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**Dr Pauline Ramshaw**

## **Chapter Six**

### **Leadership, Volunteering, and the Special Constabulary**

#### **Introduction**

The global economic crisis of 2008 prompted a resurgence in scholarly attention across western countries in the post-crisis growth in police volunteers, including the Netherlands (Steden and Mehlbaum, 2018), Sweden (Uhnöo and Lofstrand, 2018), the USA (Wolf and Jones, 2018), and England and Wales (Bullock and Millie, 2018, Millie, 2018). This growing body of work captures the breadth of volunteerism in policing reflecting the roles of both non-warranted and non-uniform citizens in addition to uniformed and warranted volunteers. As an emerging field of interest in England and Wales scholarly work on special constable volunteers who undertake police officer roles is gathering pace. Academic literature and research is capturing a broad range of special constable experiences including the extent to which they offer value for money (Whittle, 2014 and 2018); their occupational experiences (Britton, Callender, and Cole, 2016; IPSCJ, 2014); diversity amongst their ranks (Bullock, 2014); deployment and management (Bullock and Leeney, 2016; Gaston and Alexander, 2001); empowering and encouraging community engagement in policing (Calles, 2018); comparisons with police reservists in the USA (Britton, Wolf and Callender, 2018; Wolf and Jones, 2018; and motivation to volunteer (Hieke, 2018a, Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019). While the special constable holds a unique place in the policing landscape across England and Wales, what appears as an anomaly in the present policing schema re-shaped by reform, modernisation, and professionalisation (Holdaway, 2017), is a notable absence of scholarly work around leadership.

The lack of research on the relationship between leadership and special constables is surprising. Drawing from empirical research with senior police officers and stakeholders in policing, Britton and Callendar (2018) note the current climate of austerity and diminishing resources is pressurising senior police leaders into thinking differently about how they conceive the strategic direction and leadership of the special constabulary. Emerging in the mid-eighteenth century and thus pre-dating the introduction of the Metropolitan Police in London in 1829 (Leon, 2018), the original remit of the special constable was to act as police reservists during

times of unrest (Rawlings, 2002). By the twentieth century specials had become highly regarded as a useful resource by political and police leaders (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994). Currently the special constabulary, as volunteer police forces, are integrated into each of the 43 regular police forces present in England and Wales (Leon, 2018a) and special constable volunteers undertake a minimum of 16 hours per month working as unpaid police officers. Holding powers identical to that of regular police officers, specials wear the same uniform, and contribute to all areas of front-line police work including some specialist roles. Unlike other volunteers in policing, special constables due to their full training and full powers, have always had a stronger capability and adaptiveness to operational demands.

Post 2008 research is indicative of renewed attention on volunteer specials and the opportunities they offer for contributing to key areas of policing during a period of reform and modernisation. National directives for the special constabulary are intrinsically committed to supporting the strategic aims and priorities of policing in England and Wales (NPIA, 2008, NPCC, 2016), and strategic thinking at a national level identify the special constabulary as an enabler of current reform and transformation agendas shaping the future of policing (NPCC, 2018). Yet, for Bullock and Millie (2018) a lack of leadership and failure to develop strategic infrastructures capable of supporting the development and deployment of special constables, constrains their effectiveness and efficiency. Alluding to what they describe as ‘regular-centrism’, Britton and Callender (2018, pg. 150) aptly note that discourse on leadership, organisational and workforce reform programmes, concentrate upon the regular police service. They argue that despite considerable scope to feed into current professionalisation agendas, the ‘volunteering’ status of the special present strategic challenges for police leaders, marginalising discussion on the special constabulary, and relegating it to the periphery of any such ‘transformational’ debate.

The relationship between senior leaders in policing and the special constabulary is an important one. Leadership and rank across the special constabulary incorporate supervisory and management roles and responsibilities that range from peer support, mentoring, and welfare, to matters of deployment and engagement with wider police force strategy and objectives (NPIA, 2008). Although the status, power and meaning of rank for volunteer specials would benefit from greater clarity and consistency given the existence of national variations in rank,

structure, and the insignia adopted by special constabularies<sup>1</sup> (NPCC, 2018), ranked special constables are neither the equivalent of, nor hold seniority over, police officers, yet rank is a powerful tool that aids retention (Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019, Britton, Wolf, and Callender, 2018). If the potential for volunteer specials to play an instrumental role in current and future transformation agendas is to be fully realised, it is important to develop current understandings of how, and in what ways, special constables adopt leadership roles and do so at different levels within their respective organisations.

