

BECOME

Your guide to

A POLICE

becoming a

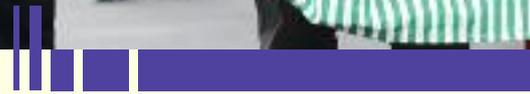
COMMUNITY

police community

SUPPORT

support officer

OFFICER



NEW C

How would you deal with a group of binge drinkers shouting in the street?

What would you do to win the trust of housing estate residents scared to give evidence about a violent assault?

How would you handle kids cycling recklessly inside a shopping centre?

What would you do to rebuild the confidence of an elderly couple who had been burgled?

ABREER A PCSO

You can't arrest anyone. You've got no handcuffs and no baton. All you've got is yourself. It's down to your ability to get on with some of the most challenging people in some of the most difficult situations. The way you win co-operation is through good-humoured persuasion. You do not jump to conclusions about what you see and hear – you understand that the obvious solution may not be the only one. Your very presence on the streets inspires confidence.

Do you have these qualities? If so, you may be just who we're looking for.

As a police community support officer (PCSO) you will be able to develop your skills in dealing with people and will gain job satisfaction from making a difference in your community. Every day you will see how your role makes a positive contribution to local policing.



How does a PCSO fit into the police family?

As a PCSO, you will perform one of the most demanding roles in the modern police force. You will inspire confidence in your community by:

- working as part of a neighbourhood policing team, supporting police officers and community action teams in solving local problems;
- helping to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour;
- dealing with minor offences; and
- supporting front-line policing.

It is an essential role, and what it does is give the police more time to support our communities.

You will:

- help members of the public;
- build links with employers and business and community leaders;
- deal with nuisance offences such as street drinking or begging; and
- be given some limited powers suited to your role.

You will not:

- have powers of arrest;
- be able to interview or deal with prisoners;
- investigate serious crime; or
- carry out the high-risk tasks that police officers perform.



What sort of things do PCSOs do?

PCSOs:

- go on highly visible, uniformed foot and cycle patrols;
- support neighbourhood officers and community action teams in solving local problems;
- make house visits to gather intelligence and offer reassurance to the public after minor crimes or anti-social behaviour;
- become involved with key people in the community, such as religious and business leaders;
- work with the Community Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Business Watch, Pub Watch, Farm Watch and Horse Watch schemes;
- protect crime scenes until police officers arrive;
- collect CCTV evidence;
- provide low-level crime prevention and personal safety advice;
- carry out low-level missing person enquiries;
- act as professional witnesses, attending court when needed;
- support crime prevention;
- engage with young people;
- interact with schools;
- support the mobile police station; and
- support crime and disorder reduction partnerships.

No day is ever the same as the last

Every day you will make a difference, preventing trouble and making your community stronger and safer. You might need to step in to calm an argument in the street, or you could be running a meeting for residents who are worried about the redevelopment of land. You could be the first member of the Police Service that a troublemaker gets to know and talks to personally.



Do you have the right qualities to be a PCSO?

You need:

- a confident, level-headed, positive and mature manner;
- the ability to deal with difficult people and situations;
- to be sensitive but objective;
- good communication and listening skills;
- good team-working skills;
- stamina for long periods of foot patrol;
- skills to deal with all types of people, some of whom may be drunk, hostile or upset;
- to be accurate when completing paperwork; and
- an appreciation of the confidential nature of police work.

MARIFE

Police community support officer

Metropolitan Police

“I realise I have the most rewarding job in the world”

I love my job – it’s so varied and there’s no such thing as a typical day. Knowing that I can make a difference to people’s lives makes my job very worthwhile.

I grew up in Spain, but moved to England in my 20s and worked in teaching, interpreting and translation. When I spotted an ad in the local newspaper about becoming a community support officer, I instantly knew it was for me.

I now work in a neighbourhood team with other PCSOs and police officers. We can’t make arrests; instead, we spend our time walking the streets, listening to people’s concerns about anti-social behaviour, drug problems or arguments between neighbours.

In this job you have to be approachable, so that people feel they can talk to you. You also need to use your own initiative, work well as part of a team and keep calm in difficult situations.

Working in the police force means meeting people with different backgrounds and perspectives. I meet parents who are concerned about intimidating gangs, shopkeepers who have troubles with shoplifting and older people who are worried about dangerous dogs. When I can improve the quality of their lives, I realise I have the most rewarding job in the world.



