



# **National Survey of Police Support Volunteers**

## **September 2018**



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# Introduction

The role and contribution of Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) in policing has been largely missing from strategic assessments, reviews and narratives about the 'state of policing' and the police workforce. However, the development of a national agenda to expand the scope, scale and nature of volunteering in policing through the National Citizens in Policing Board and associated Strategy, has firmly put PSVs on the map of policing resources. The Policing Vision 2025, supported by the recent publication of the Neighbourhood Policing Guidelines by the College of Policing, recognises the importance of engaging volunteers in preventing crime, building resilient communities and strengthening police-community relationships.

Awareness and recognition of the diversity, depth and breadth of skills, expertise and experience amongst PSVs across England and Wales is beginning to grow and the new legislation to support the designation of powers to volunteers, signals a step change in this recognition. The main areas of interest at present tend to be those where policing is seeking expertise, for example in areas of fraud, cybercrime and digital technology. However, the contribution from volunteers in areas such as mental health, working with children and young people and engaging with marginalised communities, demonstrate the potential scale of impact of volunteering in areas of extremely high demand for policing services.

The development of the National Citizens in Policing Strategy and growing workstreams across innovation, piloting new practice, developing new partnerships, capturing value and expanding communications reflects the rapid growth in interest and investment in this area of the police family. The support of the Home Office Transformation Fund to build research evidence and to pilot new practice across eighteen forces has contributed significantly to speeding up progress in this area.

This report provides the findings of a National Survey of Police Support Volunteers conducted in Spring 2018, capturing the views and experiences of individuals across all forces in England and Wales. It draws comparisons to a previous survey undertaken in 2016 and uses the analysis to point to opportunities to improve the experience, contribution and impact of PSVs in policing.

These findings sit alongside a partner report presenting the findings of the National Survey of Special Constables, which also reflects participation across all forces in England and Wales.

These survey reports accompany the National Benchmarking of Citizens in Policing, capturing the scale, scope, contribution and investment across the portfolio of volunteering in policing in England and Wales, including the Special Constabulary, Police Support Volunteers, Volunteer Police Cadets, Mini Police and those who volunteer for Police and Crime Commissioners.

These national research exercises were commissioned by Chief Constable Dave Jones, the previous National Police Chiefs' Council's business lead for Citizens in Policing, working with the national Citizens in Policing Strategic Board. This governance structure brings together key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, including the Home Office, College of Policing, Association of Special Constabulary Officers, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, Neighbourhood Watch, and representatives of the wider voluntary sector.

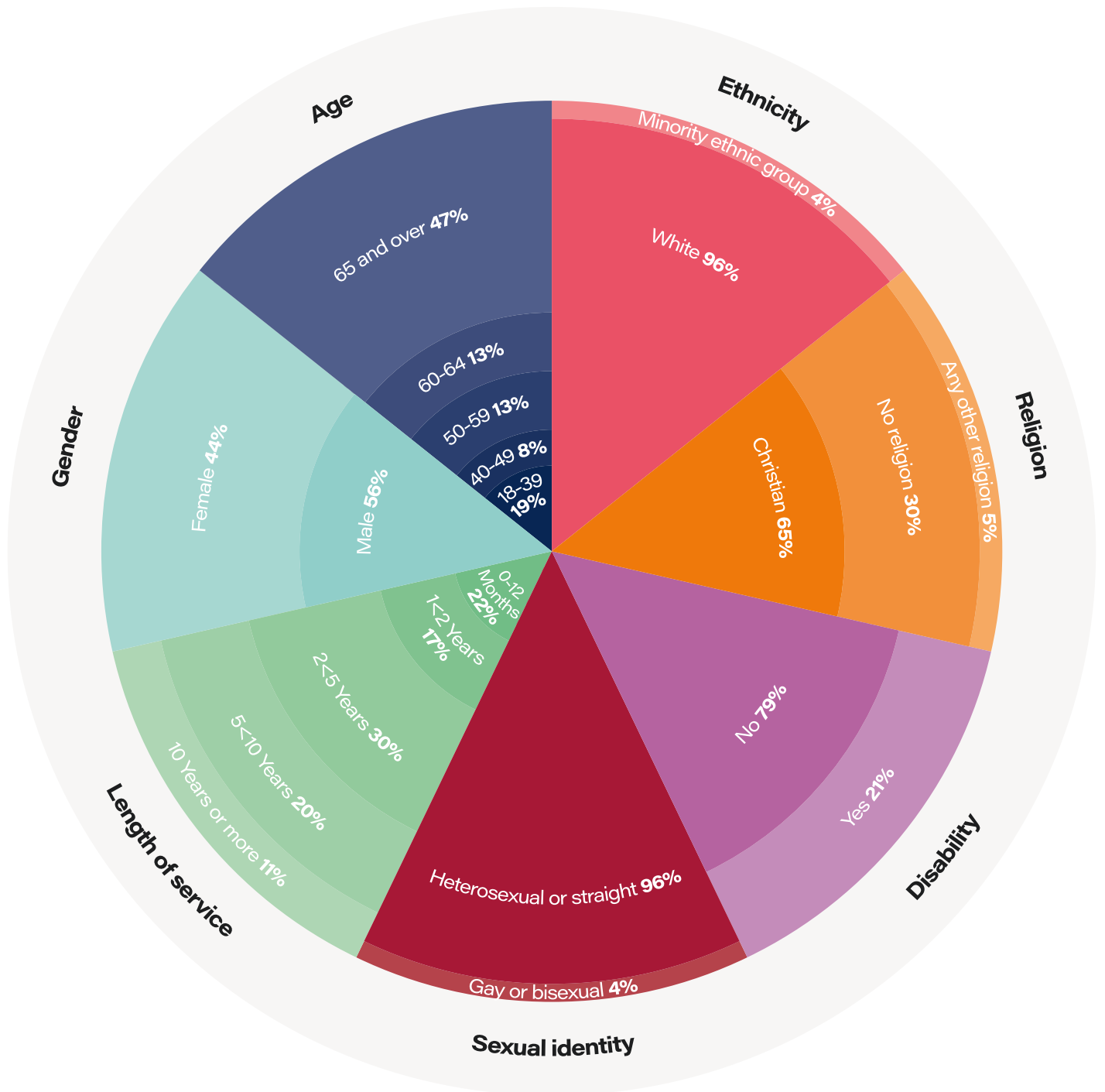
This report will be used to inform the strategic development of the national Citizens in Policing agenda and at regional and local force level to improve PSV strategies, plans, models and delivery.

# Index

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	Page no.
<b>Survey Sample</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recruitment and Training</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Reward, Recognition and Relationships</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Management, Support and Involvement</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Outcomes and Positive Impact</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>

# Survey Sample



1,205 Police Support Volunteers (PSVs) completed the survey, which represents a 15% response rate against benchmarking data (Britton et al., 2018) where it is detailed that there are approximately 8,000 PSVs nationwide. This section provides an overview of the survey sample in terms of who took part and how that compares to the population of PSVs. This report will demonstrate how perceptions of experience differ between demographics, highlighting the importance of the representativeness of the sample.