At a pivotal point in time when volunteer special constables are increasingly recognised as important and much sought-after resources at local and national levels, this chapter explores direct experiences of leadership from the perspective of the special constable. In doing so it contributes to the dearth in work around this important topic and goes part way to capturing some of the complexities around the concept of leadership across the special constabulary. The chapter opens by documenting the historical backdrop to the special constabulary and the transition from police reservists to auxiliary constables. It then draws on original data from a small-scale qualitative study undertaken with two special constabularies in England and Wales<sup>2</sup>. Using narratives from special constables, including those holding rank and in leadership roles, as a lens from which to examine aspects of leadership across the special constabulary, the chapter explores the need to revisit and clarify the purpose of rank and leadership roles within the special constabulary; the importance of effective leadership, supervision and deployment of specials; and the potential to utilise specials as generalists and specialists to expand their contribution to contemporary policing priorities.

## **Historical Backdrop and Contemporary Developments**

### ***Special Constable Historical Origins***

From the seventeenth into the twentieth century the foundations of the special constabulary rested upon men who either volunteered or were nominated to serve in the role. The King Charles Act 1673 permitted law officials to nominate members of the community as special constables, to serve when needed as unpaid reservists quelling dissent, civil unrest and disorder

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of variations between rank structure of special constabularies can be found by reading the special constabulary pages on police force websites.

<sup>2</sup> Acknowledgement and thanks to Dr Faye Cosgrove, Sunderland University, UK, who collaborated on the research project.

(HMIC, 2004). Hence the analogy historians draw between unpaid volunteer special constables, Anglo Saxon concepts of mutual obligation, and the collective communal responsibility obligating citizens to assist officials in keeping the peace (Swift, 2007). The turmoil induced by the Industrial Revolution saw special constables deployed in large numbers as extended agents of the state, enforcing order during large scale disturbances. Making substantial contributions to the policing of public order in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, the work of the special constable included suppressing political protest and populist disturbances (Rawlings, 2002).

Playing a pivotal role in supporting the new Metropolitan Police during times of emergency, outbreak of war, civil and industrial unrest and riot, legislative powers relating to the role of special constable were substantially extended. The statutory provisions outlined in the Special Constable Act 1831 granted the same powers as regular constables (Straine-Francis, 2018), sanctioned financial compensation for loss of time and expenses, and increased the accountability of nominated men through a system of fines for refusal to serve (Swift, 2007). As a control mechanism to enhance compliance, obedience, and conformity to an economic and political system underpinning the precarious position of the worker, conscripting reluctant working-class men reinforced the counterproductive method of compulsory enlistment (Swift, 2007).

In contrast was the voluntary offering of one's service as a special constable that enhanced a sense of civic patriotism and duty, particularly evident during the two wars in the first half of the twentieth century (Seth, 1961). The Special Constables Act of 1835 had reinforced the principle of voluntary special constables (HMIC, 2004) yet the requirement to serve via nomination was not repealed until 1964 (Critchley, 1967). The overwhelming preference for voluntary service had however been firmly established by the 1950s, underpinned by a recognition that those who gave their unpaid time willingly were more reliable, efficient, and committed than the conscripted (Seth, 1961).

### ***From Police Reservists to Auxiliary Force***

Mid-twentieth century efforts to develop and professionalise the special constabulary had fallen short of achieving national standardisation on recruitment, rank, training, uniform, and deployment (Leon, 2018a). It was the Police Act 1964 that marked the transition from Police Reserve to Auxiliary Force and brought special constables under the direction and leadership

of the Chief Constable responsible for the geographical area in which they gave their unpaid services (Leon, 2018a). Despite post 1964 recognition of specials as a valued source of additional manpower their numbers dwindled, and somewhat negative views of the special constable emerged hampering recruitment drives and demotivating serving specials (Gill and Mawby, 1990). Government drives to stimulate awareness and increase the numbers of special constables took shape during the 1970s (Bullock and Leeney, 2016), and post equal opportunities legislation of the same decade, the 1980s was a turning point in increased numbers of women volunteering as specials (Hieke, 2018).