How does the recruitment process work?

The recruitment process for PCSOs differs between forces. Please check with the force you are applying to for more details on their process.

There are three steps that you need to complete successfully in order to become a PCSO:

1. Fill in an application form.
2. Attend an assessment process.
3. Pass medical, security and references checks.

Step 1: Fill in an application form

Please complete the form in full, sign it and send it back to the address shown on the form, using the envelope provided.

You will then be contacted to let you know whether you have passed step 1 and can progress to step 2. You will notice that there is an equal opportunities form included. It would be very helpful to us if you could complete this because it helps us to know how diverse our applicants are.

What is the most important part of the application form?

The most important part of the application form is the competency assessment. Your answers will help us to work out whether you are likely to have the skills and abilities to be an effective PCSO and whether to invite you to step 2 of the assessment process, at the assessment centre.

Please read all the instructions thoroughly. It is important that you think carefully about your answers.

- The competency assessment section of the application form asks you to provide three specific examples from your recent past of situations you have encountered. Your answers will be used to decide if you can progress to the next stage of assessment.
- We are looking for information about how you behave in difficult situations. Research has shown that certain ways of behaving are essential to the work of a PCSO. The more of these behaviours we see, the more likely you are to be invited to the next stage of assessment. It is therefore important that your answers describe in some detail what you said and did. Do not be too general.

- You should read the questions to make sure that you fully understand what you need to do and you should choose your examples very carefully. Each question has a number of prompts. Make sure that you answer all of the prompts.
- Answer all of the questions. If you leave a question blank or tell us that you cannot think of an answer, it is very unlikely that you will pass.
- In all parts of the form please write clearly and concisely. If we can't read or understand what you write, we can't score it. Pay attention to your spelling, handwriting, punctuation and grammar. You are being assessed on your written skills throughout the application form. We also expect your examples to be to the point, clear and easy to read – as any police report or statement would need to be.
- You can use examples from your work, social, home or educational life.
- Try to use examples of situations that you found difficult or challenging to deal with. These tend to achieve better marks.
- Write in complete sentences, rather than notes or bullet points. Avoid using jargon or slang terms.
- You must not add extra sheets, write outside the space provided or write between the lines. No marks will be given for evidence that is outside the space provided.
- The form also asks about your motivation to become a PCSO and your expectations of the role.

The application must be all your own work. Be honest and expect to be questioned on any answers that you give.

How does the recruitment process work? (continued)

Step 2: Attend an assessment process

If your application passes the first assessment, we will invite you to the second part of the assessment process.

Competency assessment: example answer

We have developed an example answer so that you can see what kind of answer we're looking for. Note how the example uses 'I' and gives details about how things were done and when.

PCSOs need to be prepared to take responsibility for making difficult decisions. Think of a situation when you had to make a difficult decision that you knew might upset other people, and when you then had to tell them what you decided.

What was the decision you had to make? I had been invited to a close friend's wedding and asked to help with the arrangements. The wedding was arranged at quite short notice and the date conflicted with a holiday with my parents and sister. We had already booked the holiday and I had paid a large deposit on it. My friend made it clear how important it was to her for me to be at her wedding, and when I told my family they made it clear that they felt I should go on holiday with them as it had been booked for a long time and could not be rearranged at this late date. I had to decide whether to go on the holiday and upset my friend, or cancel my holiday, lose my deposit and upset my family.

What did you take into account when making the decision? I took into account the fact that she was

Step 3: Pass medical, security and references checks

If you perform well at the second part of the assessment process, you will be recommended for appointment subject to references and passing security and medical/fitness checks.

a very old and close friend who, in the past, had gone out of her way to be with me at events which had been special for me (for example birthday parties and when I got my exam results). However, my family deserved and had been looking forward to the holiday with me and had chosen the hotel and the resort to suit me. I would also lose my deposit. I considered the option of joining my parents at the holiday location a few days later than anticipated, but this fell within a peak holiday season and when I checked with the travel agent there were no flights available.

What decision did you make? I decided to go to the wedding and cancel the holiday.

