve got one that has been inactive maybe 14 or 15 years...And the Specials SOP, we can’t require them to resign’ – Divisional Level Interview*

Divisional Coordinators noted the difficulties around the oversight and management of inactive Specials, where a lack of a standard operating procedure for resigning Special Constables represented a challenge. Furthermore, at the time of the research, it is not clear how long a Special needs to be inactive for before they should be required to resign. It is not always clear whether the inactivity has arisen from a temporary change in life circumstances or whether the Special can no longer commit to the hours the organisation requires. Getting to the bottom of these questions is time-consuming and appears to be hampered by a lack of oversight at an organisational level.

The preferred response to inactivity expressed by Divisional Coordinators therefore tends to be to persuade the Special Constable to redeploy:

*‘I would rather get someone back out on the parade rather than resign them because it suits [Police Scotland]’ – Divisional Level Interview*

Encouraging the Special Constable to return to active duty rather than resigning is more desirable for Police Scotland as it increases the amount of available resources, but also ensures that the initial investment in the Special Constable’s training is not wasted. Redeployment of an inactive Special Constable, however, presents its own challenges:

*‘Say I’ve got one that drops off my radar... I’ll start, you know, “is everything okay”, “do you need any help”, and it may be that they’ve got something at home or they’ve got a new job and they’ve not told me, you know... Police Scotland’s not high in their priority...’ - Divisional Level Interview*

Managing volunteers in this way can be complex and time-consuming. This Divisional Coordinator highlights the time involved in trying to identify the reasons why the Special Constable is not contributing and whether they have a solution:

*‘You’ve just got to generally keep on top of it in general because if somebody has not been on parade in a couple of months then you’ve got to get in touch with them, why are you not parading, is it an issue. I’ve got a couple of people who have got issues of illness or family issues so you’ve got to keep on top of that... Nationally [as a coordinator] you’re supposed to get two days a week as a national guideline [to be a coordinator]... sometimes it could take three or four days [work] depending on what’s happening, what’s being asked of us, if it’s the training night week because it’s Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.’ – Divisional Level Interview*

Trying to maintain communication with inactive Special Constables, encouraging them to come back, and ensuring that they are supported if necessary is complex. It requires the Coordinator to have the ability to monitor the Specials in their division and, therefore, to have the time and means to carry out the role successfully. This inevitably leads to variable practice

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware of an updated plan which has gone to the Force Executive around inactive Special Constables which recommends tightening this up.

nationally, where coordinators with the capacity to do so will understand and identify inactive Specials early on when there is greater opportunity to support them in redeployment. In places where the Coordinator role is more complicated, or has moved between different officers, there is a higher risk that inactive Specials can ‘drop off the radar’ of the Coordinator. Stronger national oversight would facilitate divisional coordination of, and support for, inactive Specials. This is reflected in Recommendations 7 and 10.

Time is the main factor impacting on the redeployment and management of inactive Specials, particularly in rural areas:

*‘It definitely affects your time... because of the [large] area geographically, there was a time when I first took over that there was a lot of inactive Specials... So, I was going out to visit them at stations helping them to get logged back in the system, going through bits and pieces just trying to gee them up a bit. So, because I was having to go out one day and then I come out there another... that’s where it for me it became time consuming.’ – Divisional Level Interview*

Inactive Special Constables represent a challenge for Divisional Coordinators, based on the time and resources they have available to resolve the problem. Furthermore, encouraging Special Constables to redeploy often involves improving the appeal and/or accessibility of their role, requiring the Divisional Coordinator to be flexible in presenting solutions to that problem. This is not always possible. However the Divisional Coordinator can play an important role in supporting inactive Specials back into work:

*‘I want to find out why they are losing interest... have a conversation with [a] Special Constable who wasn’t attending regularly at all... The only thing stopping [them coming out] was that they were embarrassed that they didn’t know how to ask to get another pair of trousers. That was the only thing preventing [them]. Part of the coordinator’s duty is to look after their welfare and wellbeing, and keep regular contact’ – Divisional Level Interview*

While this can help improve the experience of Specials and reduce the attrition rates, the situation might not always be as simple as this. The (lack of) availability of some specials, and taking account of volunteers’ unique needs and availability, can be frustrating for Divisional Coordinators:

*‘...how can you plan anything around somebody who is only going to come out once every three months and even then that’s not guaranteed, for whatever reason, whether it be family commitments or work or whatever. So, how can you plan around someone who’s coming out on that type of basis...’ – Divisional Level Interview*

*‘I’ve got specials that just won’t work at the football, because they just don’t like football... we try to work with that... [and] maybe they are going to help at the kid’s football so they don’t have an extra night to give... maybe it’s a work life balance thing... but it’s complicated’ – Divisional Level Interview*

Special Constables can carry a ‘stigma’ in an organisational sense, where resourcing inconsistency and a sense of picking and choosing what shifts and jobs they do goes against the culture of policing more generally. Their voluntary nature can make them a difficult resource to plan and manage, which translates into an understanding across the policing organisation that they require flexible working hours, and that their attendance and reliability

as a source of support may fluctuate depending on how they are feeling or what events are occurring in their personal lives. This contradicts much of the police culture literature and the norms of a disciplined organisation. This can at times cause an organisational challenge:

*‘Just because you’re a volunteer doesn’t mean you can turn around and say “och, I’m not doing that”. You’ve committed to something, and certainly with the police... and uniformed organisations, you’re of no use...’* - Divisional Level Interview

Inactive specials, then, represent a challenge to Police Scotland. Long term inactivity can be a security risk, while inconsistent volunteering can be challenging to manage and over time can lead to a reduced faith and support of the Special Constables. Furthermore, the Specials Coordinators have an important role in terms of national oversight and keeping people supported.

### **The Special Constabulary as a Route to becoming a regular Police Officer**

A second reason for the reduction of numbers of Special Constables is the increased movement of Special Constables into the ranks of regular Police Constables. We know that there is a cohort of Special Constables motivated to join the regular constabulary, who are seen by Police Scotland as a potential pool of future Police Officers, but at the same time, they represent an ephemeral group of volunteers (though potentially a reliable source of support if they retain their motivation to join the regular constabulary). Ultimately, the end goal of this group is to use the Special Constabulary as a vehicle for enhancing their chances of becoming a regular Police Officer, leaving the volunteering position in the process of joining the regulars:

*‘Most people are literally either getting deferred or referred from recruitment... they’re told “come and join the Specials for six months’, and the six month after they’ve joined [as a volunteer] they can re-join the regulars.... I think that’s attracted the younger people who literally are Specials for a matter of months... yes, my numbers are going up but then I’m haemorrhaging them to recruitment...’* - Divisional Level Interview

This is a police volunteering problem that is not unique to Scotland (Britton et al, 2016), but there is no readymade solution to combat the attrition of Special Constables through progression into the regular police service. One of the reasons for this is because the Special Constabulary being used in this way is not always seen as a negative:

*‘I think that it is entirely appropriate that people do that as a road into policing, I think where we need to improve is the attraction and retention of a different group of people, who don’t intend to join the regulars in the future. I think there are two groups of people that we want to attract – those who you described that want to use this as a route into policing, I think that is fine and healthy, and a strong cohort at present. The other is the group [career specials], which I think has diminished over time, and that’s the group that I think want to join to volunteer. That’s an area that we need to do more on.’* – National Level Interview

Special Constables joining the regulars therefore does not in itself present a problem. Acknowledging and supporting these Special Constables in their efforts to become regulars would be productive. Additionally, developing specific routes in to the regulars from the

Special Constabulary (Recommendation 1) could help Police Scotland manage this attrition and could make becoming a Special Constable more attractive to potential recruits.

### **Summary**

The interviews with divisional coordinators and national managers from across the police service emphasised that Special Constables present a number of unique managerial concerns. These concerns typified the way that the divisional coordinators understood Special Constables effectiveness as a policing resource. The findings show that:

- Dealing with inactive Special Constables represents a significant portion of the Coordinator's time within their role, and Special Constable inactivity is often an uncontrollable and unforeseeable consequence of the volunteer's personal circumstances. This can make planning difficult especially for Coordinators in the busiest areas.
- Inactive Special Constables still carrying warrant cards represents a security and reputational risk to Police Scotland.
- Police Scotland could reduce the impact on volunteer numbers of Special Constables leaving to become regular officers, by trying to recruit more long-term Special Constables who are *not* motivated to volunteer by a desire to join as a regular Constable.
- Police Scotland should specifically target both types of Special Constable - those wishing to join the regulars and those who see themselves as 'career specials'. In this way, the organisation will have a sense of how many serving Specials are likely to leave in the short term, and can plan and recruit accordingly.