The use of volunteers to again support the state during times of economic, social, and political unrest reaffirmed the importance of specials who were deployed in large numbers during the controversial policing of the miners' strike<sup>3</sup> in the mid-1980s, backfilling for officers abstracted from regular duties to cover the strike (Gill and Mawby, 1990). To boost recruitment in the 1980s and 1990s, Chief Constables and senior politicians raised the profile of specials, promoting their value and endorsing their police-community relations role (Leon, 1990), which in turn heightened academic scrutiny of recruitment, retention, and deployment (Gaston and Alexander, 2001). Yet peaks and troughs in special constable service strength during the latter part of the twentieth century continued into the early part of the twenty-first century.

### ***The Value of Leadership Across the Special Constabulary***

The role of the special constable within the wider police workforce has grown in significance since 2008 and the onset of austerity as police officer numbers decline and specials have been targeted as a growth area (Bullock and Leeney, 2016). Yet despite playing a key role in supporting neighbourhood policing and wider police force priorities (Bullock and Millie, 2018); becoming embedded in specialist areas that include roads policing, rural crime, public order, professional standards and cyber-crime (NPCC, 2018); and utilised by the National Crime Agency (Crime and Courts Act, 2013), the numbers of specials have been in a steady decline (Hieke, 2018). Concerted efforts to increase the recruitment of special constables are being hampered by consistent attrition with figures for service strength reducing from 20,343 in 2012 to 13,503 in 2017 (Home Office, 2018). The notable increase between 2010-2012 has been attributed to a unique set of inter-related politico-economic circumstances; a government

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<sup>3</sup> The miners' strike 1984-1985 was widespread and longstanding industrial action across several areas of England and Wales against the closure of collieries.

freeze on recruitment to the police service; reduced budgets for police forces; and a resulting decline in police officer numbers (Hieke, 2018).

Relying on a limited and diminishing pool of volunteer special constables is complicated beyond simplistic questions around numbers and scarce resources. During periods of economic crisis inevitable government cuts to public spending place organisations who draw upon the resources of volunteers under pressure to rethink how, and in what ways, they can encourage commitment by enhancing the experiences of those who participate in work for which there is no financial remuneration (Alfes et al, 2017). Hence the need to understand and recognise how sustaining volunteer motivation and commitment is influenced by opportunities presented to volunteers for developing and utilising skills (Lepak et al, 2006).

For the special constable, a fundamental desire to ‘do’ policing is often offset against the need to partake in work that is meaningful and adds value to the organisation, particularly as they give their time for free with no expectation of monetary remuneration. One way to achieve this is through the incorporation of a rank structure within the special constabulary given rank offers a host of positive benefits including enhancing feelings of fulfilment and influencing decisions to continue in the role (Britton, Wolf and Callender, 2018), stimulating motivation and improving retention, promoting the effectiveness of specials, and fostering a sense of belonging (Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019). Setting aside potential value and attraction of rank as a mechanism to strengthen commitment and retention, with rank comes leadership roles and responsibilities. In the sections that follow the insight provided by specials talking about their respective experiences alludes not only to the leadership and supervisory expectations placed upon ranked specials, but also the importance and significance of the relationship between the special constabulary and their respective police organisations.

### **A Note on Method**

The following is based around a snapshot of data taken from a research project on the special constabulary that included nineteen semi-structured interviews conducted during 2015-2016 with serving special constables from two police forces in England and Wales. The interviews were thematically structured around motivation and situated occupational experiences and for the purpose of the chapter data around participants lived realities of rank and leadership are drawn upon to stimulate discussion and provide insight into the complexity of leadership across the special constabulary. To protect participant anonymity, interview extracts are numerically

coded. When reading the findings, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. The small number of participants from each force do not permit generalisations to be made from findings presented in the chapter. Rather, findings should be understood and interpreted as exploratory, formative, and as a basis for further qualitative research.