Tell us exactly how you went about telling the other person or people. I told my sister first, as soon as I had made the decision, as she was likely to know how my parents would react. I then waited until my parents were both at home and had eaten their evening meal and were more relaxed. I turned the TV down and said that Jayne (my friend) had been very good to me over the years and that I really wanted to be there for her wedding. I said that I had decided to go to the wedding and cancel my place on the holiday with them. I said that I knew they would be disappointed but that we would have future holidays together, whereas Jayne would only have one wedding like this.



What are we looking for in a PCSO?

These are the key qualities that we are looking for.

Effective communication

You communicate all instructions, decisions and requests clearly. You adapt the way you communicate to suit the people you are talking to.

Community and customer focus

You see things from the public's point of view and encourage others to do the same. You want to build a good understanding and relationship with the community.

Team working

You work effectively as a team member and build relationships within the team.

Respect for race and diversity

You understand other people's views and take them into account. You treat people with dignity and respect at all times, regardless of their background, status, circumstances or appearance.

Personal responsibility

You take personal responsibility for making things happen and achieving results. You display motivation, commitment and perseverance, and you are reliable. You act with a high degree of integrity. You take personal responsibility for your actions and sort out issues or problems that arise. You are focused on achieving results to the required standard and on developing your skills and knowledge.

What powers do PCSOs have?

PCSOs can be given a range of powers to deal with the environment, transport, anti-social behaviour and security. At the moment these vary from force to force.

GEORGINA

Police community support officer

Cheshire Constabulary

My work involves a lot of freedom, where I get to manage my own time. It's great being out and about all day, talking to people, doing investigative work and getting to know the local community really well.

After almost 20 years of working in the fitness industry as an instructor and senior manager, I was tired of all the travelling and needed a change. I had a lot of friends in the force, so becoming a police community support officer felt like a natural step. I haven't looked back since!

Early on, I found that I have a real talent for working with 16- to 18-year-olds. I'm not sure what it is, but they seem to listen to me. I worked together with a youth offending team, helping offenders, their parents and their siblings. Younger siblings, in particular, need support as they often struggle in violent and chaotic situations. For that work, I was awarded the Cheshire Criminal Justice Award.

My greatest achievement isn't the award, though. It's seeing kids who were once caught in a vicious cycle of crime or abuse turning their lives around. I meet them on the street sometimes and I feel so proud playing a part in getting them on their feet again.

Anyone thinking of joining the police must have that desire to help people. You must also be good at listening and solving problems quickly. You need tonnes of patience and quite thick skin, and it also helps if you're a bit nosy!

We may not have the same powers as police officers, but we can set things in motion. If we spot a problem and involve the right people, like schools, social services or housing associations, we can achieve great things. Knowing that you played a big role in pulling these people together is a great feeling.



“You must be good at listening and solving problems quickly. You need tonnes of patience and it also helps if you're a bit nosy”

Training and development

Your training and development will be key to your career as a PCSO.

Serving your community is a fundamental part of being a PCSO. Therefore one of the most important parts of your training will be to develop the key skills that help you to do this.

The training will use a mixture of methods such as practical demonstrations, computer-based simulations and presentations.

Each police force tailors its training programmes to reflect local needs. Your chosen police force will give you a detailed programme once your application to be a PCSO has been successful.



Frequently asked questions

What is the role of a PCSO?

As a PCSO, you have three main responsibilities:

1. To reduce crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour by being highly visible within your community. Your presence will deter anti-social behaviour and many other offences.
2. To deal with minor offences using the powers given to you by your force's chief constable. Your intervention often deters people from committing offences. It also stops minor problems from getting worse.
3. To support front-line policing. You will carry out duties such as house-to-house enquiries, guarding crime scenes or providing crime prevention advice.

What is the difference between a PCSO and a police officer?

PCSOs do not have powers of arrest and cannot interview or deal with prisoners. They can only investigate minor offences and they do not carry out the high-risk tasks that police officers perform.

Am I eligible to apply?

The minimum age to become a PCSO is 18, and you must be able to demonstrate all the qualities that are required of a PCSO throughout the assessment process. The retirement age for all police staff is 65.

Do I have to be a British citizen?

You can be of any nationality to apply, provided that you have the permanent right to remain without restriction in the UK. European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss citizens are automatically eligible to apply.

Security checks will be carried out on applicants to ensure that they are of good character.

How fit do I have to be?

