

# **Leading the Special Constabulary**

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## **Authors**

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Experiences of being led</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Perspectives of Special supervisors</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Leadership models and structures</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Special Chief Officers</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>National leadership</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Options for the future</b>	<b>72</b>

# Introduction

# Introduction

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## Introduction

This report focuses on the leadership of Special Constabularies in England and Wales. Special Constables are volunteer police constables, with the same warranted powers as a 'regular', paid police constable. There is a Special Constabulary within every police force in England and Wales. At the end of September 2018 (when the latest published national figures were available at the time of writing this report) there were 11,029 volunteer Special Constables serving with the forty-three geographical police forces, with an additional 314 volunteering with the British Transport Police. During 2018, these Special Constables served a total of 2.9 million hours. Specials perform a wide range of front-line policing roles, increasingly convergent with the operational roles and contexts of their 'regular' colleagues in respect of response and neighbourhood policing contexts, and are increasingly involved in supporting and delivering specialist areas of policing.

The focus of this report on the leadership of Special Constabularies is important and timely for four principle reasons:

- Despite the scale of the Special Constabulary, with over 11,000 Specials and almost 1,700 of those in promoted ranks, issues relating to the leadership of Special Constables have been relatively neglected, in terms of policy, practice and research;
- The Special Constabulary faces some substantial challenges, not least a major reduction in numbers, having halved in headcount over the past seven years, and related significant reductions in hours of contribution. There are significant leadership challenges regarding retention, effective deployment, training, support and wellbeing, 'voice' and representation, and achieving diversity;
- Policing is facing many new challenges and is under significant pressure to become more dynamic and adaptive to change. This leads to key strategic questions in relation to a changing future role and contribution for Special Constables. The future leaders of the Special Constabulary will need to both help shape this strategic future and to lead Special Constables into this new era;
- There are issues and challenges in the effectiveness, diversity and consistency of current leadership models. This raises questions about how leadership should be designed and developed going forward, both locally within forces and nationally.

The national scope of this report is important. At the time of writing, almost a quarter of police forces were engaged locally within their force areas in some form of review or organisational development activity relating to Special Constabulary rank structures or leadership. There is a lack of commonality of direction or sharing of thinking across this work. The reality is this piecemeal approach is both inefficient and ineffective at coherently addressing the strategic challenges of leadership across the Special Constabulary.

Research and evaluation into Special Constabulary leadership is extremely limited to date. This report therefore makes a significant contribution to begin to fill this gap, reflecting

# Introduction

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the largest-ever research programme undertaken at a national level on this issue.

The report draws upon a range of empirical data, including:

- National survey data of Special Constabulary leaders, addressing their experience within leadership roles;
- National survey data of Special Constables, capturing their experiences of being led;
- Benchmarking survey data from all 44 police forces, detailing current leadership structures and practice;
- Qualitative interviews with the majority of Special Constabulary Chief Officers nationally;
- Qualitative research data drawing from a large number of IPSCJ review and research projects, encompassing interview and focus group data from over a dozen Special Constabularies;
- Qualitative interviews with a range of strategic stakeholders across policing.

## The structure of this report

The report takes in turn various aspects of Specials leadership, and is structured as follows:

- The remainder of this 'Introduction' chapter describes the context for leadership of the Specials, considering the purpose and objectives for the Special Constabulary, the leadership requirement for the Special Constabulary, and some key leadership challenges;
- The second chapter explores the experiences of Special Constables of

being led, followed by a chapter that focuses on the experiences of Special Constables in promoted and supervisory roles;

- The fourth chapter seeks to summarise and analyse existing leadership models and structures and to identify the key dimensions of the debate in relation to future developments of leadership;
- The fifth chapter draws upon interviews with Special Constabulary Chief Officers, exploring their strategic role;
- A short sixth chapter considers issues of national leadership, collaboration, and 'voice' for the Special Constabulary;
- The report then concludes with options for the future.

## Defining the Special contribution

Any consideration of leadership needs to be rooted in considerations of both the purpose and objectives of the organisation being led, and of the strategic aspirations for the future.

There is widespread thinking that the Special Constabulary needs to be very different in the medium to longer-term, and that this pressure for change presents significant opportunities. In that context, it is important that a report such as this not only considers the effectiveness of leadership of the present model but also the leadership capability required to envision and realise the desired change, and also the future leadership capability required to lead that ambitious, and very different, future state.

A challenge for this report in considering Specials leadership is that the strategic contribution of, and ambition for, the Special Constabulary remains only relatively loosely

# Introduction

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defined at a national level. That national picture is then considerably further blurred by what are very wide variations in direction and practice across a disparate execution of Special Constabulary models in individual police forces.

The Special Constabulary National Strategy 2018-2023 frames the Special Constabulary as a means of 'connecting communities to policing and policing to communities' and sees Special Constables as 'a key enabler' of the Policing Vision 2025, 'through their unique and privileged position of holding the office of Constable, coupled with their integration into the communities in which they live, work and serve'.

The National Strategy looks to Specials to 'make the best possible contribution', through:

- Ensuring Specials are utilised 'effectively and efficiently';
- Ensuring Specials 'are being focused on the areas where they can make the best possible contribution';
- Adopting a cultural perspective that Special Constabulary roles and opportunities are 'limited only by our imagination', and that 'provided that Special Constabulary officers are appropriately trained and accredited then they should be able to fulfil most, if not all the functionality of regular officers'. This is coupled with a commitment to wider tasks and role, across the breadth of policing and into a range of specialisms;
- Professionalisation, including the introduction of a national competency framework, and achieving greater

coherence across issues such as leadership;

- Maximising the utilisation of skills and experience that Special Constables bring;
- Developing the Special Constabulary model to reflect new and emerging policing challenges, including the 'additional complexities of crime', 'emerging demands on the service', and that 'issues such as vulnerability and safeguarding are now fundamental';
- Beyond integration with local force plans and priorities, there is also an identified need for a shifting in the deployment focus for the Special Constabulary nationally across forces to recognise growing awareness and prioritisation of 'vulnerability' in policing objectives (inclusive of child sexual exploitation, high risk offenders, domestic abuse, cyber-crime, serious and organised crime, counter-terrorism, missing from home, vulnerable families, vulnerable adult abuse, concerns for safety, human trafficking and modern slavery, and mental health);
- Building on the USP of Special Constables; primarily that they are police officers with full warranted powers, are a flexible asset, and are deployable across force boundaries;
- Organisational development strategic priorities for the Special Constabulary that include raising the profile of Specials, widening opportunities for Specials, and developing the Special Constabulary.

In support of the development of the national strategy, the Association of Special Constabulary Officers identified potential areas where the

# Introduction

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Special Constabulary can enhance its contribution in the future:

- Providing resources at times of peak demand;
- Tackling violence and knife crime;
- Response and detection of 'minor' crimes (aspects of which currently receive limited resource and response, but which can be significant in terms of victim experience and community confidence);
- Roads policing (enhancing resources in an area of policing where resourcing has markedly reduced over the strategic timescale, and in particular in relation to enhancing visible and pro-active roads policing, preventative activity, and supporting and freeing specialist resource to focus on e.g. complex investigations);
- ANPR;
- Counter-terrorism, organised crime, human trafficking, fraud and cyber (all areas where the Special Constabulary can provide additional resource and specialist skills sets);
- Child sexual exploitation;
- Public order;
- Mental health.

Adding to that analysis, the 2018 National Citizens in Policing Benchmarking Report also identified a pattern in thinking at force level which identified three further areas:

- Neighbourhood policing, community engagement, schools and young people engagement (recognising the importance, and recent trends of reduction in resourcing in many force contexts);

- Rural policing and engagement;
- Hate crime and engagement across diverse communities.

There are a number of critical voices across the Special Constabulary who worry that the Specials model needs to change more quickly and more fundamentally, and see current strategy at national and force levels as 'incrementalism' rather than being about deeper and more strategic change. There appears to be little challenge to the specifics about future role and contribution, rather, there is frustration at scale and pace, and many would look to a greater future strategic energy which:

- Scaled up significantly, to fully realise the potential of volunteer models;
- Pushed more strongly the professionalism and integration agendas, to create a higher-functioning volunteer model;
- Would like to see a considerably larger and more rapid engagement of Specials into specialist policing areas (so essentially, consistent with the direction set out in the thinking above, but *much* more substantial in terms of scale).

Linked to some of this developmental thinking, there is also a growing enthusiasm to consider 'reserve' models. The concept of 'reserves' is loosely defined, as it is used across sectors and internationally to mean many different things, but broadly it involves:

- Achieving a more direct equivalency of operating, and inter-operability, with regulars, (at least for some of the cohort of reserve officers);
- A stronger emphasis on recruiting ex-regulars into a reserve model, seeking to maintain skills and contribution;

# Introduction

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- Some consideration of paid as well as voluntary models (with thinking often of a 'hybrid' model involving both, as is seen in some US settings);
- A new and strengthened statutory basis;
- For some, a move away from the 'Special Constabulary' name, towards either 'volunteer police officer' or 'reserve', feeling that the language of the 'Specials' carries a negative cultural baggage.
- Supporting delivery at the front-line of major changes in the development and deployment of Specials, to support the aspirations for future role, as set out in the section above;
- Supporting development and delivery of attraction and retention strategies that build towards and deliver the desired 'future state' of the Special Constabulary.

## The leadership requirement

Arising from the organisational strategy picture discussed above, and based upon the research work of the IPSCJ and a wide range of strategic conversations about the Special Constabulary, an attempt is made here to define the leadership requirements of the Special Constabulary.

At an operational delivery level, a distilled list of the highest priority requirements for leadership of the Special Constabulary can be summarised as:

- Providing effective support and supervision for Special Constables;
- Achieving the effective deployment of Special Constables, maximising 'effect';
- Supporting and ensuring the development of Specials, including building initial operational competency, professional development and career pathways;
- Ensuring Special Constables feel valued and appreciated, effective and worthwhile, championed, empowered, enjoy good relationships with regular officers and have high morale;

At a strategic level in forces, the leadership of the Special Constabulary needs to be able to deliver:

- A clear vision of future role and model of operating for their Special Constabulary, being clear of the nature and scale of intended contribution to policing;
- An ability to develop a professionalised Special Constabulary, with the skills and experience capable of delivering to that role and operating model;
- An effective deployment of the Special Constabulary, integrated with the wider force;
- Setting the conditions, creating the culture, and achieving the right leadership to deliver the best possible experience of being a Special Constable;
- Successful management of the strategic relationships with others in and beyond the force, to enable the Special Constabulary to grow and thrive;
- A 'voice' for the Special Constabulary, and effective projection of its capability, contribution and potential.

At a national level, the leadership of the Special Constabulary needs to deliver on:



# Introduction

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- Establishing a compelling and coordinated vision for the future role, capability and operating of the Special Constabulary;
- Developing a national context in which the Special Constabulary collectively grows the required capacity and capability now and in future;
- Creating the right national conditions, for example in terms of standards, culture, and ambition, to support local forces in creating the best possible experience of volunteering as a Special Constable and for forces to maximise deployment and 'effect';
- To relocate the Special Constabulary strategically, recognising its future potential to deliver across a wide range of policing priorities, to contribute to building organisational capability, and to reach into all communities promoting diversity and engagement;
- To achieve the effective strategic representation, 'voice', profile and integration of the Special Constabulary at a national level.