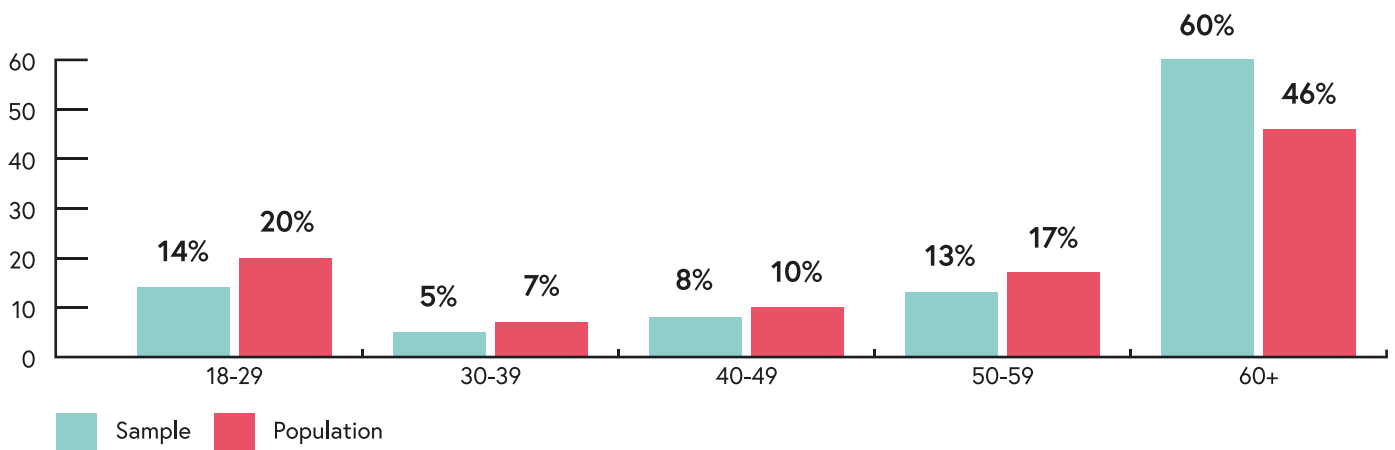
As can be seen from the infographic on the previous page, there are more males in the sample (56%) compared to females (44%). As such, the sample comprises slightly more male PSVs compared to benchmarking data, where there are 52% males compared to 48% females.

About 4% of the sample is from an ethnic minority background, comprised of 2.9% Asian or Asian British; 0.8% mixed or of a multiple ethnic background; 0.5% from an 'other' background and 0.3% from a black or black British background. The extent to which this is representative of

the volunteering population is unknown as many forces do not routinely collate this information and as such benchmarking data were too incomplete to provide a meaningful comparator. The ethnic minority make-up of the sample does not reflect the overall population in England and Wales, where approximately 14% of the population are from an ethnic minority background. Therefore, it is clear that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in the sample, but the extent to which they are under-represented in the PSV population as a whole is unknown.

The figure below shows the age range of the sample as compared to the actual population of PSVs according to benchmarking data. It illustrates that whilst nearly half of PSVs are aged over 60 years, the sample is over-representative of this group at 60%. Whilst PSVs are generally characterised as older, it should be noted that 1 in 5 PSVs are aged 18-29 years, but are slightly under-represented in the survey sample.

## Age representation of sample compared to national benchmarking



The infographic also shows that within the sample, around two-thirds (65%) of PSVs stated that they are 'Christian' and 30% indicated that they are of 'No religion'. As with ethnicity, those from minority religions were too small in number to allow for reliable analysis of differences in experience and were therefore combined as 'Other religions', constituting 5% of the sample. There were no benchmarking data to provide an understanding of the

representation of different religions in the sample as compared to the actual population. According to the 2011 Census data, 59% of the population are Christian, 25% are of no religion and 9% are from an 'other' religion, with the most dominant minority religion being Muslim, constituting 4%. Therefore, the sample is relatively proportional to the actual population. Although minority religions are under-represented in the sample, the extent to which this results

# Survey Sample

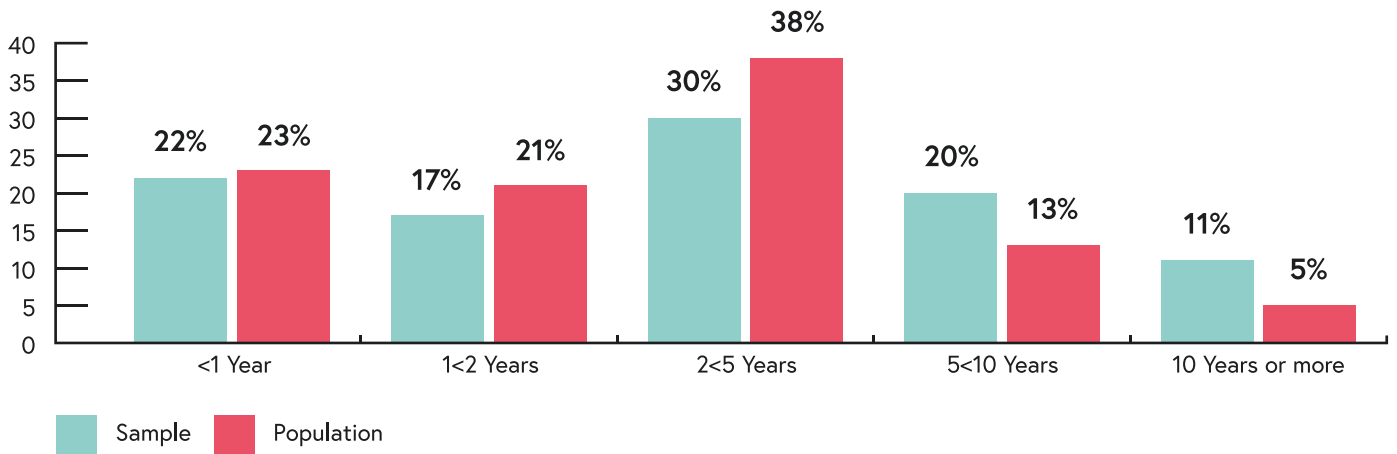
from the sample or the actual PSV population is unknown. The infographic highlights that 21% of volunteers considered themselves to have a disability and there are no benchmarking data to compare with the PSV population. In the 2011 census, 18% of the population considered themselves to have a disability that limits them a little or a lot, suggesting that the sample comprises slightly more individuals with a disability compared with the population in England and Wales.

In total, 96% of the sample described themselves as

heterosexual or straight and 4% described their sexual identity as 'gay' or 'bisexual'. There are no reliable figures available to compare to the PSV population.