## Recommendations

The remainder of this report presents recommendations, based on the findings of this project.

**Recommendation 1: Implement a new ‘dual stream’ structure for the management and development of Special Constables: the ‘Route to the Regulars Training Stream’ for those aiming to become regulars within a set timescale (to be defined by Police Scotland) and the ‘Continuing Special Constable Training Stream’ for those considering being a ‘career’ special.**

Subsequent recommendations in the report feed in to this recommendation.

There is an opportunity for Police Scotland to support those Specials who wish to become regulars and those Specials who do not have a desire to join the regulars, in different ways. It is important that Special Constables on both these streams are given equal resource consideration and support. We envisage the dual stream approach working in the following ways:

- All Special Constables undertake the same basic training. Within the training programme, the recruits would be asked whether they plan on applying to become a regular Police Constable within a set timescale or not. The timescale would be defined by Police Scotland, but we would not envisage this being less than a year of service. This would put Special Constables on one of the two streams, although of course this would not preclude their changing stream later if they chose.
- The **‘Route to the Regulars Training Stream’**, which is tailored towards those Special Constables that are considering becoming a Police Officer in the future, would focus on the development of Special Constables becoming regulars. We would anticipate a structured training and development programme being put in place to support officers on this pathway (Recommendation 2). There would be a minimum amount of time and volunteering hours a Special Constable would be a Special before being able to apply to join the regulars with shortened probationer training. Part of this will involve mapping Special Constable training requirements on to the probationer training and exploring the possibility of accelerated entry into the regulars for Specials on this route. Additionally, we propose that these volunteers are placed within a framework which emphasises the gathering of evidence to show competency within the Police Officer role.
- The **‘Continuing Special Constable Training Stream’** captures those Special Constables who are not motivated to become a regular Police Constable. This means that the motivations of this group of Special Constables will more mixed than those in the first stream. With this in mind, Police Scotland needs to be more aware of the individual needs, motivations and expectations of the Special Constables in this stream. We envisage a more structured training and development scheme than is currently in place, for Specials indicating this preference. In contrast to the Route to the Regulars, the training opportunities available here would not necessarily be tied to probationer training. Additionally, there is a real opportunity for Police Scotland to harness existing skill set of this group. We would advise that Police Scotland focus on the motivations of this group of volunteers and facilitate appropriate training and

potential specialisation within the Special Constabulary. This is particularly true for Specials located in rural locations. It should however be borne in mind that in rural and especially remote island areas, it may be members of this stream who will provide 'regular' policing.

We think there would be a number of benefits to a dual stream approach to the Special Constabulary:

- It would help with the management and fluctuation of numbers of Special Constables and the flow between the Specials and the regulars;
- By recognising and supporting the Special Constables in their motivations, attrition rates would likely be improved;
- It would help support a more joined-up approach to training across Police Scotland;
- By formalising training programmes for Special Constables, the organisational oversight and accountability is improved;
- Although there would be an initial cost in scoping, mapping and developing Special Constable training programmes, this cost would be partly recouped by reducing the repetition and time in training of Specials on the 'Route to Regulars' programme undertaking Police Constable training. Additionally, reducing attrition rates and inactivity would reduce waste;
- It would allow Police Scotland to more formally harness the skillset of Special Constables. By supporting the development of specialist roles for Special Constables, particular business areas (e.g. Cyber) could be enhanced. This is particularly pertinent for the Continuing Special Constable Stream, where time is less of an issue.

By restructuring the framework of Special Constables around volunteer motivations, the opportunities for Special Constables to realise their expectations is integrated into their management and experiences. This will enhance the feelings that they are making important and meaningful contributions to the police service, and that the police service is committed to delivering an experience for volunteers that acknowledges their own wants and desires.