Additionally, beyond this leadership requirement, leaders in the Special Constabulary can also contribute more broadly to the strategic and operational development and delivery of policing, bringing a wide range of skills, experience, fresh perspectives and a different culture.

More broadly, leadership across policing needs to achieve a stronger strategic and operational alignment and integration. The strategic development and contribution of Specials needs to be mainstreamed into thinking on key aspects of policing reform and development,

such as future workforce, leadership and diversity, as well as across all thematic policing portfolios.

## The key leadership challenges

Looking across the IPSCJ research work, a number of areas of leadership challenge in respect of the Special Constabulary can be identified. This may well not be a wholly comprehensive list, but provides a useful point of focus in respect of identifying some of the key challenges that the leadership of the Special Constabulary needs to address. Key challenges include:

- Driving improvement of the experience of being a Special Constable;
- Reversing decline in capacity and numbers. Recent years have seen sharp and sustained reductions in the scale and capacity of the Special Constabulary. This has been at a point in time where arguably the contribution is needed more than ever, the strategic intent of most forces has been to achieve growth, and the potential for a wider and more specialist contribution are increasingly understood. Reversing decline and achieving growth presents a considerable leadership challenge, nationally and in local forces;
- Producing and managing a flow of new recruits into the Special Constabulary, at a time when current rates of recruitment are at a historical low. This presents a challenge in terms of negotiating the resourcing and prioritisation of Special Constable recruitment in a context of competing demands for recruitment, HR and learning and development resource. It also requires design and

# Introduction

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- implementation of effective attraction strategies, and the reduction of negative attrition from front-end processes;
- Attracting and retaining more 'career' Special Constables;
- Achieving improved retention and longevity of volunteering careers in the Special Constabulary. Current rates of resignation are above historical trend, resulting in a young-in-service skewed Specials cohort nationally and in most forces;
- Addressing deep-seated problems of inconsistency and variable standards;
- Achieving a much stronger strategic profile and positioning of the Special Constabulary;
- Achieving greater and more consistent resourcing of the Special Constable model;
- Achieving better connection between senior leaders and front-line Specials;
- Delivering enhanced diversity across the Special Constabulary;
- Delivering a step change in the diversity of Specials leadership;
- Improving communication of the Special Constabulary and its role, service and achievements, both internally within policing, and externally with the public and partner agencies.
- Supporting Specials access to equipment and other key resources, such as access to vehicles;
- Improving approaches to reward and recognition;
- Providing better standards of supervision and support. In particular, eradicating situations in which line supervisors are not accessible and available, or are not sufficiently skilled and experienced;
- Ensuring appropriate support and access to services and representation at times of trauma, complaint, injury and similar contexts;
- Ensuring the consistent delivery of models of support for Specials, e.g. Employer Supported Policing for police staff who also volunteer as Specials.

At a more tactical and operational level, key leadership challenges can be summarised as:

- Achieving greater visibility of leaders, especially senior leaders;
- Supporting Specials in their development, and access to training which can enhance contribution;

# **Experiences of being led**

# Experiences of being led

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Special Constables of being led, primarily drawing on data from the national survey of Special Constables undertaken in 2018, and also from qualitative research undertaken by the IPSCJ in a number of police forces over the past three years. The chapter focuses on Special Constable experiences of support and supervision, and also on the perspectives Specials have of the broader leadership model and arrangements in their police forces.

Overall, looking across the findings, it is important to emphasise that there is much which is good, and strong, in terms of the current models of leadership and how they are experienced by Specials. Whilst there are key areas for consideration and change, the current experience of leadership in the Special Constabulary is by no means a wholly negative picture. There are many contexts and exemplars of very high standards of leadership, and of Specials feeling very well supported. Therefore, future thinking on Special Constabulary leadership needs to appreciate and build upon these positives, as well as addressing some of the areas of required change set out across this chapter.

## An unevenness of experiences

As will be a recurrent theme across this report, the experiences of leadership for Specials appear to vary widely across England and Wales.

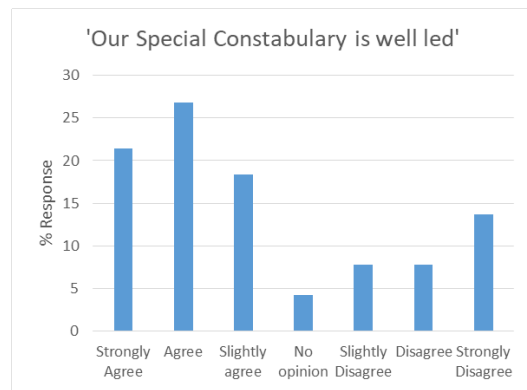
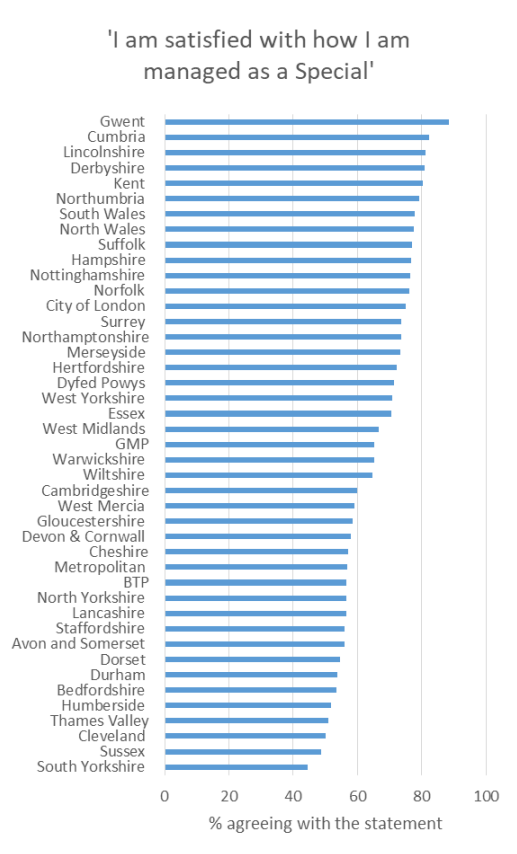
Overall, when asked if they are satisfied with how they are managed as a Special Constable, a clear majority of Specials agree that they are satisfied. However, a third do not, with one in eight strongly disagreeing. This sense of a mixed

picture is consistently seen across most of the data on the experience of being led in the Special Constabulary; often showing, as is the case here, that for a majority the experience is positive, but for a sizeable minority that is not the case, and for some it is 'strongly' not the case. A key aspect pointed to across the data is a need for greater consistency, clearer standards, and more active and explicit understandings and management of performance of leaders, to help address the problems of those who do not feel satisfied with their experience of being managed.



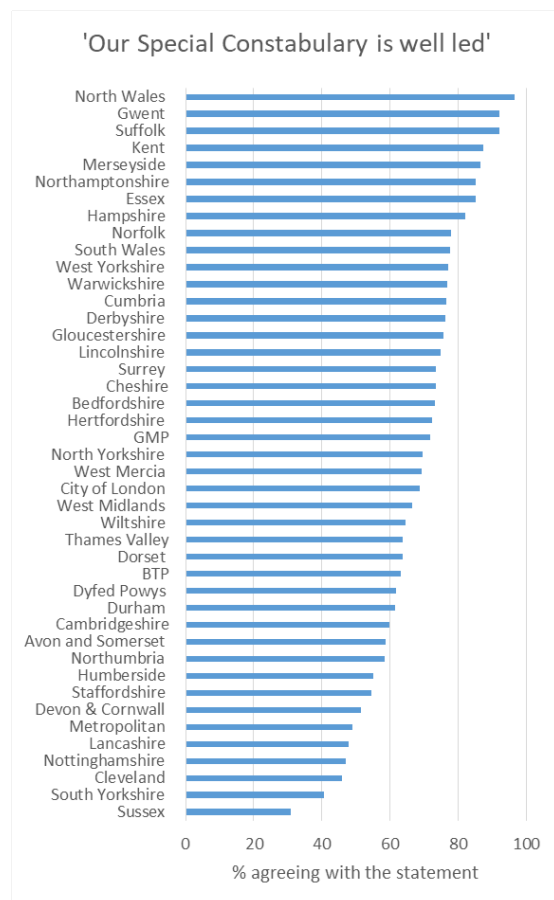
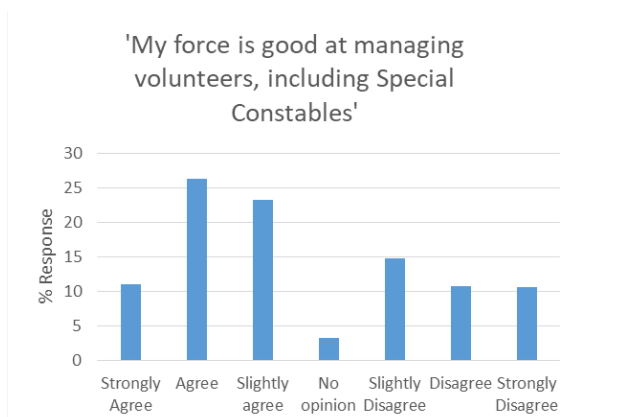
Responses at police force level to the survey should be treated with caution, in particularly avoiding reading too much into the positioning of responses in individual forces, given that in some force contexts response volumes were relatively small. However, what the graph below does show is that there seems to be a wide spread of response patterns in different Special Constabularies in terms of the percentage of Specials answering that they are satisfied with how they are led. The responses range from almost 90% to just over 40%.

# Experiences of being led



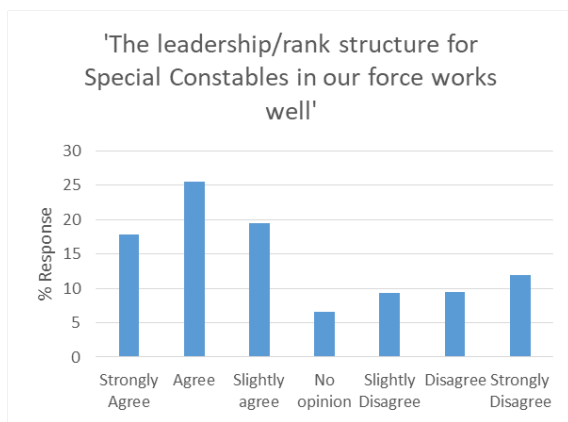
Once again, looking at the spread of responses at force level, caution is needed not to read too much into individual forces, given that some forces had relatively small response volumes. Nevertheless, that caution in respect of the data notwithstanding, it is clear that there is a very wide range of response patterns across different forces in terms of whether Specials feel that their Special Constabularies were well led.

Asking Specials to consider leadership more generally, beyond their own personal experiences of being managed, similarly a majority of Specials who responded to the national survey answered that they agreed their force was good at managing volunteers, and that their Special Constabularies were well led.