When comparing the length of time PSVs had volunteered in the sample to benchmarking data, the sample broadly follows a similar distribution pattern. As might be expected, given the age profile described above, those newer in service (<5 years) are slightly under-represented and those older in service are over-represented (5 years and over).

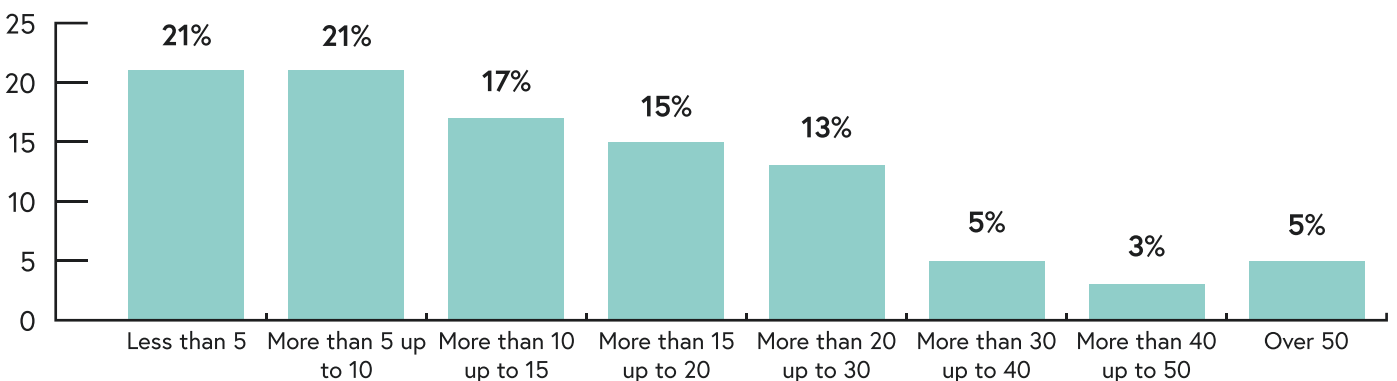
## Length of service of PSVs in sample, compared to national benchmarking



Within the sample, 4 in 10 (42%) participants indicated that they volunteer up to 10 hours a month; 3 in 10 (32%)

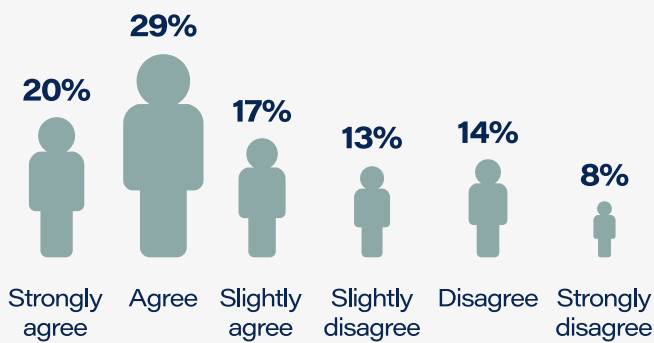
volunteer between 10 and 20 hours and the remaining 1 in 4 (26%) volunteer more than 20 hours.

## Hours Volunteered each Month



# Recruitment and Training

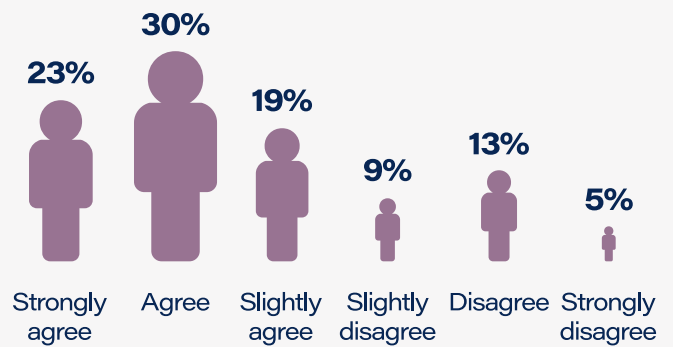
**I am receiving sufficient ongoing training to remain effective in my role as a volunteer**



**66%**

of volunteers agree that they are receiving ongoing training to remain effective in their role

**I have been given opportunities to develop new skills and abilities**



**73%**

of volunteers have been given opportunities to develop new skills and abilities

**18-29  
year olds**

were more likely to agree that they were receiving ongoing training in their role to remain effective (**74%**)

**Those that had served over 2 years but less than 5**

were least likely to agree that they were receiving ongoing training in their role to remain effective (**59%**)

**Males**

were more likely to agree that they were receiving ongoing training in their role to remain effective (**63%**)

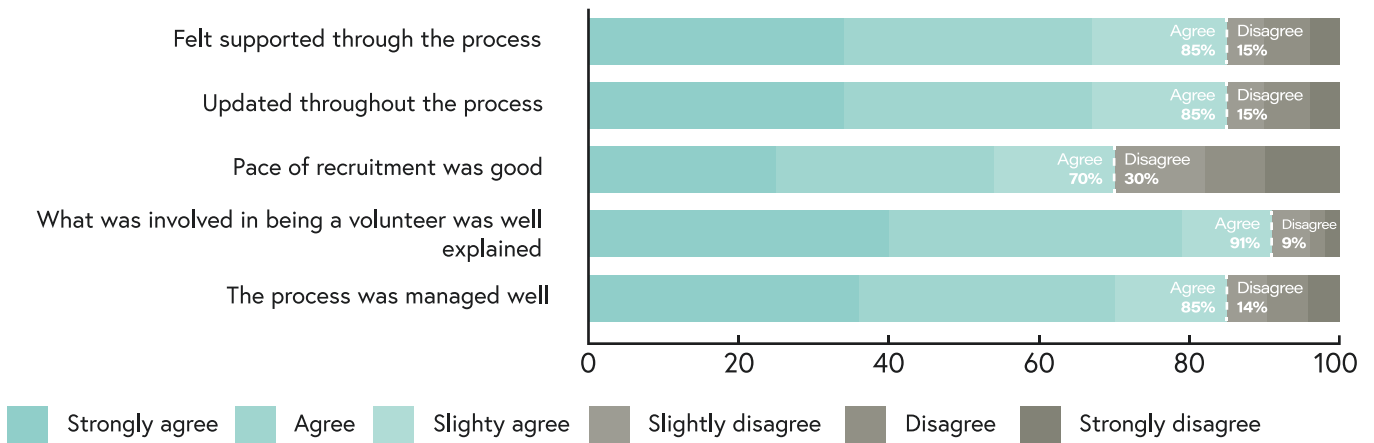
# Recruitment and Training

## Recruitment

The recruitment of PSVs was positively reported, with the majority of PSVs who were recently recruited in the last 2 years agreeing that: the process was managed well (86%); they felt supported throughout the process (90%); their

force kept in touch and updated them (85%) and what was involved in being a PSV was well explained to them (90%). In comparison to the results from the survey in 2016, the only measure which changed significantly is the explanation of what was involved in being a PSV, which has fallen significantly from 97%.