This report outlines a number of further recommendations which feed into the construction of this dual-stream framework, and further recommendations which ensure that its implementation can lead to additional enhancement of the volunteering experience, and the contribution that they bring to benefit Police Scotland.

**Recommendation 2: Review route(s) into the regulars from the Special Constabulary, enhancing training and reducing the probationer training time required for those on the Route to Regulars Training Programme**

In order to successfully deliver the dual-stream, it is important to consider the training routes into the Regulars. This entails two processes:

- Decisions taken about what ongoing continual professional development (CPD) / portfolio would need to be completed by a Special Constable on the 'Routes to Regular' programme. Recommendation 4 proposes a 'SOLAP' (Student Officer Learning Assessment Portfolio) model as an option, though defining exactly what this training would include was beyond the scope of this project. We would envisage the

training including face to face and online distance learning (ODL) packages which are already in place for probationer training.

- Mapping the training of the Special Constables onto that of the regulars. Once the training of the Specials and regulars are mapped and aligned, then it would be possible to decide if Special Constables on the 'Route to Regulars' could undertake reduced training to join the regulars. This would have clear cost savings.

Although we are cognisant of the importance of maintaining training standards, we think there is a case for reducing the amount of time needed to become a regular if:

- The Special Constable is on the 'Route to the Regulars' programme, successfully completes the required ongoing CPD and training schedule (once defined);
- Completes the required time and hours (to be defined by management) as a Special Constable, and;
- Is signed off successfully by the appropriate manager (perhaps the Divisional Coordinator).

We think this will be beneficial because:

- It would save time and money in training Special Constables in becoming regulars;
- It would support those Special Constables in their training. In the long term this would also be beneficial for the regulars because the ones who have been on the 'Route to Regulars' will have an understanding of training requirements;
- It would help with the oversight and training of Specials;
- Police Scotland will have a clear idea of the numbers of Specials who will apply to become regular Police Officers<sup>2</sup> and an idea of the timescales, allowing for better planning of both numbers of Special Constables and regulars, and;
- It would support the motivation of many Special Constables to work towards being a regular.

### **Recommendation 3: Develop enhanced training and support for Special Constables on the 'Continuing Special Constable Training Scheme'**

In addition to developing the training for the 'Route to Regulars', we recommend that a structured training programme is developed around those on the 'Continuing Special Constable Training Scheme'. There is an opportunity to enhance the way that Special Constables are deployed by structuring training, allowing Special Constables on this path to develop more specialist roles, should they wish.<sup>3</sup>

We would envisage this working:

- Special Constable indicates a wish to be on the 'Continuing Special Constable Training Scheme' within initial training.

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<sup>2</sup> This group of Specials will still be required to apply to become regulars, they will not be automatically accepted as probationers.

<sup>3</sup> We do not envisage this being as extensive as some of the models in England and Wales and we remain ambivalent to developing a rank structure among the Special Constables in Scotland. We would recommend carrying out further work exploring the implications of a rank structure on the Special Constables in Scotland, before taking a decision on whether this is an appropriate path.

- At the end of training all Special Constables get an input on the reality of being a Special and on the training and development processes required once they are warranted.
- The Divisional Coordinator meets the Continuing Special Constables at the 6 month point:
  - to 'check in' and discuss how the first 6 months have gone;
  - to find out if their volunteering ambitions are being met;
  - to have an in depth conversation about future ambitions;
  - to 'check-in' and see if there are any skills that Police Scotland can harness through specialisms (i.e. if the Special Constable has particular training in a Police Scotland business area that would benefit from additional support);
  - to support the Continuing Special in beginning to work towards a specialism if this is practicable;
  - to manage the expectations of the Special Constable if they are unrealistic.
- We would envisage Divisional Coordinators having these review meetings yearly after the 6 month meeting.

Linking training and motivations more closely together should help reduce the number of inactive Special Constables, enhance the oversight of them and support training needs and personal development. There is also a clear benefit for Police Scotland in harnessing existing skills of their workforce.

**Recommendation 4: Consider using the 'SOLAP' (Student Officer Learning Assessment Portfolio) as a tool for supporting the new training structures and introducing a minimum numbers of hours for Special Constables.**

Although Police Scotland already have training programmes in place, we think the 'SOLAP' (Student Officer Learning Assessment Portfolio) model would be worth exploring. A new training structure, which is based on the SOLAP model used in England and Wales Special Constabularies, would support the implementation of a dual stream Specials structure in Scotland.