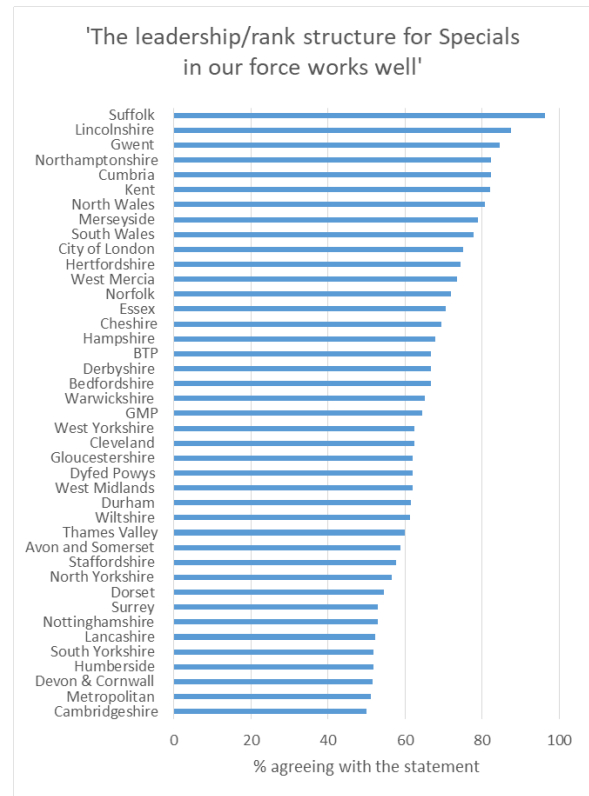


# Experiences of being led

Asking a similar, but slightly differently focused question, in respect of whether Specials felt that the leadership/rank arrangements worked well in their force, a broadly similar pattern of responses is again evident. A majority answered positively, but a sizeable minority (approximately a third) disagreed that arrangements worked well. Again, one in eight Specials 'strongly disagreed' that rank/leadership arrangements work well.

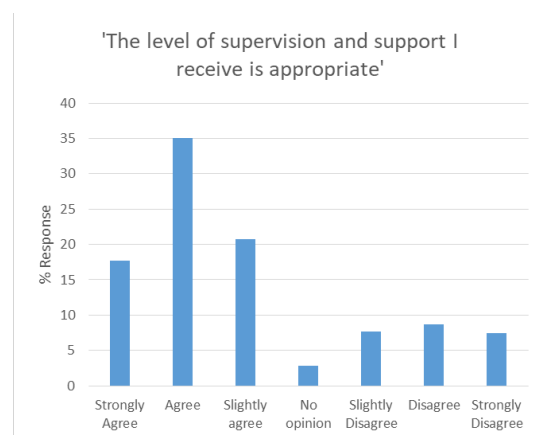


Again, with the caveat that care should be taken in reading too much into individual force results given response levels in individual forces, it can be seen that there is a large degree of variation in response between different forces. (The two forces of Sussex and Northumbria who do not have rank arrangements have been removed from this graph).



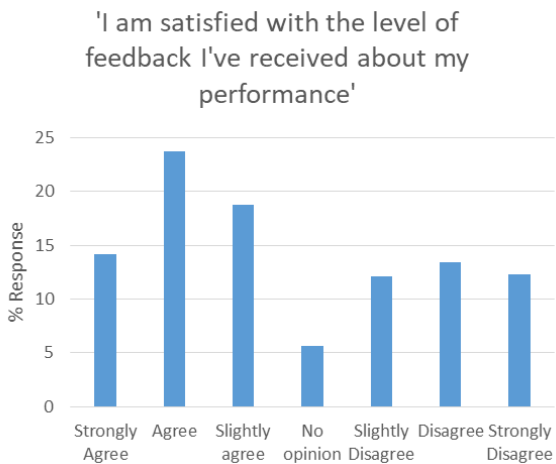
## Supervision and support

On the whole, Specials responded positively to the level of support and supervision that they have received. Three quarters felt they received an appropriate level of support, and 18% strongly agreed. However, alongside that, almost a quarter disagreed.



# Experiences of being led

A majority of Specials were also satisfied with the feedback they receive, although again there is a challenge in that over a third do not, with one in eight 'strongly' disagreeing.



Where there was dissatisfaction with supervision and support, one range of concerns related to the experience and skills of supervisors, primarily reflecting feelings that those in supervisory roles lacked experience. This seems to match up with challenges of recruitment into promoted roles, particularly S/Sergeant, which has led in some contexts to appointment into S/Sergeant roles very early in service, and in some forces before Specials have attained independent patrol status.

Most commonly, concerns relate more to a simple absence of supervisor engagement and contact. Including some Specials who have had little if any contact with their supervisors.

**“Never met her. And I’d never met the him who came before the her either!” (Special Constable)**

**“Supervision? I don’t know who mine is.” (Special Constable)**

This sense of gaps in supervision and support, through an absence or lack of accessibility of supervisory ranks in the Specials, does not seem to occur in all forces, but nevertheless appears from our research across forces to be a quite widespread concern. It seems to have its roots in a number of different problems:

- Problems in some forces in recruiting to and resourcing front-line supervisory ranks in the Specials. This can in turn lead to a number of issues, including some supervisors who are very inexperienced, some who may have been unenthusiastic in taking on the role, a lack of stability in rank structures including a high proportion of ‘Acting’ supervisory roles, and too large spans of control due to unfilled roles;
- The above problems can be exacerbated in force contexts which have a higher proportion of non-independent, young-in-service, Specials, who are much more demanding of supervisor time and resources;
- A lack of standards, role description induction, training and support for those in supervisory roles;
- Little or no structured management of supervisors, meaning that gaps in contribution or capability are not systematically identified;
- Related to the above point, a lack of structured feedback opportunities, meaning that gaps and problems are not identified and resolved.

With more established, and longer-in-service Specials, such gaps in supervisor engagement and contact may well matter less to individual Specials, although in such contexts they can lead

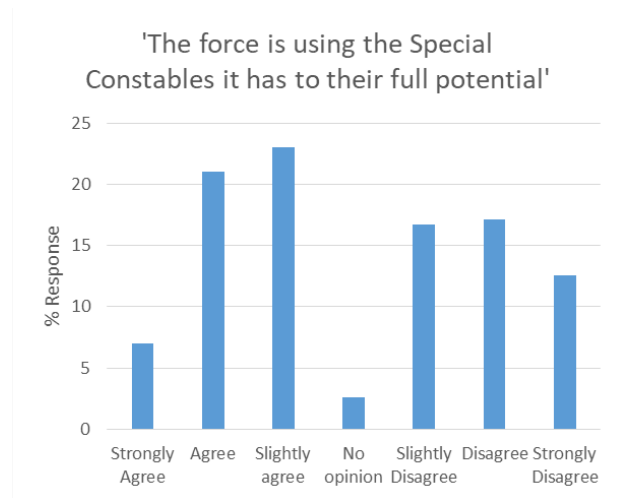
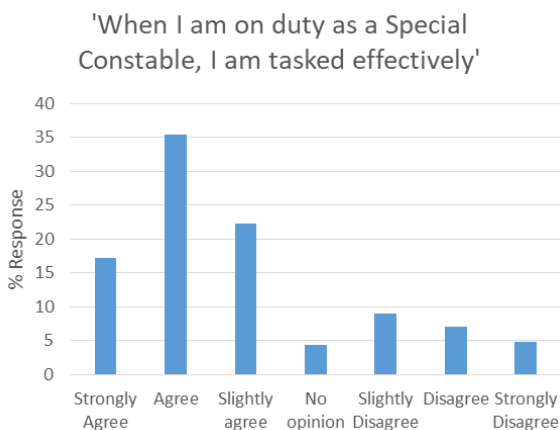
# Experiences of being led

to a sense of lack of progression, appreciation, communication and support. However, for younger-in-service Specials, such gaps in supervisory support may well be the difference between staying and resigning, and progressing towards independent patrol status or not doing so.

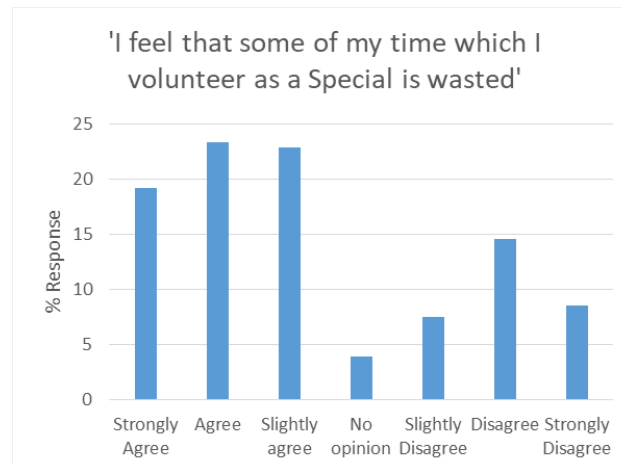
## Effectiveness of deployment and utilisation

Research shows that a critical element that drives overall morale and experience for Specials is the degree to which they are effectively and meaningfully tasked and deployed. It is important that tasks undertaken feel worthwhile, value-adding, interesting and enjoyable, all of which reduce likelihood of disengagement and resignation.

Most Specials agree that they are tasked effectively, although a one-fifth of Specials disagree.



A majority of Specials feel that some of the time that they volunteer as a Special is wasted, with almost one in five 'strongly' agreeing that this is the case.

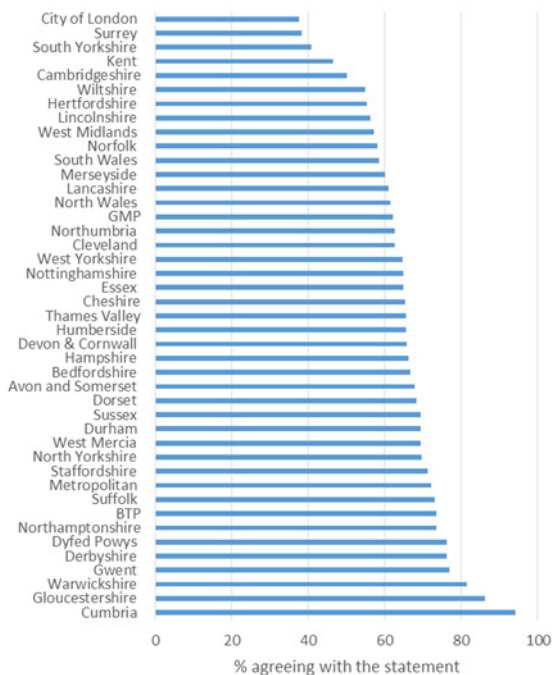


Looking across forces, the proportion of Specials who feel that some of their time is wasted varies markedly across forces. Once again, caution should be taken in focusing on individual force positions in the graph, due to relatively low response volumes in some forces. However, the scale of variation nationally is marked.