### ***Clarifying the Purpose and Meaning of Rank***

At the outset of any discussion on rank, it is important to acknowledge that from a structural perspective due to their status as part time volunteers, irrespective of seniority of rank, experience and longevity in role, special constables must acquiesce to the orders of the lowest rank in the regular police hierarchy:

*The special supervision is a bit of a toothless tiger...A PC, a brand-new PC that left training yesterday, operationally can override my decision as an inspector (SC7).*

Despite this clear division of power and authority, policy driven research consistently recommends special constabularies replicate the rank structure of the regular police service as part of special constabulary modernisation agendas (ACPO, 2005, NPIA, 2008). Similar rank structures are thought to encourage greater integration between police forces and special constabularies (NPCC, 2018). Yet disparity between forces over the benefits of a special constable rank structure and the role of different ranks is longstanding (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994), and given specials are a heterogeneous group (Bullock and Leeney, 2014), they themselves exhibit divergent views about the value of a rank structure and its intended purpose. Discussion around rank and structure stimulates polarised debate, and while the symbolic value of retaining a chief officer special was evident in this study, there were specials who questioned the need for a full rank structure given it has no influence or bearing over operational matters:

*I would like to see the majority of the senior management team for the specials gone... Yes, have a Chief Officer to represent us in the public eye...but there should be no hierarchy because at the end of the day they're just volunteers...giving up their spare time (SC3).*

And others who shared impassioned views about what shape and form a rank structure should take:



*Why don't we have a national chief special? And then consistency across the ranks, across the board in terms of training, deployment... a centralised special chief officer for the country and then superintendents in each area that take account of local needs (SC10).*

Notwithstanding existing evidence supporting rank as a mechanism to encourage retention, it was also clear that rank does not hold appeal for every special:

*I don't see any advantage really in moving through the ranks, because I only want to be a [career] special. I don't want to be a regular, it's not going to serve me in any way, and people have said well it looks good on your CV. It won't look good on my CV because I'm a [title of full-time occupation] (SC17).*

*I would like to go to sergeant, but I think anything above...would be too much to do for voluntary, for free, essentially (SC4).*

Incongruity between specials around the meaning, purpose, and desirability of rank is evident. Current strategic thinking around specials include much welcomed plans to re-consider the role and purpose of supervisory ranks within the special constabulary (NPCC, 2018). Revisiting the question of rank within the context of the special constabulary and delineating responsibilities and expectations at each level, would clarify any confusion over what rank means as a volunteer special. It would also assist in furthering understanding about ways in which leadership across the special constabulary can be best utilised from within to realise the strategic vision for specials as well as in partnership with police organisations to best support national policing directives.

### ***Unpacking Complexities of Special Constable Rank and Leadership***

Maximising specials strategic contribution to policing priorities has intensified in the current economic and political climate, and the reality for senior police leaders confronted by diminishing resources is added pressure of how best to utilise specials in the 'here and now'. Britton and Callender (2018) recognise this point, aptly noting strategic thinking around specials are preoccupied with filling gaps between demand, capacity, and available resources. Yet in an era where the 'politics of austerity' have seen police organisations adopt radical measures in response to shrinking budgets (Whittle, 2014), government reports feeding into

wider reform and modernisation agendas are largely absent of meaningful discussion on the role of the special (Britton and Callender, 2018). This point had not gone unnoticed by chief officer specials:

*To survive we have to adapt. So the Special Constabulary in its current form is past its sell-by date. It's got no growth potential for the future. It's not responsive or adaptive enough to survive the changes that are coming in our changing social landscape, or changing public sector landscape, and it's a bit like the police was 20 years ago, in serious need of reform. And the police have started that reform but the Special Constabulary, because of that badge, has always been left as a follow-on (SC16).*

The low visibility of the special constabulary in wider national policing directives and strategies is a missed opportunity to embed specials contribution firmly within national debate around police reform and modernisation. Such a move could normalise their role in mainstream policing and capitalise upon the very real contribution ranked specials with leadership responsibilities can and do make in assisting delivery of local policing priorities. The national strategy for the special constabulary has long been committed to supporting the strategic aims and priorities of policing in England and Wales (NPIA, 2008, NPCC, 2018). Reflecting this, relationships between senior leaders in the regular police service and in the special constabulary are dominated by how volunteer specials can best support their respective regular police organisation achieve its operational goals and targets (NPIA, 2008). Findings from the study support this point as the role and responsibilities of chief officer special constables were extrinsically linked to their relationship with counterparts in wider police organisations.