Using the SOLAP model, which is focused around gathering evidence of the Special Constable's competencies, would allow for volunteering training which is individualised, pointing to the competency of the volunteers. Following the SOLAP model, Special Constables can gather evidence related to the sort of work that they will engage with, which can be tailored to the personal Special Constable and based on the geographical area they are tasked with working within.

The SOLAP model would allow Recommendations 2 and 3 to be developed, with separate evidence for the officer on the 'Route to the Regulars' and 'Continuing Training' streams (see Recommendation 1). Those in the separate streams would develop targets and goals with Divisional Coordinators (Recommendation 6). In addition, a time limit can be placed on the collection of evidence in order to ensure that Special Constables contribute a particular minimum number of shifts or hours to qualify that training as completed (Recommendation 9). This would incentivise Special Constables to commit to volunteering for a prescribed period of time, particularly those who see a future career in regular policing, who have under

current conditions, been identified as representing less value for money than other Special Constables because of their shorter length of volunteer service.

This recommendation represents a number of important benefits which supports the other recommendations in the report:

- It would be a way of capturing evidence of the competence of Special Constables;
- It is a tool for providing evidence for Special Constables on the 'Route to Regulars' scheme;
- It enables the tracking and supporting of the training of Special Constables on the 'Continuing Stream', making volunteering more meaningful to those Specials not motivated by a desire to join Police Scotland as regular officers;
- The SOLAP model would help identify and support those Specials who disengage in training and shifts, with the aim of identifying and supporting them to continue to volunteer, and;
- Incentivise and monitor those Special Constables who contribute the smallest number of volunteering hours to do additional hours as Special Constables.

**Recommendation 5: Ensure there is capability in the tools and systems employed for the monitoring of Special Constables to be able to track volunteering needs and flag up development requirements and inactive specials**

The proposed new structure which focuses on the development of volunteers, the tracking of their progress and contribution, and recommends minimum time limits (see recommendation 9 and 10), requires an accessible and robust means of tracking and identifying the needs of individual Special Constables. Given that we are recommending enhancing training and reducing the time a 'Route to Regular' needs to do in probationer training, it is important that there are appropriate monitoring tools in place to support these changes.

It appears that this information is currently available across a number of systems, but it would be useful to develop a database through which the individual volunteers' needs and development can be tracked, along with progress along their respective training routes. Ideally this would link to a SOLAP type system.

This would allow Divisional and National Coordinators to have a tool which they can draw upon to monitor the progression of individuals through training and development, highlight and flag potential problems that they may encounter which represents a barrier to their service. This tool could record the motivations and expectations of Special Constables to support the groups on their respective training schemes.

Additionally, using this database tool to help organise shifts, engage and communicate with specials, and organise the support frameworks of Special Constables will ensure that Divisional Coordinators are equipped with this information when organising and managing their volunteers. This recommendation will:

- Support the monitoring and evaluation of Special Constabulary progress;
- Give Divisional Coordinators a tool through which they can engage with, manage and support Special Constables on a more individual level, making their job of identifying needs and support more effective;

- Enhance Special Constables' feelings that Police Scotland is taking their needs and development seriously, enhancing feelings of wellbeing, and ultimately, satisfaction and retention.

**Recommendation 6: Develop a performance framework, with aims and objectives for evaluating the national goals for the Special Constabulary. These should be monitored, measured and assessed at both divisional and national levels.**

Restructuring the Special Constabulary as suggested above, requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This is to ensure that the dual stream structure does in fact improve volunteer satisfaction, retention, recruitment and contribution. In order to do this, Police Scotland should bring national and local management teams together to set divisional and national aims and objectives for the Special Constabulary. These should include retention numbers, the numbers of Specials successfully completing the 'Route to Regulars' and objectives around ensuring that the 6 monthly and annual reviews are carried out in a timely manner. They should also support engagement of Special Constables and reduce inactivity, by minimising numbers of inactive Special Constables and ensuring cases are dealt with in a timely manner.