# Experiences of being led

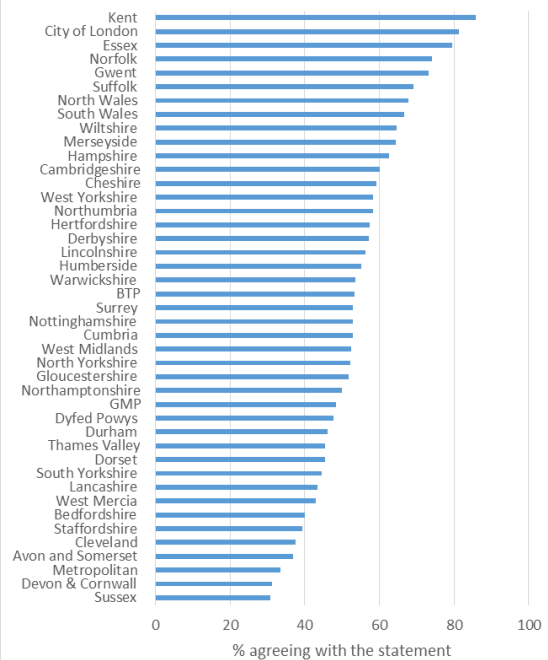
'I feel that some of the time I volunteer as a Special Constable is wasted'



Views are mixed amongst Specials as to whether their force uses the Specials it has to their full potential. Broadly half agree it does, but also almost half do not.

Once again, looking at response patterns across police forces, there is a large degree of variation.

'The force is using the Specials it has to their full potential'



This data across effectiveness of deployment and tasking presents some direct and important leadership challenges. In summary, a fifth of Specials disagree that they are tasked effectively, almost two thirds feel that some of their time is wasted, and almost half of Specials disagree that their force is using the Specials it has to their full potential.

This points to key challenges for forces and for their Special Constabulary leaders, in terms of:

- Whether the force has a strategy for the effective and prioritised deployment of Specials, or if this is primarily left to ad hoc arrangements within individual teams and with individual accompanying regular officers;
- Whether the force understands its current deployment and 'effect' of Specials;

# Experiences of being led

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- Whether the force has plans to build better deployment methodologies for its Special Constables in the future.

Clearly, the question of effective utilisation goes beyond methods of tasking and deployment, and also embraces broader strategic challenges, including:

- How to make best use of the skills and experience Specials have, often brought in from outside of the police service;
- How to best develop the policing skills of Specials, to enhance contribution;
- How to develop the contribution of Specials in a broader range of areas of policing.

## Poor induction and initial support

A key gap consistently and strongly identified by Specials in their experience of being led is an absence of structured support at the induction and initial practice stage. There is felt to be a gap after initial training, with (in many forces) what comes next in terms of practice induction and competency build being experienced by many Specials as being poorly supported and organised.

**“I know talking to some people off my course, you know, they’ve gone out for the first time and then they were like, whoa, you know, straight into a violent domestic. And to me that’s letting the officer down, it’s not backing them up, you know, coming again from the military perspective, you don’t go into battle or into a situation, yeah, unless you can, you know, deal with it.” (Special Constable)**

**“When I first joined I thought I had some really good training and then you’re like oh yeah this is great. Then like you’re**

**assigned to that station and it just stops... So there is no introduction, there is no, okay well who am I going to go and talk to, where am I, what duties am I doing, it was kind of left up to me to kind of wander around.” (Special Constable)**

**“I think it should have been easier... I felt I did a lot of work... it might have been useful if I’d got introduced to a few more people rather than having to do it myself. Because I would say the more shy among the Specials may not have done it.” (Special Constable)**

For many Specials, they feel that they have ‘been left alone to get on with it’, in terms of induction and orientation to the front-line environment, and then in terms of developing capability and signing off competencies. For others, there is also a (potentially opposite) experience of feeling ‘pressured’ in respect of their pace in progressing competency sign off.

## Visibility and connection

A priority of many Specials for their leaders is that leadership is ‘visible’ to them, and that their leaders are ‘connected’ to them.

Experiences vary widely, with some feeling their leaders are remote and lack visibility, and some the opposite.

**“Very low visibility of the senior people. Never see any of them.” (Special Constable)**

**“And some of the people I’ve met who have been in senior management have been very visible, they are fantastic. So I would say there’s a lot more positives there than negatives” (Special Constable)**

For many Specials, they contrasted the visibility of Special Constabulary leaders positively with

# Experiences of being led

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what they perceived as the visibility of regular senior officers.

**“We see our senior officers out all the time, and they do get to know their front-line Specials. Very different to the regs, never set eyes on any of their top brass on a Friday night, probably never will. Our leaders aren’t 9-5 in the same way that their chiefs are.” (Special Constable)**

Qualities including being seen as ‘genuine’, ‘authentic’ and ‘passionate’ about what they do are valued by Specials.

**“You’ve got people like [name], you know, who really genuinely does have a passion and that does come across quite profoundly, you know, he talks and you realise he does actually mean what he’s saying, you know. And again it’s having that kind of mind set really throughout the whole organisation and trying to get that bedded into Specials, that passion and that proactive initiative.” (Special Constable)**

A quite common perspective is for Specials to have some appreciation that good work is being undertaken by Special leaders, but feeling that the communication of their work and role is poor.

**“From what I see they [senior leaders in the Special Constabulary] work very hard and do a lot for us. But I don’t think most [Specials] see any of that, and the communication is rubbish.” (Special Constable)**

In some force contexts, there are problems of what is experienced as a lack of ‘connection’ between Specials and their senior leaders. In part this relates to feelings that senior Specials are out of touch or not up to date. In part, to a sense of senior leaders not being present and leading by example. In part, to gaps in

knowledge as to what senior leaders do (senior leadership being ‘in parallel’ and poorly understood by front-line Specials). And in part, issues of ‘difference’; for example, senior Specials are often older, have a longer record of service, and are at different life stages professionally and personally, to many of the younger, and younger-in-service, Specials that they command.

In some force contexts, there were perceptions of ‘agendas’, ‘politics’ and ‘territory’ at a senior level, which again made Specials on the ground feel frustrated with and disconnected from their senior leaders. This was particularly the case in forces where Specials perceived that senior Specials did not get on with, or work well with, their senior colleagues.

For some Specials, aspects of senior Specials demeanour, style and uniform tended to add to a sense of disconnect. This was often associated with views that ‘there are too many’ senior officers, and fundamental gaps in knowledge about what senior Specials do. As one Special put it, the ‘lots of braid’ problem leads to a presentation of senior Specials that tends to set them apart and distance them from front-line focused Specials.

**“And sat at the front there was this row of older white guys in suits, never seen any of them before, never seen them out, don’t know who they are or what they do.” (Special Constable)**

**“I do sometimes wonder what it actually achieves by having the hierarchy that we have. In very simple terms, I just don’t know what they do. I do know there seems to be a lot of them, lots of layers of them.” (Special Constable)**

# Experiences of being led

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These findings point to a challenge, in particular for senior Special leaders, or remaining ‘in touch’, connected, communicative and relevant to front-line Specials. The picture varies from force to force, but many senior Specials are effective in achieving front-line presence and visibility, perhaps comparing favourably with many of their senior regular counterparts. Looking at best practice nationally, key aspects that senior Specials could usefully focus upon include:

- More effective communication across the Special Constabulary about their activity and role, which is often poorly understood;
- A greater involvement of Specials as a whole in terms of key decisions for the Special Constabulary and processes of forming strategy for the future;
- Enhancing visibility of instances where senior Specials are championing the Special Constabulary, or progressing issues of particular front-line resonance and concern (e.g. equipment, training, driving, etc.).

## The challenges of Special Sergeant roles

The majority of Specials tend to prioritise front-line visible leadership. Much of this front-line leadership relates to the S/Sergeant role, which is also by far the largest rank numerically in the Special Constabulary, with the 1,026 S/Sergeants nationally amounting to 62% of all promoted Specials.

As is the case with all aspects of Specials leadership, there is a widely varying picture nationally around how S/Sergeant roles operate,

and in issues around their recruitment, support and management.

S/Sergeants can find themselves in some force contexts overwhelmed by numbers of Specials to supervise and in particular with the extent of developmental support and capability assessment activity in forces where the cohort of Specials is weighted more towards young-in-service Special Constables. Many S/Sergeants reflect on the scale of administrative burden at their rank; often perceived to be exacerbated by a complex and bureaucratic discipline system, and by the lack of coordination and HR support in some force contexts for front-line Specials supervisors.

**“I think we need to be taking away the administrative burden and getting people out onto the street to actually lead on the ground and to actually do what we all signed up to do, which is to serve the public.” (Special Constable)**

**“What we’re saying is that we need more centralised support on managing Specials, on dealing with those who don’t show up or cause problems.” (Special Constable)**

For some Specials, they perceive the problem also in part to be that a proportion of other leaders in their Special Constabularies are no longer front-line active or particularly directly engaged in front-line supervision and support; this perceived dissociation of some Specials leaders, particularly at higher ranks, with the actual policing activity of the Special Constabulary, is seen as having a funnelling effect of those front-line supervisory responsibilities falling on fewer individuals, particularly at S/Sergeant level.

# Experiences of being led

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**“Lots of parallels with the regulars, so it’s the sergeant role where all the pressure is at.” (Special Constable)**

As a consequence of the above picture, many S/Sergeants find their activity skewed towards spending time dealing with non-attendance, poor performance, and with the competency processes of new Specials. This leaves problematically little time to more generally supervise, support and operationally lead the rest of their (attending and performing) team members, and sometimes with insufficient time to engage themselves in front-line practice as much as they would wish.

**“And then by them concentrating on the 20% doing wrong, then, rather than the 80% who are doing right, it becomes imbalanced and then therefore you get demotivated good people, those career Specials go, you get retention problems.” (Special Constable)**

Many forces are having difficulty in recruiting to S/Sergeant roles, many are under-establishment and have high proportions of acting roles. These problems are often driven by the skew in profile towards younger-in-service Specials, which reduces the size of the ‘pool’ from which to recruit.

**“We’re definitely short, we’re short of Special Sergeants and we haven’t got a big pool to draw them from at the moment.” (Special Constable)**

Whilst there remains a flow of applicants for S/Sergeant roles in all forces, and the problem should not be over-exaggerated, some Specials at Constable rank are ‘put off’ by the prospect of promotion. Many Specials perceive becoming a S/Sergeant as something that consumes a great deal of time, carries a lot of responsibility and expectation, does not feel particularly

appreciated or rewarded, and would divert them from what they enjoy most and find most rewarding, which is front-line policing.

**“I have no idea why anyone would want to become a Sergeant. It consumes your whole life, if you try to do it properly. I know people who work every evening, literally every day.” (Special Constable)**

**“I’ve seen the role destroy good people. Then they leave, because they just can’t cope anymore. It’s a scandal really. A real shame.” (Special Constable)**

There is no systematic data set of the longevity and retention in role of S/Sergeants. However, qualitative research in forces suggests that there is quite a flow of S/Sergeants either leaving, or returning to Special Constable rank. Issues raised tend to reflect the role placing considerable burdens on time, and takes much time away from front-line practice.

These findings point to two things; firstly, the need to better design and manage S/Sergeant roles, and to better support Specials within them. This needs a more robust and systematic approach to understanding span of control, and to ensure a role design that makes such roles manageable in terms of balancing the volunteering experience with the rest of life.