## Recent recruits' perceptions of the recruitment process



The lowest level of satisfaction for PSVs was the pace of recruitment (70%). By far, the most common comment of recent recruits was that the recruitment process needs to be faster (34%), followed by better communication with volunteers throughout the process (18%). This is critical to successfully capitalising upon initial interest and successfully recruiting into a PSV role before interest fades.

**"The time it takes from first contact to confirmation of appointment is lengthy"**

**"It was almost 6 months before I started my role as a PSV. I had to chase up on a couple of occasions to find out what was happening."**

PSVs also emphasised the importance of ensuring that what is involved in volunteering roles was clearly explained, as for some it was not what they had expected. For others, they were not aware of the diversity of roles and opportunities to volunteer within the force.

**"I think the role of being a volunteer should be explained more as the things I expected to do were nothing like reality"**

**"In some cases members of the public who want to join as a volunteer don't know what PSVs are about."**

## Initial Training

In terms of initial training, satisfaction of recent recruits was high with around 9 in 10 agreeing that: their initial training covered the things it needed to (95%); they felt supported (93%) and felt the way it was delivered (e.g. mix of remote/online learning and classroom-based) worked well for them (91%). Satisfaction with the pace of the process was also high and had significantly improved since the 2016 survey (93% from 84% in 2016).

However, two-thirds (65%) of PSVs felt that they would have liked there to have been more practical sessions. Other comments about how initial training could be



improved focused on it being better organised, timely, that the content is relevant to the role and there is a clearer explanation of roles. Some of the comments made reflect wider discussion about recognising the skills and experience that PSVs already have.

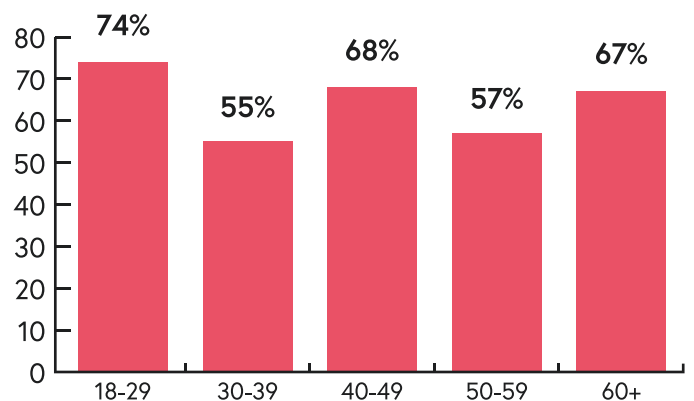
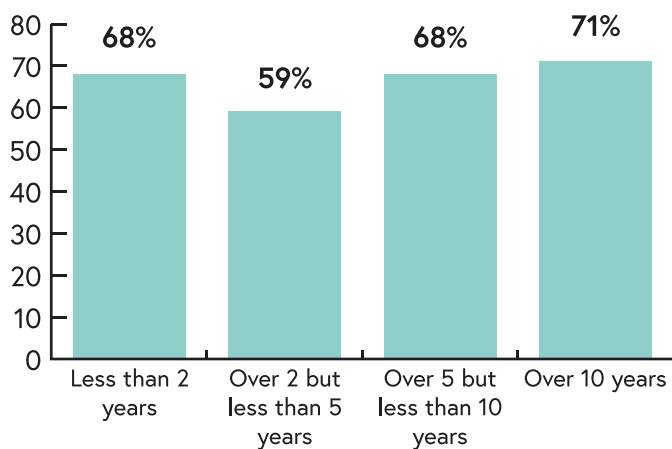
**"Visit to site where the volunteering will take place and more practical sessions to better represent the activities during the volunteering"**

**"Really badly organised, no communication and 'teaching' was wishy washy with volunteers knowing more than those teaching. Felt belittled, mixed messages in the meeting room when doing practical assessments. Cancelled hour before, many turned up to the session to be told to go home"**

## Ongoing Training and Development

The proportion of PSVs who agreed that they are receiving sufficient ongoing training fell from 77% in 2016 to 66% in this survey. The infographic on the previous page shows that those who have volunteered for over 2 years but less than 5 years were significantly less likely to agree that they are receiving sufficient ongoing training and opportunities to develop new skills. A similar result was found for males, while those aged 18-29 years were significantly more likely to state they receive sufficient ongoing training and opportunities to develop new skills. The figures below illustrate differences in ongoing training based on length of service and age, with the 2-5 year service and 30-39 year groups being least likely to say they receive sufficient ongoing training.

### Percentage receiving ongoing training, by length of service and age

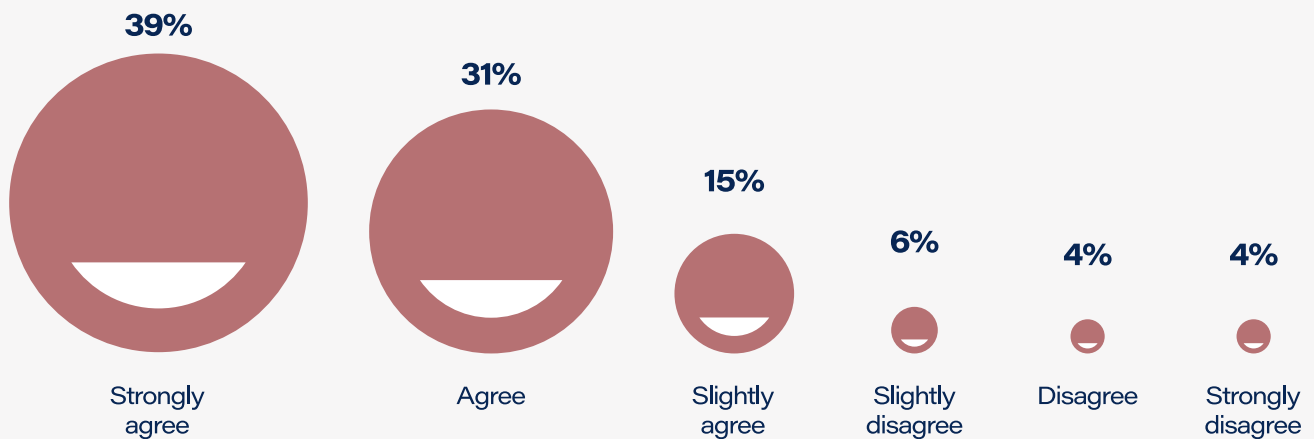


## Key Points and Implications

- The pace between initial interest and beginning training needs to be improved. If the process is too slow, some volunteers become disinterested. Keeping prospective PSVs updated regarding stages of the recruitment process, plans for initial training and providing information about the range of volunteering roles available to them are important aspects in this initial experience in policing.
- Satisfaction with initial training was high but, similar to Specials, PSVs felt they would have benefitted from more practical sessions. In some cases, volunteers found that the training was badly organised, which impacts feeling valued and confidence in the PSVs programmes in policing.
- Overall, satisfaction with ongoing training was lower than for initial training and has fallen since 2016. Satisfaction was particularly low for those who have served more than 2 years but less than 5, which may be a critical period in terms of need for ongoing training and impact on contribution and retention. Investment in maintaining and developing skills is key to nurturing interest and enjoyment in the role and wider commitment to volunteering in policing.