Specifically, these aims and objectives should be developed in conjunction with Divisional Coordinators, to allow for the identification of local and divisional needs and difficulties and take account of local differences. The aims and objectives which are set in divisions with large urban centres are likely to be different from those set in mostly rural divisions.

These aims and objectives can be dual layered, with national ones indicating the desire of the organisation as a whole for the purpose and function of the Special Constabulary, and divisional aims and objectives focusing on the experiences and needs of the Special Constabulary at the local level. National aims and objectives are likely to focus on Special Constable recruitment numbers and training, while local level aims and objectives might focus on the motivations and roles of the Special Constables. By giving Divisional Coordinators a role in setting local goals, it will allow for:

- The Special Constabulary to conform to national expectations, aims and objectives, whilst also allowing for them to become effective local policing resources by ensuring that the local and divisional operational needs are considered in the construction of their targets.
- The placing of the Divisional Coordinator at the core of volunteer management within those divisions, ensuring that they are involved in the construction and implementation of local volunteering policy which is tailored towards the experience and needs of their own volunteers.

**Recommendation 7: Increase the amount of dedicated resources to divisional coordinators for the line management of Special Constables.**

This is a key recommendation. We see Divisional Coordinators as the key part of the success of the future of the Special Constabulary and therefore this role needs adequately resourced. In order to ensure that the new dual-stream structure can be implemented, more resources should be dedicated to the Divisional Coordinators to ensure effective management and engagement with the Special Constables. We strongly recommend consideration is given to

making all Divisional Coordinators a substantive post, where it is their sole role within Police Scotland.

The study has provided evidence that the management of Special Constables can present logistical problems for Divisional Coordinators. Implementing the dual stream (Recommendation 1) will also require Divisional Coordinators to have a more hands-on role in monitoring, supporting and developing of Special Constables. It is therefore important to ensure these people are given the time and space in which to grow their teams of Special Constables. This will in turn enhances the feeling of support experienced by the Special Constable. Additionally, it will:

- Support the new training and management plans recommended above;
- Enhance the commitment of volunteers through improving the support they have access to within the police service;
- Enhance volunteer satisfaction through improving Special Constables' feelings of recognition by providing opportunities meaningful to them;
- Show that Police Scotland is promoting and actively supporting the role of Special Constables within the organisation.
- Save money. Although deploying full time Divisional Coordinators will cost Police Scotland some money in terms of resourcing, this will be more than recovered by a reduction in Special Constable inactivity and, in the longer term, we think it will uplift of Special Constable numbers through more locally geared activity, and;
- Mitigate the risks associated with inactive Special Constables through better oversight and support at divisional level.

**Recommendation 8: Introduce a short survey during training which asks about the motivations and expectations of Special Constables and asks them to nominate which stream they wish to be on. Then survey Special Constables at regular intervals, perhaps as part of their SOLAP training schedule.**

With motivation the most important factor in organising these new streams of Special Constables, understanding and identifying motivation at the outset of the Special Constables journey is an important step in ensuring that the restructure is successful.

The findings from the study not only pointed towards the variation in the different motivations across the cohorts of Special Constables, but also suggests that Special Constables have different expectations from the reality of the role. It is important to manage these expectations in training but to also monitor the motivations of the Special Constable over time<sup>4</sup>. Implementing a dual stream approach should help address some of the gaps between motivation and expectations, however, it would also be useful to monitor motivations and expectations against the reality of the role over time. Being able to identify Special Constables' expectations of the role, what areas of policing may best suit the experience they are expecting, and being able to manage these expectations before they are deployed, will allow for their experiences and the expectations which they bring to the policing organisation to be better aligned (within operational constraints). This, we know, increases satisfaction,

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<sup>4</sup> We appreciate the time constraints with carrying out ongoing research and monitoring, but we envisage this type of monitoring activity as being helpful for developing support and training for the Special Constables. This would become part of the substantive role of the full time Divisional Coordinator. We would be happy to support this work and help design and monitor this survey.

feelings of worth, and ultimately, will improve the retention of the Special Constables within the organisation. As such, this recommendation will:

- Ensure that the Special Constables know what they can expect from their volunteering activity at the point of joining;
- Enhance retention by making by catering to Special Constables' individual needs and preferences;
- Manage the expectations of the Special Constabulary, allowing Divisional Coordinators to pick up on unrealistic expectations at an earlier point.