Secondly, more broadly (and providing the strategic context for the role design and organisational design work discussed above), there is a need for a different vision of what such front-line supervision should be, in terms of its character, its emphasis, and its style of operating. In terms of that strategic thinking, Specials consistently request front-line supervisors who:

# Experiences of being led

- prioritise front-line practice, are seen as highly credible police officers, and are seen first and foremost as front-line practice leaders, bringing a passion for and expertise in policing;
- are freed up from 'tick box' competency assessments to be able to lead on rounded capability assessment, based on real-time observation in the field and not the collection and signing off of lists of criteria;
- are able to engage and lead all their team members, and are not just preoccupied with issues of failure to attend and perform;
- care for their officers, seek to know them as individuals, understand their motivations and aspirations, and who 'go the extra mile' and 'have their backs'.

- Leaders who are never visible doing the job.

## Doubts over senior leader influence

Whilst senior leaders (as discussed in later chapters) place a great deal of emphasis on their roles in influencing on behalf of the Special Constabulary and developing effective strategic relationships, there is a caucus of scepticism amongst Specials of Constable rank that such influencing is effective.

Some Specials perceive their senior leaders to carry little weight, credibility and influence, and are not listened to.

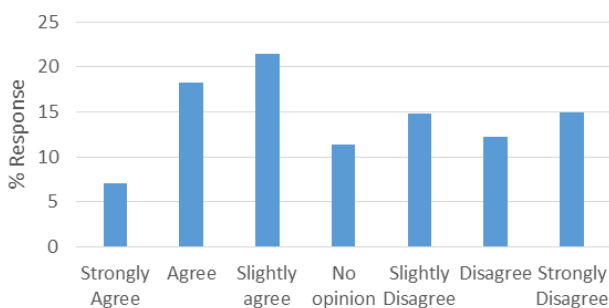
**“Our chief and SMT could give so much but I don’t think they’re listened to or respected very much. Probably exactly as much as we are at the front line.” (Special Constable)**

This is reflected in perceptions as to whether the 'voice of Specials' is heard effectively in shaping thinking within their force about the future of the Special Constabulary. Over four in ten Specials think that it is not. Only 7% 'strongly' agree that it is.

For some Specials, this feeds into and links with more negative views about the capability and efficacy of senior roles and those who occupy them more broadly. However, for others, Specials feel frustrated that their senior leaders are capable, and have a lot to contribute at senior level, but that their force does not seem to create the environment and have the culture where this potential is realised.

**“As I see it, our leaders are often much more experienced at managing big companies, big budgets, big numbers of**

'The voice of Specials is heard effectively in shaping thinking within force about the future of the Special Constabulary'



What Specials would like to see less of is:

- Remote management by email;
- A focus on paperwork and metrics, rather than people and practice;
- Jobs-worth approaches;
- Leaders who are not prepared to be there and stand up for their people;

# Experiences of being led

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**people, than their [regular] police equivalents. They have that critical professional managerial background other senior police lack. If the police was a business, it would have gone broke decades ago. In that sense, I think Specials leaders raise the standards of police leadership, not lowers them”** *(Special Constable)*

## Standards

There are very mixed perspectives amongst Specials in terms of the quality of their leaders, and the standards that are set and managed across Specials leadership. For many, these are felt to be a lack of framework, expectations and clarity of role.

**“There needs to be better accountability in terms of what the supervisor does, how they’re expected to perform and also what the expectations are in terms of behaviour and standards.”** *(Special Constable)*

This context is seen by some as leading to a variation in standards and motivation of Specials leaders, which can risk having an undermining effect on Specials leadership more generally.

**“I see some who literally just ride it and they love having the rank but they don’t do anything. You know, have the rank but they haven’t done operational duties and they love turning out to the county show or the carnivals wearing all their clean kit and extra braidery, whatever, don’t get me wrong there’s some who are really good, there’s some who are not. I’m not tarring everybody with the same brush.”** *(Special Constable)*

The issue of standards and expectation also loops back to the discussion above in respect of the challenges of recruitment, particularly into S/Sergeant roles, and the sense that such

challenges can lead to the recruitment of very much less qualified and experienced colleagues.

**“You’ve got people going into the roles who’ve literally just got five minutes of service because they’ve been there five minutes, you know, you’re talking to an old timer here, and they’ve been there five minutes and made supervisor or Sergeant and you’re thinking, you don’t have the credentials, you don’t have the reputation or the rapport or the respect and then you’re devaluing that role because it’s almost dished out because they’ve got to have one.”** *(Special Constable)*

**“So we’ve got three... I’m a temporary Sergeant now, so we’ve got two other Sergeants, one for each station, and then Inspector. And I think all of us are still in probation period effectively. So yeah, that role of helping the new ones coming in and helping with their PDP is sort of coming down to us who don’t really know what the hell we’re doing anyway.”** *(Temporary Special Sergeant)*

Alongside such issues, there are also concerns relating to:

- Poor standards of assessment and selection at the recruitment stage;
- A perceived lack of induction and training for supervisors, not all of whom bring any people leadership background or skillset;
- Very little structured supervision or appraisal of supervisors;
- Few opportunities to feedback on the experience of being supervised;
- A lack of clarity as to what the role of supervisor should involve.

# Experiences of being led

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## Style

Leadership styles and approaches across forces vary considerably.

There are behaviours amongst some senior leadership teams which are less engaging, empowering and appreciative, and instead tend to reflect approaches that are more didactic and hierarchical in style.

**“With like the higher up, higher above ranks being quite dictatorial, I suppose.”**  
*(Special Constable)*

**“Sometimes it does seem to be a bit about empires, my patch their patch, my Specials and their Specials. We’re meant to be one force, one Special Constabulary, but over the years, time and time again, I have seen lots of behaviours that do not reflect that, mainly from Specials themselves rather than the Regulars, and from people who have quite senior ranks.”**  
*(Special Constable)*

For some Specials, they feel that there are more deeply-set cultural aspects of such issues of style which need addressing.

**“There always seems to be more of a problem with Specials’ ranks rather than actual Regulars or Regular ranks. I don’t know why. There must be some kind of power trip or something, who knows?”**  
*(Special Constable)*

As reflected above in terms of front-line supervisors, Specials look for certain traits and styles in their leaders. They can be very frustrated when the operating styles of leaders falls short of, or is very different to, those desired traits.

**“Because he’s just like, “Yeah, you need to do your PDPs.” It’s the same story**

**every time. There’s just no talk of achievement. It’s not like, “Right, brilliant. What’s been happening now? What’s happened over the last month? Can we like get enthused about this whole thing?” One of my colleagues said when we came out of the meeting the last time, “do you find when you come out of these meetings that you just wanna go and die?” Like it’s all just so boring. I think, yeah, I think it can be changed to make people’s attitudes a little bit better... “Amazing you saved this guy from throwing himself off the Docks.” Which someone did and actually not much was kind of put towards that in terms of actual achievements and kind of celebrating that success.”**  
*(Special Constable)*

**“The best ones lead from the front, wearing their love of policing on their sleeve and putting their people first. The job first, rank second. Then there’s the process pedants, who’ve never managed to be in charge of shit all else their whole lives, and now they’ve got this train set to play with, to be the fat controller.”**  
*(Special Constable)*

These findings point to the need to consider issues of style and ways of operating of leaders, at all ranks. Some programmes of training for Specials leaders, where it is available, tend to foreground issues of technical knowledge and expertise, without actively engaging with wider questions of leadership identity, style and projection.



# **Perspectives of Special supervisors**

# Perspectives of Special supervisors

## Introduction

This chapter of the report explores the experiences of Special Constables in leadership roles. The chapter primarily draws from data in the 2018 national survey of Special Constables, which had questions specifically for Specials leaders, and also from qualitative research interviews and focus groups undertaken by the IPSCJ in a number of forces between 2016 and 2019.

The focus is not primarily on Special Chief Officers, as there is a later chapter devoted to their experiences. This chapter is mostly focused on those in other promoted ranks within the Special Constabulary.

Overall, Specials leaders have found being in their promoted role a positive experience. There is an argument that the survey may exaggerate that picture, in the sense that those questioned were individuals still in a promoted role, and for those who have not found it a good experience they are more likely to have left. Nevertheless, virtually all those promoted Specials responding to the survey said it had been a good experience, with a third strongly agreeing.



Consistent with that picture, a large majority of Specials in promoted roles would recommend seeking promotion to other Special Constables.



## Attraction to the role

Many forces experience some challenges in attracting Specials to take on leadership roles, particularly the initial step to S/Sergeant. Primary factors discussed by Specials are:

- Work-life balance, and perceptions that Special leadership roles require a lot of hours of service to fulfil;
- Worries about not being able to undertake as much front-line policing due to time being taken up by supervisory duties and meetings;
- Feeling that they experience enough 'paperwork' and 'line management' in their day jobs.

**“One of the challenges I sense is if you become a Special Sergeant, you can, you know as you say the role is administrative, you can end up doing a lot of the administrative people management and less and less of the policing.” (Special Constable)**

# Perspectives of Special supervisors

In some forces, particularly where recent recruitment volumes have been relatively high, there is a significant pinch-point in the Specials supervisory model in respect of S/Sergeants. This is created by three intertwined factors: a young-in-service cohort provides fewer suitably qualified candidates for S/Sergeant roles; a young-in-service cohort creates a greater demand for the work of S/Sergeants; and that greater demand tends to skew S/Sergeant roles to support, supervision and assessment of new non-independent Specials, which can make the role less appealing to some.

**“With so many trainees, the people to promote just ain’t there and those that are, none of them wants to be a supervisor, they’re quite happy doing what they’re doing, working on response, doing neighbourhood work, whatever they get involved with and it’s not good pressurising people to do it because more often than not, they don’t work out. So yes, we definitely are short of supervisors. But not everyone wants to take on the responsibilities that the force expects them to.” (Special Superintendent)**

Sitting alongside the generally positive experiences reflected by those in supervisory roles, for those not in them, they are often seen as unattractive. This contradiction may reflect, to some degree, limited understandings of what is involved.

**“The management side is a lot of responsibility and very little reward or recognition for it.” (Special Constable)**

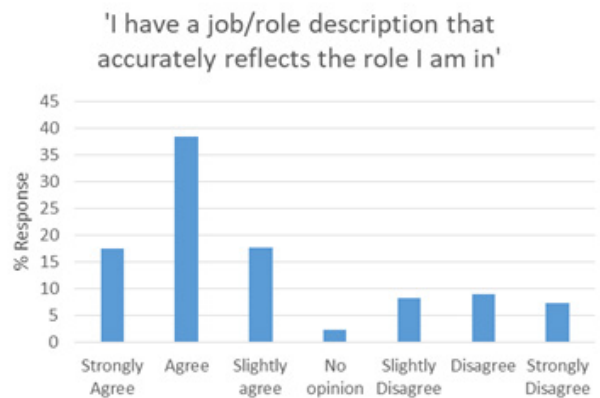
## Appointment to role

Forces vary widely in the degree of, and quality of, processes relating to promotion, clarity of role design and of expectation.

Many forces present some very basic gaps in terms of role design and communication of expectation.

**“If there was any clarity what they’re looking for in a special sergeant, inspector, superintendent, then the force would do a lot better in finding the right people to fill those roles.” (Special Sergeant)**

The national surveys show a majority of promoted Specials have a role description which reflects the role that they are in; albeit one in five disagreed that was the case.



The national survey responses also suggest most promoted Specials feel that the process of their appointment to role was 'open and fair'; albeit one in eight do not.