# Reward, Recognition and Relationships

## I feel appreciated by the police service for the contribution I make



**85%**  
of volunteers

feel appreciated by the  
police service for the  
contribution they make

### 30-39 year olds

were **less likely to agree** that they feel appreciated by the police service for the contribution that they make (**67% compared to 87% for other age groups**)

### Those who had served over 2 years but less than 5

were **less likely to agree** that they feel appreciated by the police service for the contribution that they make (**79% compared to 88%**)

### Males

were **less likely to agree** that they feel appreciated by the police service for the contribution that they make (**84% compared to 89%**)

# Reward, Recognition and Relationships

There has been a significant drop in the proportion of PSVs who felt appreciated by the force for their contribution, 85% compared to 92% in 2016. As illustrated in the infographic on the previous page, there were certain groups within the PSV sample who were significantly less likely than their colleagues to feel appreciated; those aged 30-39 years; those who have served more than 2 years but less than 5, and males.

Whilst the majority (87%) of PSVs felt their efforts were well recognised, this has significantly decreased from 93% in 2016. A third (32%) of those who did not feel that their efforts were recognised were planning to leave in the next 6 months, compared to 5% of those who felt their efforts were recognised. The findings emphasise the importance of recognition in retention of PSVs, which is also reflected

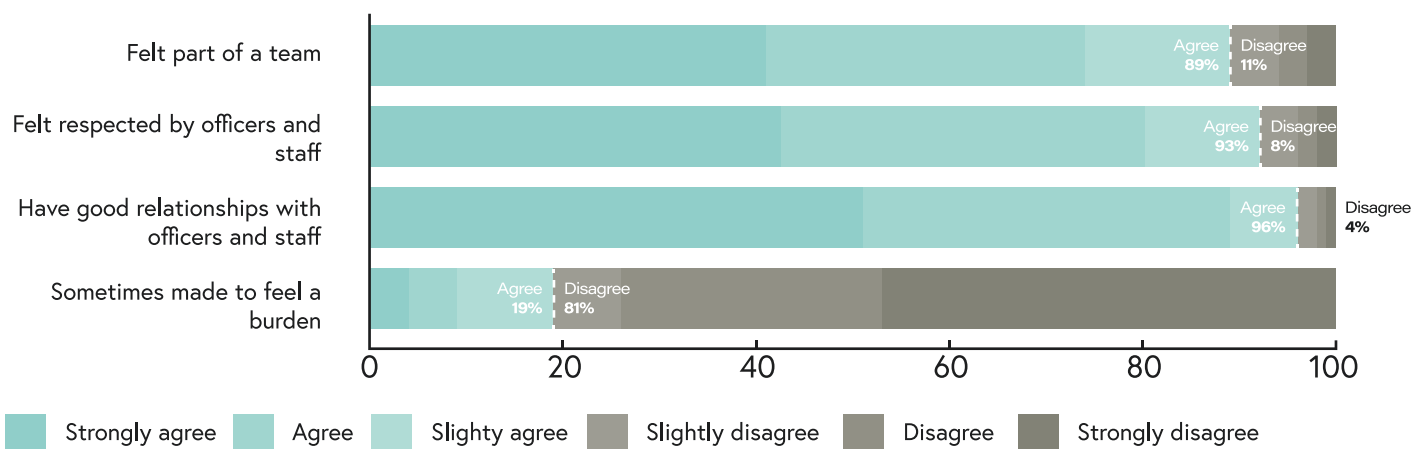
in the reasons provided by PSVs who are planning to leave in the short-term:

**"I don't feel that my input has been acknowledged by the force. Sometimes it has been counter-productive and frustrating."**

**"Unorganised, waste of our time as not appreciated"**

In contrast to the results concerning appreciation and recognition, over 9 in 10 PSVs agreed that they had good relationships with regular officers/staff who they engage with (96%); that regulars/staff respect and value the contribution that they give as a volunteer (92%); and felt part of a team (89%).

## Perceptions of relationships with police officers and staff

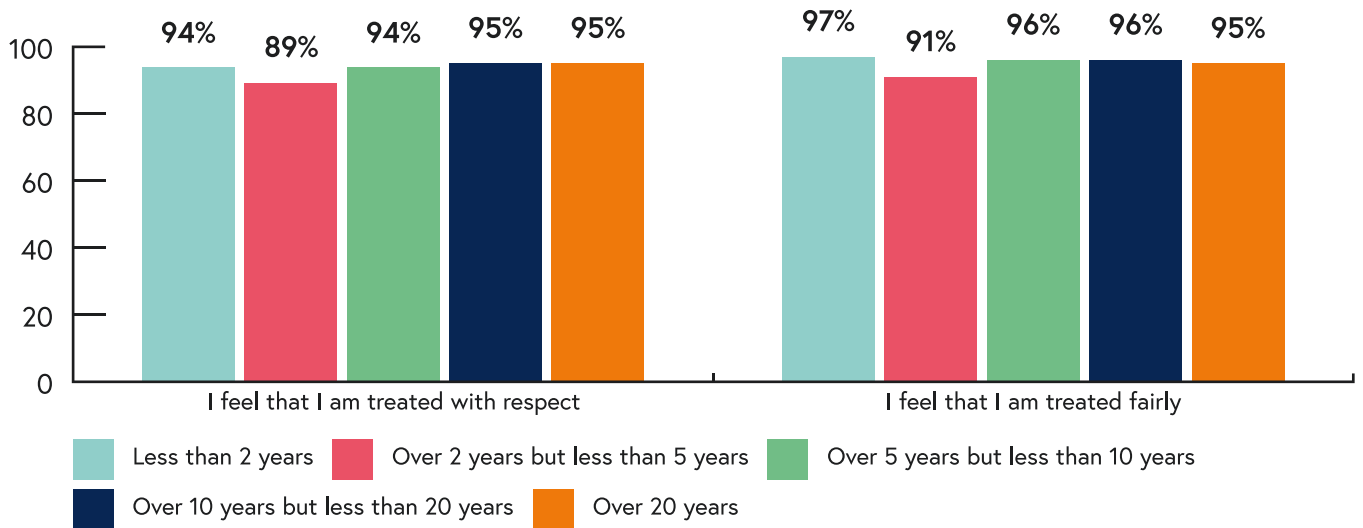


However, a fifth (19%) also state that they are sometimes made to feel like a burden rather than a help by regulars/staff. Those aged 30-39 years were most likely to feel like a burden (34%), followed by 18-29 year olds (27%), whereas those aged 60+ years were significantly less likely to feel this way (15%). PSVs from an 'other' religion and those from 'no religion' were also more likely to feel like a burden compared to Christian volunteers (25%, 22%, 16% respectively). These results may be related to age, as those who described themselves as Christian were also more

likely to be in the 60+ age group.