**Recommendation 9: Begin consultation about imposing a required minimum number of hours for volunteer participation.**

Implementing this recommendation would impose a minimum time frame for the training of Special Constables. This has some human resource implications, and as such, consultation with Special Constables should happen before deciding on what the minimum number of hours should be.

The cost of training and supplying equipment to a Special Constable is approximately £8000. The SOLAP model would be a useful tool for ensuring that the Special Constable completes a set number of hours. While we would be hesitant about making this commitment too onerous, it is important to recognise the need for ongoing maintenance of skills and confidence among Special Constables. This may also improve the confidence of the Regulars on relying on Special Constables.

A minimum hours requirement would help formalise the training and allow Police Scotland to more effectively manage volunteers. From a human resource point of view, having a definite monthly/weekly number of hours for each volunteer enables more consistent planning and represents a greater value for money from these volunteers. We would be concerned, however, that imposing a set amount of time on volunteering activity, without introducing any new incentive, may lead to those Special Constables who currently serve but do few hours feeling further disenfranchised. We therefore recommend introducing this alongside improved training and development opportunities and consulting with Special Constables to find out what impact introducing minimum hours would have on those already serving.

**Recommendation 10: Introduce a new policy for the management and termination of inactive Special Constables.**

We are aware of some work going on in this area, but we strongly recommend that robust policy and management around inactive Special Constables is put in place. The recommendations above should help with the monitoring of inactivity and also should reduce the numbers of inactive Specials. As the recent internal Police Scotland report highlights:

In August 2019, there were 514 Special Constables throughout Scotland, 121 of which are classed as "inactive" as defined by the SOP. Of that 121 it has been established through Divisional Coordinator enquiries that 74 of such have an explanation for their inactivity e.g. Maternity, Seasonal employment, Injury/illness. The remaining 47 are regarded as having fully disengaged with the Special Constabulary and Police Scotland but have yet to formally resign. This group are rightly highlighted as a risk to the organisation.



A more effective process for addressing inactivity would reduce the demand on staff, offer any support required at an earlier stage and may encourage some inactive Special Constables to either redeploy or offer their resignation sooner.

We would recommend implementing the policy put forward by the National Coordinator as soon as practicable:

- **Staged Process:** This offers Police Scotland a transparent and accountable process to better manage the number of 'inactive' Special Constables, with limited demands placed on local coordinators and would be facilitated as follows:
  - Three months of inactivity – first letter (standard letter) seeking clarification for period of inactivity, potential welfare issues or any other contributory factor, with offer of support if required. Closing with a prompt for the special to re-engage with the force and re-deploy. The reintroduction of persons would be managed on a case-by-case basis and any remedial action identified and offered.
  - Six months of inactivity – second letter (recorded delivery) seeking further clarification, welfare etc. Closing with a further prompt for the Special Constable to re-engage, a classification of their now “inactive” status and the process for them to redeploy. A resignation form attached to letter. Support to redeploy is again offered, however it is explained that if no response is received after 10 days then their status as a Special Constable will be terminated and their records updated to reflect this.
  - If this threshold is met the “inactive” Special Constable is then informed by recorded delivery letter, to their last known address that they are no longer considered a Special Constable and should surrender immediately all items of police uniform and identification or collection of same will be arranged. Persons will be referred to the Police Scotland leavers survey which may uncover key aspects of that individuals reasons for becoming inactive.

This would also ensure the Divisional Coordinator can report upon particularities of each situation which may have impacted upon their ability to deploy, such as illness, family/work commitments, welfare and ensure support options are made available.

Police Scotland would be able to demonstrate a commitment to supporting volunteering by operating a volunteering process that is efficient, that supports Special Constables who wish to develop their skills and one which effectively manages inactive or disillusioned personnel from the force. It in no way detracts from the force supporting those Special Constables who are inactive with an identified welfare issue or those seeking support to re-engage and re-deploy. This option simply provides a more robust and effective management model for inactive Special Constables.