# Perspectives of Special supervisors

Nevertheless, in some forces, there remain concerns from some Specials as to what they perceive as poorly managed and biased appointment processes.

**“Who you know, who is friends with who. It’s very unprofessional in my opinion.”**  
*(Special Sergeant)*

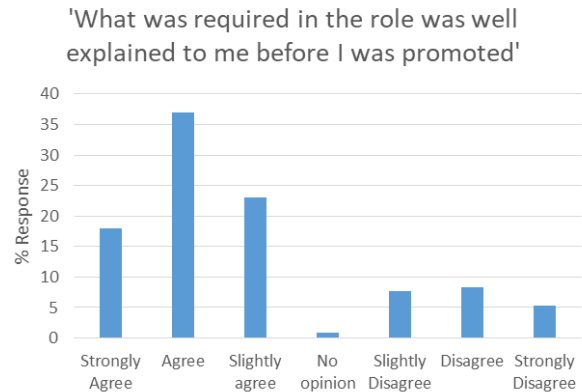
In many more force settings, there are reflections that whilst processes have improved, there has been a history of appointments that have been less professionally managed.

**“It’s a lot more professional now but in the past it was almost like, you know, who wants the job now kind of thing.”**  
*(Special Chief Inspector)*

A key challenge – again not by any means in all force contexts, but certainly in a number – is a failure to effectively induct and communicate new supervisors as to the nature and expectations of their promoted role.

**“Sometimes it feels like it’s, hey you’re promoted now, good luck. You’re a Sergeant now, you’re an Inspector now, I’m not gonna tell you what that’s about but sure you’ll work it out quick enough.”**  
*(Special Inspector)*

Statistically, the national survey suggests most supervisors feel that their role was well explained to them before being promoted. However, almost one in five promoted Specials disagree that this was the case.



## Management and support in the role

The picture seems highly variable as to the support available to Specials supervisors. At best, there appear to be models of structured induction, managed probationary period with competency sign off, systematic appraisal, and clear specification for competencies. At the other end of the spectrum, none of those aspects are in place.

## Development of leaders

In respect of training and development for Specials leaders, several senior Specials felt that the key question was more one of recognising and building on existing skills and experience.

**“For many of our leaders, it isn’t about developing new skills and experience, we already bring all that. It is about recognition, and making good use, of the enormous skill sets we bring into policing.”**  
*(Special Chief Inspector)*

For some, there is recognition that capturing and understanding skills is challenging in itself, as well as seeing cultural barriers to doing so in policing, particularly where such skills have been

# Perspectives of Special supervisors

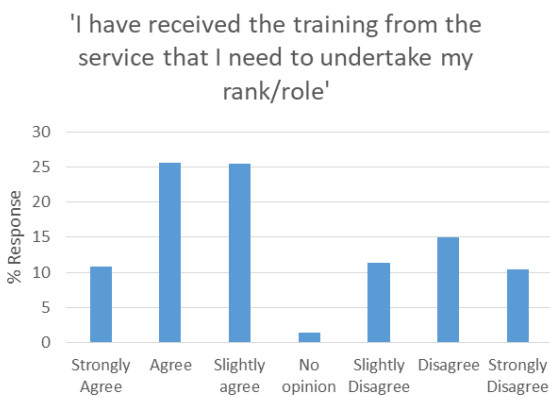
gained and accredited outside of the police force.

**“We’re not good enough at that. And we’re also not good enough at recognising day job skills. But it’s a difficult area to cover because it’s such a wide ranging set of skills. As well as it not being in the police culture, policing doesn’t do skills that have not been grown and signed off within the force.” (Special Chief Officer)**

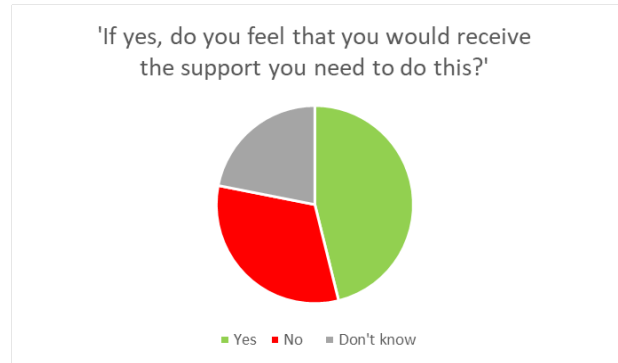
For some, there is a frustration that they feel policing always looks towards the Specials in terms of perceived deficits and inferiority to regulars; whereas, in their view, promoted Specials often have supervisory and leadership skills and experience far beyond their regular supervisory colleagues.

**“The gulf in class between my Special Sergeants and their regular Sergeant counterparts, honestly, enormous. Most of my [Special] Sergeants have years of experience of managing people. Many of the regs supervision are two years in and have no people management experience or life experience at all” (Special Chief Inspector)**

Having said that, many Specials perceive deficits in the training and development provided by forces to Specials leaders.



Whilst a majority of Specials leaders feel they have received from their force the training they need, slightly over a third do not. This would appear to represent a significant strategic gap in training and development provision. One in ten promoted Specials ‘strongly disagree’ that they have received the training that they need to undertake their role.



This strategic gap in training and development support is echoed in the qualitative research interviews with Specials leaders.

**“So the current training [for Special Constabulary leaders] is minimal. The first line Supervisor training is pants in [their force] certainly. In some Forces it is better. A very uneven picture.” (Special Chief Officer)**

## Ambition for future promotion

A majority of Specials are either unsure, or say that they do not wish to seek further promotion. There are many reasons why Specials may not wish to seek further promotion, many of which are neither negative or indicative of a problem for Special Constabularies. Nevertheless, such figures for aspirations of further promotion do present some strategic challenges to achieving effective succession of future senior leaders.

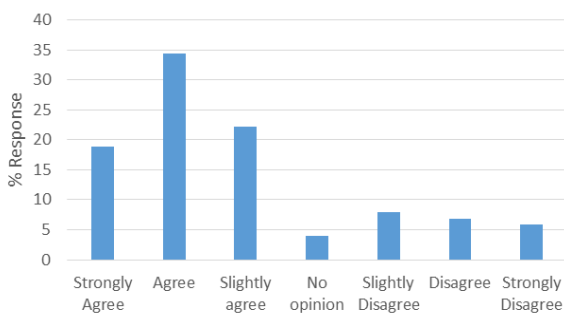
# Perspectives of Special supervisors

'Are you interested in moving up to the next rank within the Special Constabulary?'



A slight majority of promoted Specials interested in further promotion feel either unsure or negative about receiving support for their future aspirations of being promoted. Whilst this should not be exaggerated as a problem, and half of Specials do feel they would be supported, it points to a potential strategic gap in support for leadership pathways and careers in the Special Constabulary.

'I find generally that Regular officers are supportive of me in my current role'



## Relationships with Regular officers and supervisors

The responses to the national survey suggest that most Special leaders feel regular officers are supportive of them in their role; albeit one in five Special leaders disagree.

Best practice reflects:

- Clarity of role for regular supervision and Specials supervision, written down, understood and agreed;
- Culture amongst regular officers and regular supervisors which is supportive and appreciative of Specials supervisors;
- Opportunities for regular and Special supervision to work together, e.g. on operations or projects;
- Integrated leadership teams, enabling and encouraging of Special leaders contribution;
- Empowerment of Specials leaders to lead on aspects of force policy or practice, at all levels in the organisation;
- Opportunities to train together;
- Opportunities for coaching and mentoring (in both directions, so regular supervisors coaching/mentoring, and vice versa).

At the other end of the spectrum, poor practice tends to reflect:

- Cultures which do not engage with Specials leaders more broadly within management teams;
- Regular cultures which emphasise that Special Constabulary leaders carry no formal authority, formal rank, status or significance in the wider leadership of the force;
- Lack of clarity over roles;
- A tendency for Special and regular supervision to sit separately, lack communication, and criticise one another for gaps in the overall supervisory model for Specials.

# Perspectives of Special supervisors

Regular leaders have a strong role to play in 'setting the tone' for how relationships between regular and Specials leaders play out.

The style of engagement of Specials leaders can also be a critical factor in the success of relationships.

## The demanding nature of supervisory roles and time pressures

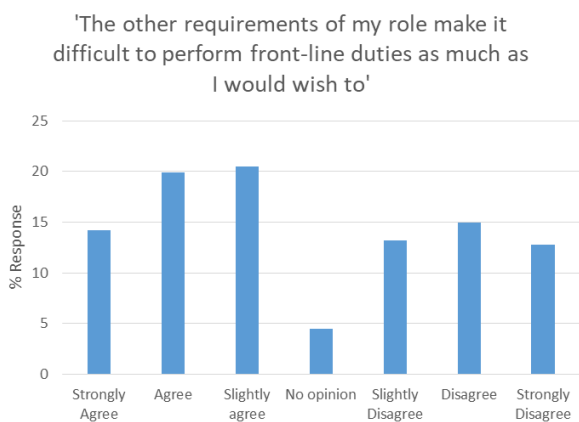
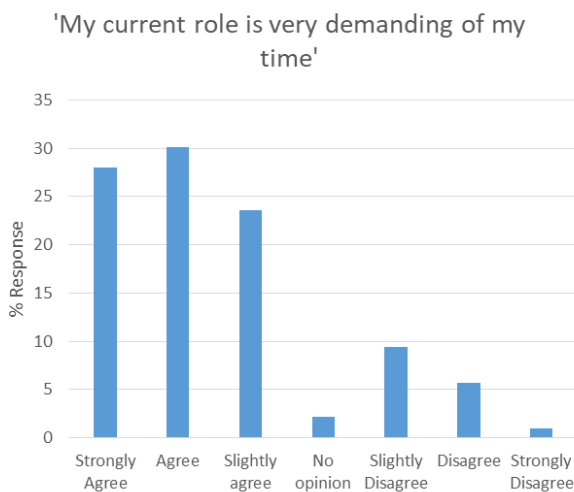
A major challenge for promoted Specials is the time demand of the role.

Over a quarter of Specials leaders 'strongly agree' that their current role is very demanding of their time.

**"I know Inspectors who have younger children and there's a hell of a lot for them to do, I know they send emails late into the night because that's the only free moment, that's when they've dealt with the kids." (Special Sergeant)**

**"There are two choices. This is your life and it dominates over everything else in your life. Or you haven't got time to do it. In my opinion, that's down to poor role design, an absence of clear expectations, no supervision. No experience of managing volunteers well for the force. It's a real shame, because for most people in the end they can't put in everything of themselves forever, and they burn out, they move on, and we lose some incredible people." (Special Inspector)**

Perhaps reinforcing one of the barriers (identified earlier) to attraction into leadership roles, a majority of Specials leaders say that the other requirements of their role make it difficult for them to perform front-line duties as much as they would like to.