Most PSVs feel that they are treated with respect (92%) and that they are treated fairly (95%). Those who have served more than 2 years but less than 5 were least likely to feel they were treated fairly and with respect, compared to other groups, illustrated in the figure below. Males compared to females were also slightly less likely to state that they were treated with respect and fairly (91% and 93% compared to 95% and 97% respectively).

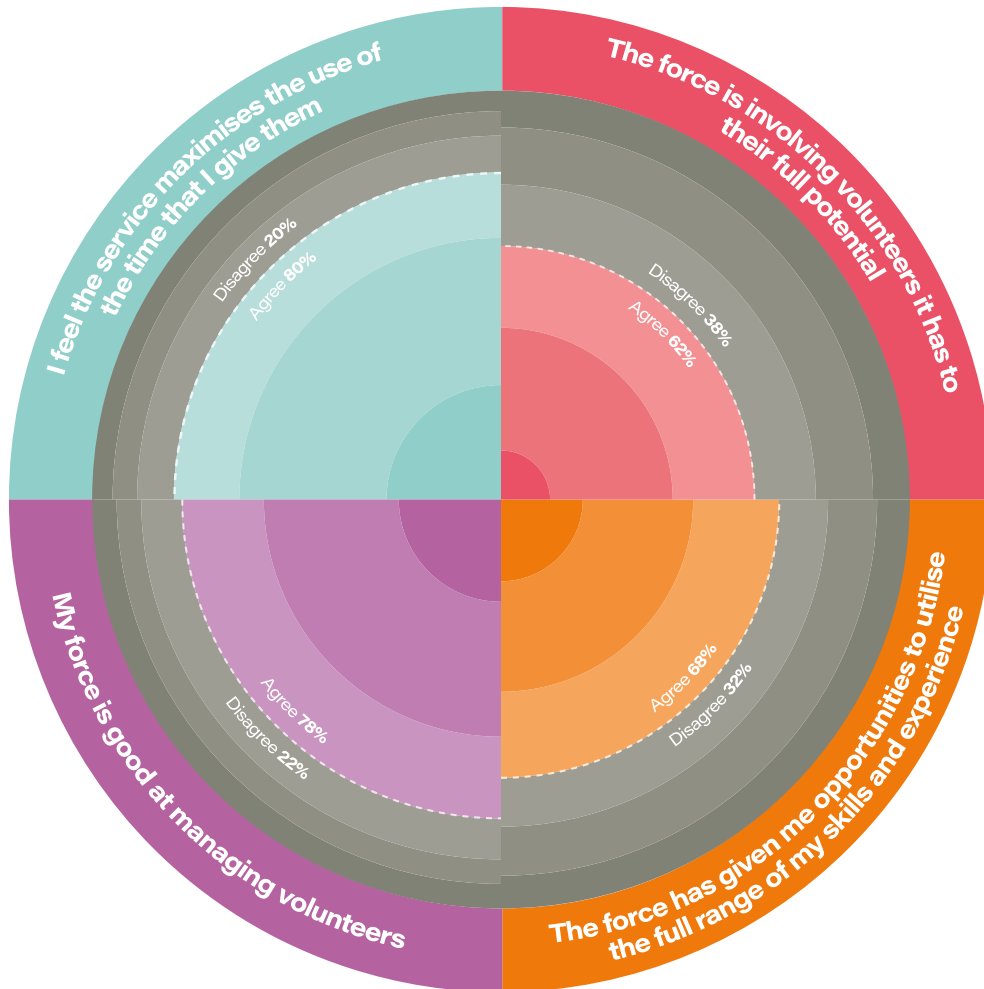
## Perceptions of being treated fairly and with respect, by length of service



### Key Points and Implications

- The results illustrate that although most PSVs feel rewarded and appreciated, levels of agreement have fallen significantly since 2016 and lack of recognition was apparent in some PSV's reasons for intending to leave in the imminent future. The 30-39 age group and those that have served 2 years but less than 5 were most likely to be discontented in relation to recognition, being treated fairly and with respect and in their relationships with regular officers and staff.
- Feeling valued and recognised by regular officers and staff in the teams PSVs work directly with was higher than by the wider force. Such findings may reflect a wider cultural discourse about the value of PSVs in policing, where volunteers may not be valued as integral to policing workforce models and delivery. The evidence presented in this section demonstrates the importance of appropriate recognition of contribution to retaining PSVs within the policing family.

# Management, Support and Involvement



**38%**

of volunteers disagree that the force is involving volunteers to their full potential

**22%**

disagree that the force are good at managing volunteers

**32%**

disagree that the force has given them opportunities to utilise the full range of their skills and experience

**38%**

disagree that the services maximises the use of the time that I give them

Management and support were key factors that influenced morale and recognition for contributions made. The results of the survey demonstrate that those with less than 2 years in service were most likely to be satisfied with how well they are managed, 75%, whereas those with over 2 but less than 5 years' service were significantly less

satisfied at 60%.

The fall in satisfaction with management after 2 years in service was most notable for the 18-29 age group, decreasing from 77% to 59%, a drop of 18% (see graph below).

## Satisfaction with supervision and management, by length of service



Females were more likely to be satisfied with supervision and management (91% and 89% respectively) compared to males (87% and 80% respectively). While numbers were relatively low, PSVs who did not classify themselves as heterosexual (n=55) were also significantly less likely to agree that they were satisfied with how they are managed as a volunteer compared to heterosexual PSVs (71% to 84% respectively).

There was evidence to suggest that forces were perceived by PSVs to be under-involving their volunteers. For instance, 4 in 10 (38%) PSVs disagreed that the force used volunteers to their full potential; 3 in 10 (32%) disagreed that the force had given them the opportunities to utilise their full range of skills and abilities; 2 in 10 (22%) disagreed that the force were good at managing volunteers and 2 in 10 (19%) disagreed that the force maximises the time that they give (see the infographic on the previous page).

Exploring differences within this, 18-29 year olds were significantly more likely to feel that the force was involving volunteers to their full potential, 78%, compared to 58% of 30-39 year olds and 59% of the 60+ population. This is important, recognising that the 60+ age group comprise around half of the PSV population (see Britton et al., 2018).

For those who are planning to leave their volunteering role in the next year, feeling under-involved was the most common reason given (23%). This included people that had gone through recruitment and training only to discover there was no role for them, people whose role no longer existed or people who weren't being given enough to do. Such experiences demonstrate the significant deficits in organisation, investment and attention paid to creating and maintaining positive and impactful volunteering roles.