You may be required to take a fitness test. You will need to fill in a medical history questionnaire and undergo eyesight tests. PCSOs need to be fit enough to perform quite lengthy foot patrols.

Is it OK if I have a tattoo or body piercing?

Your appearance should show that you are aware of the impression you make on other people, avoiding favouritism and offence at all times. We judge every case on its merits, but you should be aware that some tattoos (whether visible or not) and facial piercings might be unacceptable. Tattoos are unacceptable if they are rude, crude, racist, sexist, sectarian, homophobic, violent or intimidating.

What qualifications do I need?

You do not need formal educational qualifications to become a PCSO. However, your English should be proficient.

What if I have previous convictions?

Previous convictions and cautions will not necessarily stop you from being appointed; it will depend on the nature and the circumstances of the offence. You must declare any convictions, cautions, reprimands, warnings and fixed penalty notices of any kind. Failure to declare information regarding your involvement in any police procedure or investigation may result in the application being withdrawn. If you are unsure, please contact your force.

How much is the salary?

See the enclosed terms and conditions for details.

What hours will I work?

See the enclosed terms and conditions for details.

Will I get a uniform?

Yes.

What equipment will I use?

You will have a radio, possibly a mobile phone and, in most forces, a protective vest. As PCSOs do not carry out potentially confrontational duties, you won't use handcuffs, batons or incapacitant sprays.

Some people call this 'policing on the cheap'. Is it?

No. You are an extra resource to complement and support regular officers.

Will I have to work alone?

Much of your time may be spent patrolling on your own. There will be occasions when you will patrol with other PCSOs, police constables and sergeants as part of your neighbourhood policing team. You will also have opportunities to work with special constables and members of other warden schemes.



Will I have the power of arrest?

No. Police officers, not PCSOs, have the power of arrest. In certain circumstances you may be given the power to require someone to remain with you for up to 30 minutes, pending the arrival of a police officer. However, this is not a power of arrest.

So will I really make a difference?

Yes. You will be a highly visible, reassuring presence, helping to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour and to make your community a better place in which to live. Not everyone has the right qualities to be a PCSO. But if you do, you'll see the difference you make to people's lives every day.



JOE **Police community support officer** Gwent Police

Working as a PCSO satisfies my need to make a difference in this world we live in.

When I saw the ad for the role of a PCSO in the paper, the job description asked for 'someone with life experience who is able to work with people in challenging circumstances'.

It described me perfectly. I used to be a professional musician and have taught music. As a trained health and fitness instructor, I managed a gym for four years. Then I worked in an NHS psychiatric daycare unit and in a crematorium!

I was born in Birmingham to Italian parents. Being part of two cultures gives me a personal insight into how people feel and what they go through when they come to this country.

Why this career? Because there were lots of things going on in society that concerned me and I wanted to be in a position to do something about it. In the last five and a half years doing this job, I've seen the best and worst of people. It's important to have compassion for what goes on out there. You need to earn people's trust and build a rapport with them, whether they are offenders or not.

A typical day involves shift work, and we take turns to work on weekends because it's important to have a presence on the streets when the community is at its busiest.

Police officers respond to incidents, but as PCSOs we work on the prevention side of things – before the trouble happens. I'm working with the local authorities now to set up some activity centres for young people. It's a good feeling knowing that you've made someone's life just that little bit better.

“It's a good feeling knowing that you've made someone's life just that little bit better”

What's good about being a PCSO?

You gain:

- a sense of achievement from helping to create a strong community;
- variety – no two days are ever the same;
- a diverse mix of colleagues – PCSOs come from all age groups, backgrounds, cultures and communities;
- visibility – people get to know you, talk to you and share their concerns with you;
- time outdoors – PCSOs spend 80 per cent of their time patrolling on foot;
- good rates of pay; and
- satisfaction, knowing that regular officers have extra time to deal with more serious crimes.

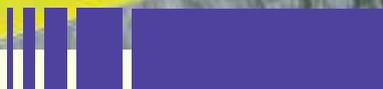
What should I do now?

Now that you've read about being a PCSO, and if you feel you have the qualities we're looking for to make a difference to communities across the UK, why not apply?

If you have any further questions, please contact your local police force or visit www.policecouldyou.co.uk



Our thanks to everyone who helped with the production of this brochure.



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