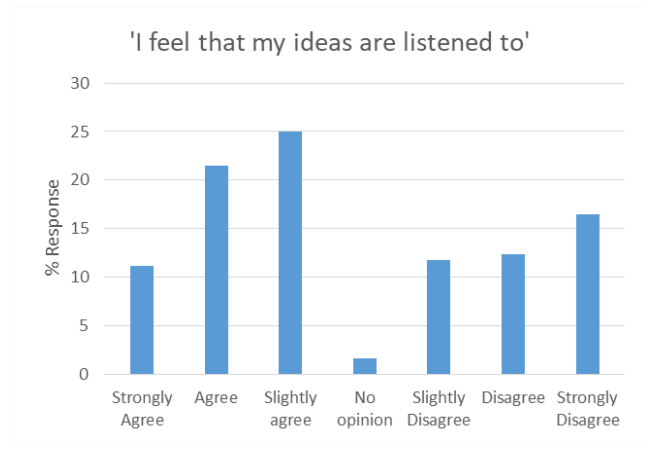


# Perspectives of Special supervisors

## Feelings of limited 'voice' and influence

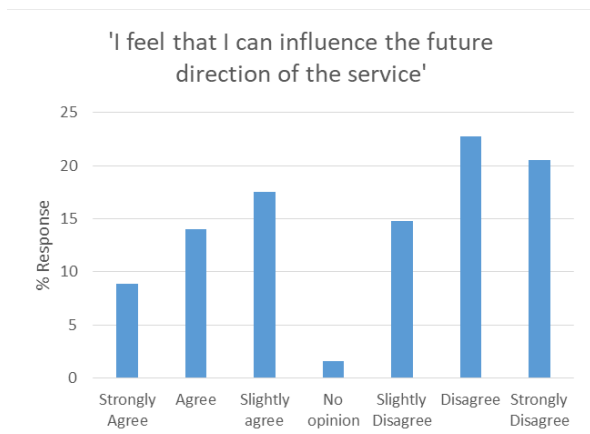
Given their positions in leadership roles within the Special Constabulary, it is perhaps a surprising finding of the national survey that almost half of Specials leaders do not feel that they can influence the future of the Special Constabulary. One in seven 'strongly disagrees' that they can influence.

Linking to some degree with those two findings, well over a third of Special leaders disagree that their ideas are listened to. Taken collectively, this suggests that Specials leaders feel that they have limited 'voice' and influence; that they are in a leadership role, but that their leadership is not 'real' in the sense of being able to lead or shape change – not only within the wider service, but also within the Special Constabulary itself.



Perhaps less surprising, but still strategically challenging, a majority of Specials leaders do not feel that they can influence the future direction of the service.

For some Special leaders, this picture goes beyond a feeling of not being listened to, towards a broader and deeper culture of being actively resisted in terms of exercising a leadership role.



**“Ended up starting my own Anti-Social Behaviour unit, way before anti-social behaviour was something on the agenda for government. Had fantastic successes. Got stopped because we were too successful.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“I call these people ‘dementors’. If you watch Harry Potter there is this black entity called a dementor and it sucks all the life blood and energy out of you. By standing near them... I met quite a few of those people. In fact, every police force has them. They sometimes hide in the shadows but you know when you are near one because you feel that you are hated**

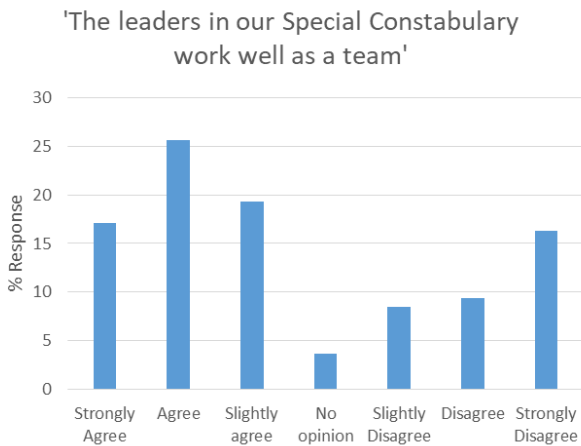


# Perspectives of Special supervisors

as a Special or volunteer.” (*Special Chief Officer*)

## Perceptions of the dynamics of the Special Constabulary leadership team

Looking across the national survey responses, a majority of Specials leaders agree that their leadership team works well together. However, a third of Specials leaders do not; and a concerning one-sixth of Special leaders ‘strongly disagree’ that they are in a team which works well together.



Where Special leaders are not felt to work well as a team, often there is a perceived ‘gap’ or ‘distance’ between more senior ranked Specials, and those in front-line supervisory roles. Other characteristics of such teams include a lack of opportunities to meet, poorly managed meetings, and a lack of engagement and opportunities to contribute and to shape strategy and direction. Such contexts also often have dynamics relating to personalities, in particular a perception that individuals at senior level are ‘blockers’ to change.

Where teams are more successful, cohesive and positive, they are characterised by:

- Opportunities to engage and contribute at all ranks across the team;
- Linked to that, plenty of opportunities to lead, operationally, developmentally, and strategically, with a delegated and enabling style of leadership;
- Effective meeting structures, coupled with effective communications more broadly;
- Senior Special leaders who are interested in, and in touch with, the front-line.

Team dynamics present a particular challenge at times in respect of diversity and difference. The majority of Specials leadership teams are primarily, and in some cases exclusively at senior level, male and white.

# **Leadership models and structures**

# Leadership models and structures

## Introduction

Ranks and leadership roles held by volunteer Specials within Special Constabularies have a long history. A recent survey of police forces identified that there were 1,668 Specials at the rank of Special Sergeant or above, meaning that 14.7% of Specials are in a promoted rank. That proportion is up from an estimated 12.0% (estimated from incomplete data, which was missing seven forces) in 2016.

This chapter summarises current models and structures for rank arrangements in all 44 (including BTP) Special Constabularies across England and Wales. The chapter then discusses the function of ranks, engages with current debates about 'equivalency' with regular ranks, discusses the effectiveness of the implementation and management of rank arrangements, and identifies challenges in respect of diversity and gender.

Overall, as set out across this chapter, what is striking about the current picture of rank arrangements in the Special Constabulary is:

- The range and variability of different rank models;
- Lack of national guidance and steer, coupled with a lack of consensus about the future direction that rank arrangements should take;
- Serious challenges in respect of problems in effectively managing and executing rank arrangements, and in terms of the diversity of those in promoted roles.

## Special Constabulary rank structures across forces

42 of the 44 Special Constabularies across England and Wales currently have rank arrangements, the exceptions being Sussex and Northumbria. Of those, 41 use rank titles consistent with those used in the regular service (Special Sergeant, Special Inspector, etc.), the exception being West Yorkshire which maintains a 'Section Officer' and 'Senior Section Officer' nomenclature.

The numbers at each rank are summarised in the table below.

Rank	Number	% of all Specials
S/Constable	9,674	85.3
S/Sergeant	1,026	9.0
S/Inspector	455	4.0
S/Chief Inspector	101	0.9
S/Supt	40	0.4
S/Chief Supt	1	0.0
Asst. or Deputy Chief	14	0.1
Special Chief Officer	31	0.3

In terms of supervisory ratios, in the above figures there is one S/Sergeant for every 9.4 S/Constable ranked officers. There is one S/Inspector for every 2.3 S/Sergeant. There are 86 Specials ranked at S/Superintendent or above, amounting to 0.8% of all Specials.

Caution should be taken in comparing such ratios, and the related sense of 'spans of control', between the regular service and Specials. For a host of reasons, the comparison is of two quite different contexts. Nevertheless, for interest and some context, comparative figures are summarised in the table below.

# Leadership models and structures

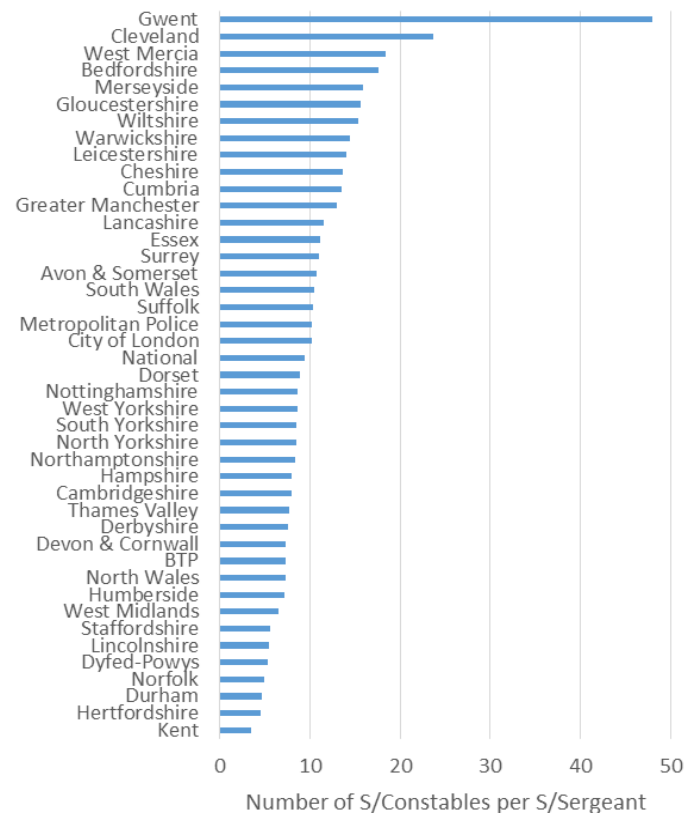
	Regulars	Specials
Number of Constables per Sergeant	5.2	9.4
Number of Sergeants per Inspector	3.3	2.3
Percentage in promoted role	22.1%	14.7%
Percentage at rank of Superintendent or above	1.1%	0.8%

There is significant variation in the models and scales of rank structures across Special Constabularies. The proportion of Specials promoted, across the 42 forces with rank arrangements, varies from 7.5% to 32.5%. That proportion of promoted Specials is shown for the 42 Special Constabularies with rank structures in the graph below. It reflects that the national average of 14.8% is of limited use in

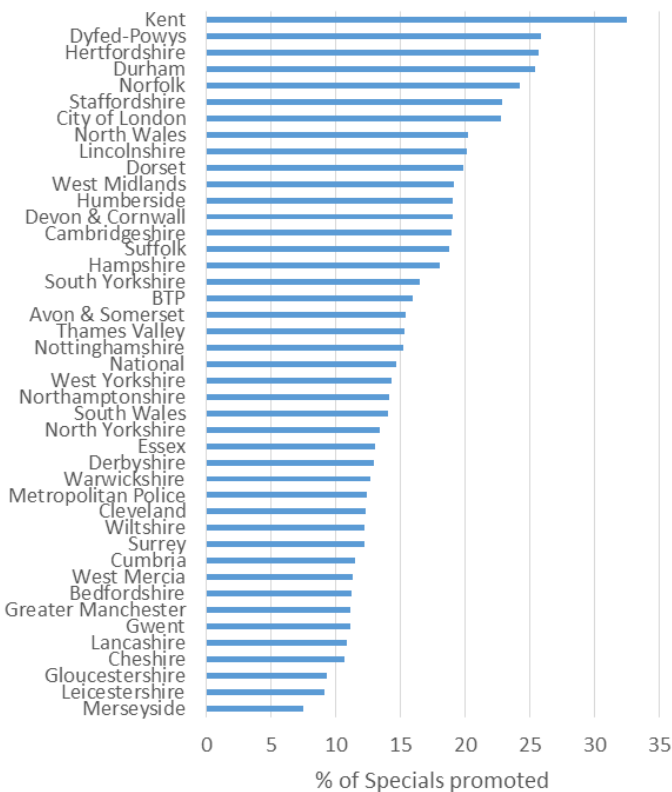
summarising the national picture, given the sheer scale of variation in individual forces.