**"No-role after training - a complete waste of my time and your own"**

# Management, Support and Involvement

"I have not been provided any opportunity to provide support"

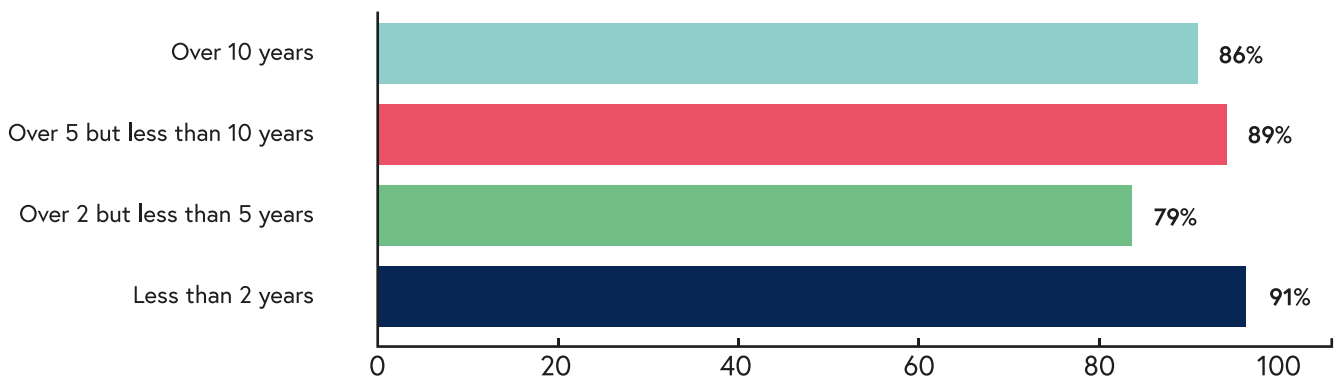
"No longer deployed since reorganisation of volunteering management in the (force) and closure of front counters"

Whilst the results relating to provision of support within forces were positive, 86% of PSVs indicated that they are sufficiently supported in their role, this means that around 1 in 10 (14%) PSVs feel unsupported. Feeling unsupported was the second most common reason for intentions to leave, with 21% of those planning to leave in the next 6 months citing a lack of support as the primary reason.

"No support or feedback, seminars arranged and cancelled at short notice. At the moment I feel undervalued and the work as a volunteer is treated as irrelevant"

PSVs who are in their first 2 years in role were significantly more likely to feel supported than PSVs who had volunteered for over 2 years (91% to 84% respectively). In addition, reflecting findings around management, those who had served less than 2 years were most satisfied with the level of support they received while those who had served more than 2 years but less than 5 were least satisfied.

## Satisfaction with support, by length of service





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## Key Points and Implications

- Although satisfaction with management and support was fairly high, there are a minority who feel there is a lack of support provided for PSVs, and those individuals tend to have served more than 2 years but less than 5. The findings indicate a pattern across measures, which suggests that after a couple of years some PSVs become dissatisfied with how they are managed and supported, and these are significant contributing factors to their intentions to leave. Those who continue to volunteer beyond this phase were often those who were more satisfied with management and support received throughout their time volunteering.
- The effective involvement of volunteers and the skills they bring is critical to maximising their impact for policing and improving retention. The recruitment of volunteers without a clear role to perform is severely detrimental to their perceptions and experiences of volunteering in policing and of policing more broadly. Such opportunities should be clearly defined and communicated to all prospective PSVs to ensure investment is not wasted and the volunteer and the role they perform is genuinely valued by policing.

# Outcomes and Positive Impact



**94%**

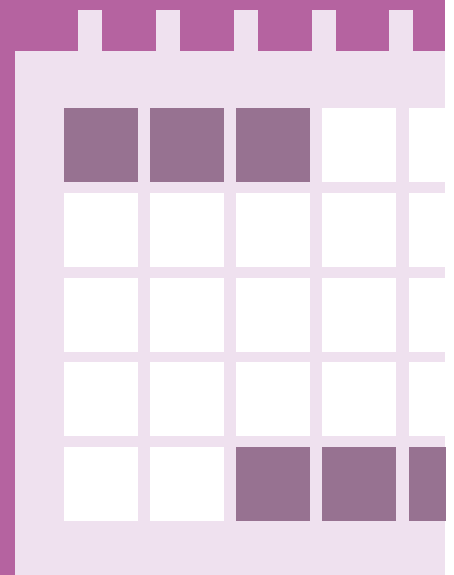
of volunteers agree that their morale is good

**60%** of volunteers saw themselves volunteering for the police in the long term

**22%** of volunteers said that they would be doing it for at least a year but no more than 3 years

**9%** of volunteers said that they are likely to be doing it for 6 months but no more than a year

**9%** of volunteers were planning to leave in 6 months or less



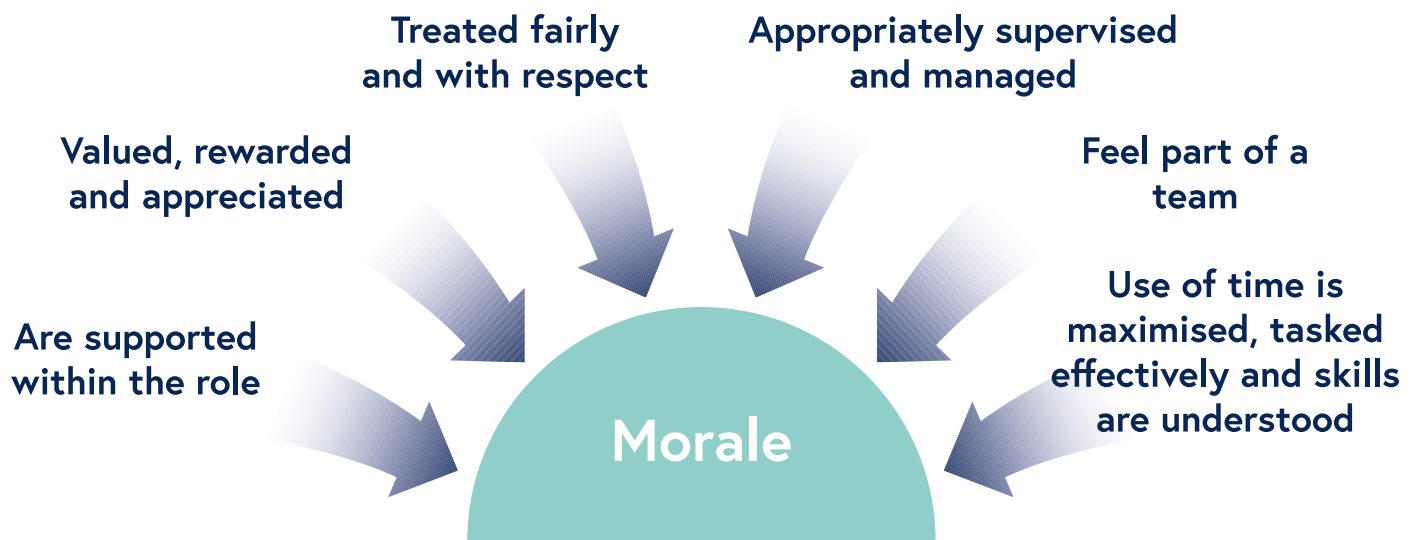
of those that were planning to leave in the short term (in the next 6 months), morale was significantly lower (67%) than those that were not (96%)

## The Relationship between Experience, Morale and Retention

Most volunteers described their morale as good (94%), which is similar to 2016 (95%) and is consistently above 90% across length of service. Female PSVs showed a slightly higher level of satisfaction compared to males (96% to 93% respectively).