Describing a process where the special constabulary and the wider force work closely together, chief officer specials regularly attended strategy meetings with their force senior management teams where strategic matters under discussion included planning force priorities, community priorities, threat assessments, operational tactics, and force budgets. Describing positive, integrated and productive working relations with peers in their respective police forces, key to the role of the chief officer special was sharing these responsibilities and determining how best to achieve outcomes in practice:

*So the deliverables for my job, essentially, are maintaining the strategic direction for*

*the force. So translating force priorities and the PCC's<sup>4</sup> priorities into actually how do I then, via the supervision chain, get that special constable on the street delivering against this key priority or that deliverable (SC16).*

Attending wider force strategy meetings held great significance in understanding the integral contribution their members were expected to make in supporting and achieving force objectives and priorities. The extent to which chief officer specials were able to influence or feed directly into decision making underpinning these discussions on behalf of the volunteer constabulary was unclear. Yet the expectation upon them to deploy volunteer constables to satisfy requests for additional resources from a diverse range of police departments was evident:

*I think they're all [strategic leads in regular force] waking up or have done over the last 18 months [that] specials are a great resource to tap into...but of course when you've got low numbers, trying to meet all those demands is really difficult...Until we grow we're not able to stretch out otherwise we become too thin and diverse and you lose any benefit that they would get anyway (SC6).*

Cascading force priorities to specials reaffirms the wider police organisations eagerness to draw on additional labour generated by this volunteer workforce. At the same time, it displaces and replicates pressures around resource allocation onto special constables holding rank status and is indicative of the extent to which the work of ranked specials is situated within the broader context of supporting wider police priorities.

Following on from wider force strategy meetings senior specials met with their own leadership teams to disseminate agreed force priorities, impart what each force needed their specials to deliver, and decide how to go about achieving these outcomes. This top down transfer of strategic responsibilities through the specials rank structure was articulated by one respondent discussing their career progression from sergeant to inspector:

*[as sergeant you] become responsible for managing a team of people. That's pastoral*

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<sup>4</sup> Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) are elected officials whose role it is to be the voice of the people and hold the police to account. Each police force in England and Wales have a PCC, the exceptions are Greater Manchester and London where this role is undertaken by a Mayor.

*care, making sure the hours are done, making sure that we understand what the priorities of the area are and [that] we're meeting them. And then when you step up to inspector that changes again, you're looking at more strategic aims [force wide and local neighbourhood concerns] and making sure that the sergeants are empowered to...deliver against the force strategy (SC10).*

It is clear from the interviews that ranked specials do play a pivotal and active role in strategic leadership, supervision, deployment, mentoring, welfare and administrative capacities. The dominance of these duties however did not over shadow the importance of *doing* front line policing and maintaining an operational presence was viewed as significant and intrinsic to the leadership role of ranked specials:

*I do try and maintain the 16 hours on the street...Because how can I lead people if I don't know what they're doing? (SC6).*

Undertaking front line police work was also important in retaining interest in volunteering as a special. In this sense rank was regarded by some as burdensome as with it came different responsibilities and the separation from operational duties as desk-based duties became ever increasing the higher the rank the special achieved:

*Like now I've got chief inspector rank ... I'm office based ... as a Sergeant you would look after your team, but you were still out. There was still that expectation for you to get out and about. As you go to inspector, yeah you still get out ... but you've got more of a supervision role. Chief inspector is just constantly checking where people are, what hours are they doing, why haven't you been out, when are you coming out? ... I do that at work, and I'm now thinking the idea as a volunteer was for me to do something different, and I'm finding at this moment in time I'm spending more of my time doing my day job (SC5).*

Volunteer decisions around career progression are ultimately shaped at the individual level bound up in complex reasons about why people undertake this role, and why they continue. In this sense, while rank can be valued and sought after, rank can also be regarded as onerous as the responsibilities accompanying seniority and hierarchical positioning can call into question what individuals are prepared to undertake in a volunteering capacity, and the extent to which

their original desire to volunteer in policing is undermined.