This process should, in the longer term, reduce the burden and not incur any additional tasks for Divisional staff, who are currently monitoring inactivity. By referring all final matters via either the North, East or West Regional Coordinator and finally the National Coordinator, a robust process of consistency and quality assurance is being applied and one which would withstand external challenge/scrutiny.

Alongside this, we would support the automatic termination of appointment on failure to respond to letter to last known address. This process would undoubtedly be the most effective and efficient method of removing inactive specials. It would consist of one letter despatched by the Volunteer Coordination Unit to the last known address that would inform the Special Constable that due to their extended period of inactivity their status as a Special Constable is now terminated. This process would be only be invoked to deal with the current 47 who have failed to engage with previous Divisional Coordinator requests and where no explanation of their long term inactivity has been offered/established. Utilising this method would return the force to a position of strength, reduce the risks as previously outlined and offer the Divisional Coordinator a level of support from the Volunteer Coordination Unit.

**Recommendation 11: Review the local, divisional and national expectations of the role of Special Constables to create a new definition of the role that volunteers play within Police Scotland<sup>5</sup>. Modernise recruitment materials to reflect these changes, using motivation as a guiding factor in their reconstruction.**

The dual stream structure will also give the opportunity for a ‘rebranding’ of the way that the Special Constabulary can be advertised. In particular, by creating a dual stream, volunteering can both support the number of police officers joining (through the ‘Route to Regulars’) and support the existing regulars (through enhanced training on the ‘Continuing Specials Training Route’). Organising the Special Constabulary in this way, based on motivations and potential outcomes for the volunteers, an opportunity exists for the Special Constabulary to be refreshed. Following this study’s findings, this could incorporate a new definition of the role that the Special Constable, or each of these volunteering streams, plays within the policing organisation.

As the study suggests, there is no one definition across Police Scotland of the role of a Special Constable. By constructing a definition, which takes into account consultation from divisional and national stakeholders, a more appropriate definition can be created which is more easily realised in practise, allow for the better management of volunteer expectations. This will:

- Enhance volunteer commitment and feelings of worth by aligning their expectations and the realities of police work;
- Attract a wider range of volunteers to the police service by capturing a number of potentially attractive motivations within the one definition, and;
- Potentially contribute to a ‘rebranding’ of Special Constables and can be used as a marketing tool in the modernisation of recruitment materials.

If this recommendation was enacted, new recruitment materials which indicate the ‘new look’ of police volunteerism following the dual-stream restructure may help to increase the numbers of Special Constables joining. Once the above recommendations are implemented, emphasising the training opportunities within the advertising would be important. Furthermore, if Police Scotland do pursue a rebranding of the Special Constabulary, then investment in the new name, message and aims would be key. If Police Scotland keep the

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<sup>5</sup> We think the term ‘Special Constable’ has particular connotations and if there is significant work developed around training etc. it might be an appropriate time to rebrand this part of Police Scotland. This would clearly be contentious, so consideration would need to be given to how the rebranding was marketed and who was included in conversations about what the Special Constabulary might be called in the future.

‘Special Constabulary’ name, then there are particular ways that the different training streams could be advertised.

We know from the matching hypothesis (Clary et al, 1999) that volunteers are more attracted to volunteering activities which have recruitment materials and advertisements that offer opportunities which aligns with their motivations and expectations. For example, should Police Scotland desire more Specials who would be attracted to being on the Continuing Training Stream, this study shows are more motivated by ‘giving back’ to communities and tend to be older. Advertisements and recruitment materials should therefore emphasise opportunities which contribute to community policing, the flexibility in training, the opportunities to develop specialisms within the Specials and ways to give back to communities in trying to attract these individuals.

Conversely, attracting Specials on to the ‘Route to Regulars’ would involve advertising the reduction in training time to become a Regular, the structured training opportunities, the support in becoming a regular and targeting marketing towards younger people through, for example, university programmes.

Updating the marketing in this way would allow:

- More nuance to who is targeted and recruited;
- More nuance to the overall mix of Route to Regulars versus Continuing Training Specials;
- An increase in numbers of Special Constables;
- An ability to recruit to more specific targets (e.g. someone who would wish to be on the Continuing Training Stream, working in a rural division with an interest in supporting community policing).

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