6 in 10 PSVs (60%) considered themselves to be committed for the "long-term" (i.e. more than 3 years) and 2 in 10

(22%) were planning to continue for the next 1-3 years. However, the remaining 2 in 10 (18%) who took part in the survey were planning to leave in the next year. Morale is important to retention, with only 7 in 10 (67%) of those who are planning to leave in the next 6 months describing their morale as good, compared to over 9 in 10 (96%) of those staying beyond 6 months. Many aspects of PSV experiences are related to their morale but those that have the strongest relationship are illustrated in the figure below and are displayed in order of strength from left to right<sup>1</sup>.



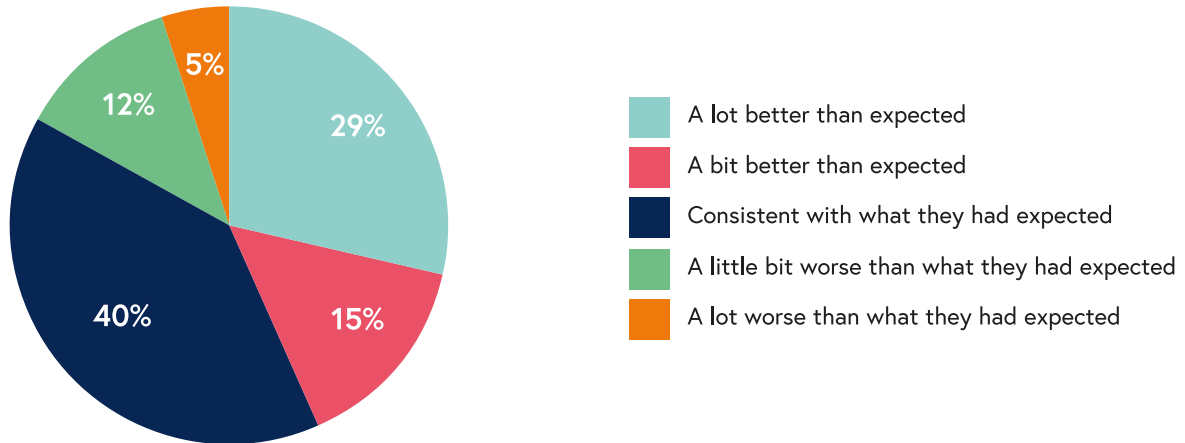
Volunteers intending to leave in the next 6 months more often gave organisational reasons (63%) than personal reasons (37%). The top three reasons for leaving were: not being used at all or being under-involved, not being supported and not feeling their time is appreciated. This highlights that getting the organisational structure and volunteering environment right for PSVs is critical and directly impacts retention.

For 44% of PSVs, their experience had been better than they had expected and for 39% it had been consistent with what they had expected. However, for 17% it had been worse than expected. Having the role of a PSV and what was expected of them explained prior to starting is a key predictor of whether experience is better or worse than expected. For those who felt it had not been explained, 45% indicated that the experience had been worse than expected, compared to 14% who suggested it had been explained.

<sup>1</sup> Strengths of association between measures of experience and morale were tested using the Chi-square test. All the measures that are associated with morale listed were significant at the <.001 level and had Phi values ranging between .346 and .484. These values would be considered statistically as moderate or medium associations.

# Outcomes and Positive Impact

## Experience of being a PSV in relation to expectations



## Making a Difference and Encouraging Others to Volunteer

A very high proportion of PSVs felt that they had supported their local police force (96%) and had made a difference to their local community (93%). PSVs were also likely to recommend volunteering in policing to other people (94%). There were some notable differences in terms of encouraging others to volunteer, as females were slightly more likely than males to recommend it (96% to 93% respectively).

77% of PSVs are not interested in joining the regular

Constabulary, 13% are interested and 8% are not sure. Of those who are interested, 4 in 10 (37%) stated that they did not feel supported in that process.

"I think for volunteers like me who dream of being a regular officer there should be much more support not just from officers at the station that we're based at but also from our careers department. I personally feel that as we are aware of how (the force) works we should be encouraged to become officers and they could look at running workshops or inviting us to see officers in training school so we know what to expect."

## Key Points and Implications

- Overall morale is high amongst PSVs. The majority were identified as being in it for the long-term and feel they support policing and make a difference. These results suggest that PSVs in many forces have a positive experience and would recommend it to others. Having a full understanding of what to expect in a PSV role is important to managing expectations and maintaining positivity about the role once in post.
- However, as illustrated in sections throughout this report, factors such as support, effective management and supervision, feeling valued and appreciated, being treated fairly and with respect and being involved effectively, are critical to maintaining morale and retaining PSVs in the long term.

# Conclusion

The vast majority of PSVs feel their role supports their local police force, makes a difference to their communities and would recommend volunteering in policing to others. Broadly, they feel recognised, valued and appreciated for what they do, have positive relationships with regular officers and staff and feel like part of a team.

Experiences of recruitment and initial training could be improved in terms of pace and communication, and opportunities for ongoing training and development could be expanded. These aspects of the experience are important in shaping perceptions of the value that policing places on PSVs and can be seen to reflect a wider cultural discourse about the 'relative' importance of volunteers in policing.

Satisfaction with management and supervision is high and has significantly improved since 2016. However, a third of PSVs feel that their skills and experience are not used effectively and this under-utilisation of skills is a significant contributory factor to intentions to leave. Whilst the majority of PSVs indicate intentions to continue volunteering for the long term, those intending to leave point to organisational factors as the main cause, as opposed to personal circumstances. In particular, lack of support and lack of appreciation for the time contributed to policing were identified as key drivers of intentions to leave.

Maintaining high morale is also fundamental to improving retention of PSVs, which is driven by recognition, value, appreciation, good management and supervision and provision of support. Those who have volunteered for more than two years but less than five years are most likely to rate these various factors negatively and are least likely to feel they are treated fairly and with respect. This links to requests for ongoing training and development, clarity of role and purpose and full utilisation of skills and experience. Forward planning for PSV role development and growth is therefore fundamental at the two-year stage of service, to maximise contribution and commitment to role.

In order to achieve the strategic ambition to increase the scope, scale and nature of volunteering opportunities in policing, particularly to bring in specialist skills for niche areas of policing, the overall professionalisation of role development, recruitment, training and ongoing support is key to attracting and retaining volunteers.