### ***Leading, Supervising and Deploying Specials***

The effective leadership and management of volunteer specials from within their own organisation, and by the wider police organisation, is important in reducing potential for inefficient working practices and easing or preventing difficult or unfunctional relationships between volunteers and regulars (Gaston and Alexander, 2001, Whittle, 2014). As an internal factor impacting upon retention, poor supervision of specials can influence their decision to resign (Callender et al, 2018) and effective deployment and management of special constables can prove difficult for ranked police officers with supervisory responsibilities as volunteer needs differ greatly to those of the paid employee (Bullock and Leeney, 2016). The unique challenges of managing and leading volunteers are captured succinctly in the following quote:

*It's interesting with the specials because they want to do what they want to do. It's very difficult to manage a bunch of volunteers because a portion of them just say well I'm a volunteer. If I don't want to do that I'm not going to do it. Managing people like that is very hard because you've got no leverage. You've got to motivate and encourage.... it's akin to herding cats. There's so many different personalities, so many different drivers, they are volunteers. Meeting the needs of those individuals and meeting the needs of the service, that's the biggest challenge (SC10).*

Special constables with ranked supervisory responsibilities are often regarded as better placed than regular officers to understand the needs of volunteers (NPIA, 2008). This is particularly so in terms of understanding individual volunteer motivation and the need to derive a sense of value and fulfilment from undertaking unpaid work.

The work specials are tasked with undertaking is therefore important as their sense of job satisfaction is increased through deployment on a wide range of duties (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994). When senior leaders in police organisations engage special constables in varied and adaptable work they demonstrate to the volunteer that their work is valued (Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019). Conversely, deployment to mundane tasks undermines specials sense of value and impacts negatively on satisfaction and commitment (Callendar et al, 2018), something captured in the study:

*[assigned work the special doesn't value] can you go on a scene guard for us? So that had been planned, and I was livid, I was so angry it was unbelievable. I thought how dare you treat me...put me on a scene guard when I'm giving up my precious time to sit outside a house or a warehouse or something when I could be tucked up in bed (SC14).*

It is to be expected that, as volunteers, specials undertake routine duties that free up regular officers to work on tasks better suited to full time paid employees. Raising awareness of the need to balance challenging and exciting work with routine duties to prevent attrition and encourage retention is important for all those tasked with managing and deploying specials (Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019).

Current strategic thinking leans towards identifying specialist areas where specials can make the greatest contribution to policing (NPCC, 2018), and there are some forces who incorporate specialisms, albeit on a small scale, within their transformation agendas (Britton and Callender, 2018; Whittle, 2018). Attempting to balance force requirements and special constable interests is however far from a straightforward process (Bullock and Leeney, 2016). Finding middle ground between deploying specials to meet wider police organisations operational demands and the extent to which specials can or should exert some preference over the work they deliver is difficult, but not impossible. Several factors complicate decision making processes underpinning considerations to allow volunteer engagement in areas traditionally reserved for regular officers, some of which are captured succinctly in the following quote from a chief officer special:

*I think there is a danger of becoming too much parity with a Regular officer. There needs to be distinction...Specials aren't out enough to have the ongoing skills...I'm not going to be on a murder investigation team because...I do [have] basic investigation skills, but I don't have enough and I'm not doing it day in day out to have those skills...Specials are basically your frontline officers doing the job queue. Yes, learning some skills through some diverse teams, but not necessarily being attached to them permanently...SCs are effectively a GP. You're not going to become the consultant ...you get the additional skills, but you don't become a specialist in it (SC6).*

Senior leaders in policing are very much aware of the limitations around volunteer special constables engaging in specialist work due to their reduced hours and irregular participation in policing (Whittle, 2018). Additional considerations oscillate between balancing the cost of specialist training and equipment against investing in a volunteer who *may* reward the organisation with long term unpaid service, but even then, will only ever be able to give limited time in return. As subjective and non-tangible rewards, opportunities for specialist work and fluidity of movement between departments can strengthen a police officer's organisational commitment (Cooper and Ingham, 2004; Chan and Doran, 2009; Ramshaw, 2013), specialist work can similarly encourage and improve retention amongst specials:

*I wanted a driving course ... because I wanted to drive a police car. But also the operational commitments are stronger because then I can do more. By being able to drive (SC17).*

Special supervisors of rank with responsibility for deploying and tasking special constables are very much aware of the need to meet wider force priorities *and* accommodate where possible the opportunity to engage in specialist police work:

*So there is all this what they call 'sexy policing', but it's how do you strategically plan it and how can you devote the time to it? ...I do think in some of the instances where I say we've lost specials, had we had this specialisation we might have been able to retain some good people (SC5).*

It would be naive and inappropriate to suggest specials become involved in all areas of specialist police work. Leaders in the special constabulary understand the significance of managing the expectations of special constables and of striking a balance between expectation and 'hands-on' experience. Inconsistency at the national level around specialist work deemed appropriate for volunteer special constables hinders this progress. In this research there were disparities between forces in the way that specials were deployed, and the policing duties they were able to undertake, that allude to the benefits of pressing for national consistency:

*One of the frustrations for me is that there's the way that we do things here in [force] but then you look [at other forces] I can't fully collaborate with [them] and do things with them because their rules and their procedures and their policies are completely*

*different (SC6).*

Chief officer specials and specials holding rank talked of difficulties orchestrating joint operations between forces when specials are not consistently trained and deployed in the same way. For instance, in some force areas not all specials are interview trained, not all have opportunities to drive or undertake blue light emergency response duties. A national approach to special constable training, duties and deployment would make it possible to distinguish between routine and specialist police work; provide varied opportunities to engage in a range of police work; adopt a seamless and effective approach to joint operations; backfill between forces when police officers are called upon to assist major incidents; and make it easier for specials to transfer between forces.

### ***Exploring Potential for Specials as Generalists and Specialists***

The role and duties of special constables have moved on significantly from earlier periods in their history where the expectation was that they would be drawn upon in times of emergency or deliver tedious routine work such as directing traffic (Whittle, 2018 pg 136). Indeed, the National Police Chiefs Council estimate a fifth of all calls to the police service relate to traditional volume crime and that training, development and deployment of special constables is geared towards supporting the police deal with this demand (NPCC, 2018, pg 5). Dealing with traditional forms of volume crime affords opportunities for specials involvement in a wide and diverse range of generalist routine frontline police activities (Bullock, 2015); crime orientated work which appeals to special constables (Bullock and Leeney, 2016); challenging work that encourages motivation, commitment, and retention (NPIA, 2008a); and work that distinguishes the role and contribution of specials within the current mixed economy of police volunteers (NPCC, 2018).

Providing varied deployments to enhance special constable skill sets, encourage motivation and commitment, and to reward volunteers has long been recognised (NPIA, 2008a). While the potential to engage in a wide and diverse range of police work was not always immediately apparent to the individual special:

*Policing has changed...we're not a Hobby Bobby anymore, we're blue line...[but]...The force really hasn't changed their dynamic look of what we're actually doing. They still think, to some extent, we're of yesteryear and we're not, we've come*



*on leaps and bounds (SC8).*

One way to realise the uniqueness and potential of specials, and distinguish between specials and regulars, is to acknowledge the variety of specialist skills specials can bring from their day jobs. There are skills that special constables could bring *to* policing from areas of expertise in their paid employment that could be invaluable to the police service. Rather than plug gaps in voids between demand and resources, it is within reason to suggest calling on the skill set of the special during times of corresponding skills shortages in policing. Changing crime patterns and mutating online crime markets for example present challenges for traditional methods of policing (Wall and Williams, 2013). In this study specials with specialist professional backgrounds, skill sets, and expertise were given the opportunity by their wider police organisations to make significant contributions to complex investigations:

*I've got one special [in their paid job] they do a lot of IT work, so they've been able to do quite a lot of cybercrime [the force] give them unprecedented access to the computers so they're a vital resource to tap into for free (SC5).*

At a grass roots level most local police organisations are neither structurally or culturally ready to think differently about specials as individuals who bring specialist skills and experience into policing that could be utilised across the organisation (Britton and Callender, 2018). Examples such as the one above suggests this is happening to some extent, albeit in a piecemeal way. The appointment of NCA Specials on an unpaid and part time basis to assist with a range of complex issues is further evidence at the national level (Crime and Courts Act, 2013). Information gaps pertaining to the personal, educational, and professional background of specials hinder opportunities to utilise the often-unique skill set specials bring to the role (IPJSJ, 2014). Maintaining a register of skills enabling forces to call on individuals when a need arises for their skill set has been suggested previously (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994). This information could be hosted on police force secure servers. Adopting a systematic approach to a national database could avoid gaps between strategic leadership thinking and operational deployment, and incorporate specials more firmly within reform, modernisation and professionalisation agendas.

There is much scope for volunteer specials to specialise through engagement in a wide and diverse range of police work, and by drawing on existing skill sets derived from specials

respective areas of paid employment. Realising the latter point would rest upon knowledge of the individual special constable, their skill set and their willingness to utilise transferable skills in a policing context (Ramshaw and Cosgrove, 2019). Hence the position of ranked specials with leadership and supervisory duties whose familiarity with their peers' background, motivation, and volunteering journey are best placed to facilitate and instigate a joined-up approach to matching sought after skill deficits in local policing contexts with suitable, willing and able special constables.

Specials need to be different and their role needs to be clear if their purpose is to stand out from other citizens in policing volunteer groups, and regular officers. Thinking creatively and innovatively about how, to what extent, and in what ways special constables could be cast in specialist areas and be called upon to bring sought after specialist skill sets into policing could set them apart. Thinking of specials as generalists, and specialists in a policing and non-policing context, could reinforce and support arguments to incorporate a fuller discussion of the role the special constabulary in ongoing reform and modernisation agendas.

## **Conclusion**

An appreciative reading of the rich and lengthy history of special constables and the special constabulary depicts a sustained contribution to a wide and diverse range of duties, particularly during periods of political and economic uncertainty. The continued value and significance of specials are evident in the versatility of their contemporary deployment across a spectrum of policing activities within current policing landscapes. This chapter has made a small contribution to unpacking what it means to hold rank and leadership responsibilities as a volunteer special. As scholarly work on special constable volunteerism gathers pace, emerging research agendas would benefit from incorporating focus upon rank structure, the leadership responsibilities attached to rank, and their bearing upon the relationship between the special constabulary and the wider police organisation.

National leadership directives for the special constabulary are intrinsically committed to supporting the strategic aims and priorities of policing in England and Wales. There is however much scope for consistency regarding the role of the special constabulary between national, regional and local directives, and for implicit recognition that the leadership role and responsibilities currently undertaken by special constables, particularly those holding rank,

bring much value and purpose to the achievement of local and national policing priorities. Embracing and strengthening the connection between special constabulary strategic vision and wider national directives in ways that recognise the reciprocal and mutually enhancing relationship between both organisations would allow for specials to be considered as enablers of wider reform and modernisation agendas. This is of importance given the operational policing environment in England and Wales is currently undergoing a transitional and transformational period within which the special constabulary play a key role.

Leaders in policing, both regular and special, have much to gain by synchronising deployment according to specials' broader skill set, and tailoring opportunities for professional development to the motivations and aspirations of the individual special. Greater consideration of these internal factors, coupled with due regard to specials' adaptive motivations in-post, will lead to more effective leadership, better support for specials in their volunteering journey, and maximising the contribution specials make to policing priorities. The significance of strategic focus and leadership around managing the volunteers' journey from within their own organisation can allow for the role of the special to be recast and promoted as a sought-after volunteering opportunity in policing. Raising the profile of special constables could encourage motivated individuals to join the specials with a view to seeing their volunteering as a career. This includes engaging proactively in leadership and supervisory strategies that appeal to individual goals and aspirations of special constable volunteers including, but not limited to, possibilities for rank progression, potential to engage in specialist work, and opportunities to apply individuals' existing skill set in police settings. If special constables are to be more firmly embedded in the strategic delivery of core areas of policing, and become more of a presence in reform, modernisation, and professionalisation agendas, much rests upon progressive leadership and direction of special constables from within and between their respective regular and special policing organisations.

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