As with the numbers of promoted Specials, the ratio of Special Sergeant to Special Constable varies very widely across different police forces.

Number of Special Constables per Special Sergeant



Proportion of Special Constables with promoted rank



A sizeable number of police forces have been undertaking reviews or other similar exercises to consider their current arrangements in respect of Special Constabulary ranks. There have been more than ten such reviews in forces over the past year. However, there has been little coordination or communication across these processes. As such, the reviewing of models in individual forces is unlikely to drive

# Leadership models and structures

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much, if any, convergence across the national picture.

The outcomes of these reviews have taken local arrangements in widely differing directions, some establishing volunteer Special Chief Officers or adding ranks, others removing such roles and ranks. Many reviews seem to be led by a regular officer or by police staff and very few by Specials leaders themselves. Often the review lead has had little direct prior experience of the Special Constabulary. Often such reviews appear to have had little cognisance of similar processes, even where they have been recently completed in neighbouring forces. In many cases, reviews appear to have been prompted by issues and concerns relating to personalities, style and relationships within existing senior Specials teams. Some restructures have arguably been utilised to remove senior ranked individual Specials who were seen as problematic, as much as they were concerned with a more strategic, reasoned or broader development of a leadership model or strategy.

Despite this sizeable scale of investment in recent review work, or (as reflected above) in part because of it, the 42 police forces which have rank arrangements in their Special Constabularies display a very wide variety of different models. One aspect of variation is in terms of the number of different ranks. In summary, the national picture currently looks as follows:

- 31 Special Constabularies have a rank structure which includes having a volunteer Special Chief Officer role;
- Of those 31, 17 forces have Specials at most ranks, including at least some

officers in S/Superintendent or Assistant Chief roles;

- Of those 31, 12 forces have ranks up to S/Chief Inspector, and then a Chief Officer role;
- For the remainder of the 31: 2 forces, have Specials up to the rank of Inspector and then a Special Chief Officer role;
- 4 forces only have ranks up to Inspector;
- 2 forces only have ranks up to Chief Inspector;
- 3 forces have ranks up to S/Superintendent, but do not have a Special Chief Officer role. In two of these forces (Hampshire and Wiltshire), there is a S/Superintendent role which in effect functions similarly to the Special Chief Officer role;
- 1 force has a spread of ranks up to Assistant Chief level, but there is a regular Superintendent as head of the Special Constabulary;
- 1 force has a spread of ranks up to Assistant Chief level, and a vacancy for Chief Officer.

Whilst there has, as reflected above, been little coherence in recent developments in leadership rank arrangements and structures, it is possible to identify three broad patterns across recent changes:

- A reduction in volunteer Special Chief Officer roles, typically replaced by a regular officer fulfilling a 'head of' Special Constabulary responsibility;
- An increase in the number of forces who have thinned or removed their more senior ranked Specials (e.g. reducing or eliminating roles above S/Chief

# Leadership models and structures

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- Inspector, and in some cases above S/Inspector);
- Linked to the above two trends, a tendency for strategy and senior leadership responsibilities to be exercised increasingly by police staff or by regulars, rather than by Specials;
- A shift in several forces of insignia towards a consistency with regular ranks.
- Special ranks are not 'real', and that whatever the rank of a Special, it is a title without substance and 'legally' they remain at constable rank.

Overall, a huge degree of variation across forces can be seen. It is no exaggeration to say that every Special Constabulary rank arrangement is different in some way to every other force.

Equivalent arrangements in the regular service, whilst allowing some local discretion in design, are in effect consistently structured, are regulated nationally, and have been for many years. The lack of systematic national consideration and focus over many years is evident, and is reflected in the significant investments made at the local level to review and reform models and rank structures to improve Specials leadership at force level.

## Ambiguity of seniority and authority

One core contested aspect in relation to Special Constabulary leaders concerns the seniority and authority of Specials ranks. There are elements of a quite pervasive culture in policing that support one or more of the following statements as being true:

- All regulars 'outrank' all Specials, regardless of the rank of the Special Constable;
- Specials are not able to command regulars;

Such views are not universal, but they appear widely shared. In producing this report no legal view has been sought as to the legal substance or veracity (or otherwise), in terms of current police regulations and legislation, of any of these claims. In terms of debates on the issue, both those supporting and those discounting such positions claim that there is a legal basis in support of their opinions.

Clearly a widespread cultural positioning across policing that somehow Specials ranks are not 'real', are 'subordinate' and carry no authority - whatever legal basis or otherwise there may be for such views - risks being fundamentally diminishing and undermining. It also appears to be quite old-fashioned, instinctively devaluing volunteers and contrasting unfavourably with other sectors. For example, in military reserve contexts, where there are very much more progressive views towards an equivalency of status of volunteers of rank.

Such a culture towards Special ranks, whilst typically having its origins in questions of formal command, also casts a larger shadow across wider aspects of authority, seniority and scope of responsibility of volunteer Specials leaders.

This perhaps is most visible in respect of more senior roles. Questions of seniority, authority and scope in modern policing organisations - where there is a broad spectrum of ranked regulars, senior police staff positions, and the like, all working together - are much more complex and nuanced than simply questions of

# Leadership models and structures

formal rank and line of command. A senior police staff member, perhaps in a chief officer role, clearly carries direct authority and leadership across others in the organisations, with a commensurate senior organisational status, despite no sense of formal command chain through rank. There is an argument that the ambiguity over the status, and 'reality', of Special leader role and authority, whilst originating in formal questions of 'rank' and command, ultimately shows more broadly through into a wider questioning of position and authority within the organisation more generally. Questioning whether Specials *really* lead areas they have responsibility for.

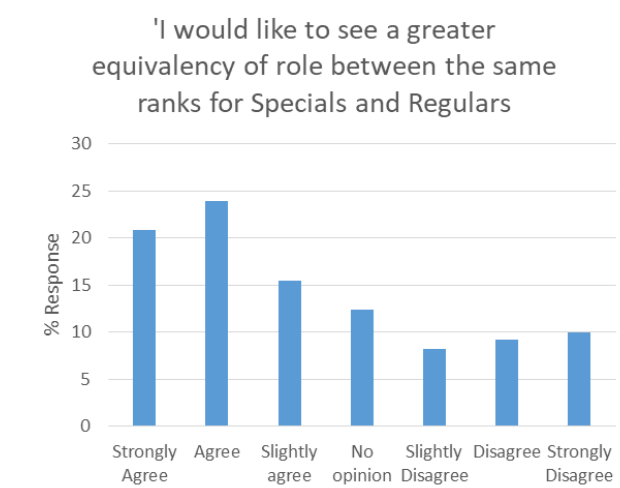
The review processes of rank and leadership structures discussed in the section above is an interesting case in point, to consider the positionality of senior Specials leaders. Despite the number of such reviews across forces, it is difficult to point to one which was either commissioned by or led by the senior Specials team, rather than by regular officers or police staff. Several of those recent reviews have decided to abolish senior Specials ranks, and to shift those roles and responsibilities to police staff or regular officers.

Such issues of culture - power imbalance, inferior status and lesser authority - seem to sit at the core of future challenges about Specials leadership. There are obvious cultural challenges in negotiating the role and status of part-time, volunteer leaders, who are, in cultural terms, 'outsiders' within wider leadership models in policing. Such issues seem deeply cultural and yet go largely both unnoticed and unchallenged. The picture varies widely across forces, and there are some examples to the contrary, but in many forces a reality of senior Specials teams exercising the

true senior leadership of the Special Constabulary still feels a long way off.

## Equivalency with regular ranks

There appears to be a consensus about wishing to see some convergence of how regular and Special ranks operate. There are a range of opinions in terms of how far such convergence evolves towards a full equivalency or interoperability of roles, i.e. a S/Sergeant and regular Sergeant, S/Inspector and regular Inspector, etc., in effect being trained and operating in an interchangeable manner.



As reflected in the graph above, a majority of Specials would like to see some movement towards 'a greater equivalency' of ranks; albeit a quarter also disagree.

For some Special leaders, the ultimate destination for the development of Specials ranks would be to emulate completely, or at least in all practical ways, the ranks of regulars.

**“Like the military, a rank is a rank, the same training, qualification, expectation, status.” (Special Chief Officer)**

# Leadership models and structures

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For others, the idea of Special ranks developing to become inter-operable and equivalent in terms of training and capability is ‘a pipedream’, at least for a large majority of Special supervisors who would not have the time to gain and maintain such qualifications, skills and experience.

**“I can’t see a time when most Specials will be able to do enough hours in the week to have the space to build the experience and do the preparation and revision to do a sergeant exam and then beyond that, to keep current and effective and all the ongoing build of experience to do an equivalent job.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Such views typically see gaining that sense of full operational rank equivalency as being something a smaller proportion of Specials with the time and dedication to do so may wish to pursue, and they should not be precluded from doing so, but also apply a pragmatism that achieving a full sense of operational equivalency across all Specials is not feasible.

**“In the City of London they’re doing quite a lot of training for Sergeants, Inspectors where they make them take the OSPRE exams for Regulars. I think that’s a great thing to do. I think there’s a bunch of Specials that would want to do this. But it is also limited to people that have got time to do it. So Special Constables who don’t have time to do that training would then automatically be excluded from becoming a Sergeant Inspector when actually they could be good leaders.” (Special Chief Officer)**

However, whilst such views caution against seeking a ‘full equivalency’, most Special leaders want to see clearer standards, and within that to mirror substantial elements of regular rank profiles.

**“I can see a time when we have a clearer standard. There is a process, it sets a bar. It is probably different to regs, to OSPRE, but some of it can and should be the same.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Such thinking, even if it does stop short of the more purist position of full equivalency, would still support seeking to build a substantial proportion of operational qualification and operating into Specials ranks across from their regular rank counterparts.

**“Everything being exactly the same is a pipedream. What about 70%, 80%? Even 50% or 60%. To create an operational substance, gravity, capability to the role. Without operational role and that front-line purpose and credibility our ranks shrink to being welfare, attendance, liaison, I think they should be more than that, they should be operationally capable, or we shouldn’t have them at all, or at least shouldn’t call them ranks, as that implies something about an operational chain of command.” (Special Chief Officer)**

There were views expressed that it is important not just to frame Special leaders in terms of a progression towards equivalency with their regular counterparts, but also to recognise those elements of the role which are distinct. In particular supporting and managing volunteers, and (for more senior ranks) running a volunteer organisation. These elements call for different role descriptions and skills sets to regular counterpart ranks.

Notwithstanding these future views about role equivalency and operational capability, there are many within the Special Constabulary who have concerns with the current situation. In basic terms, this is seen by them as the titling regular and Specials ranks the same, despite those ranks functioning differently, being differently capable, and having a very different



# Leadership models and structures

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status. That is variously viewed as a 'muddle' and as a 'risk'.

**"I think calling our people the same thing when they're obviously not the same thing just isn't good. No idea why we do that. I preferred the distinct language of Section Officers." (Special Constable)**

**"I think many Regulars hate seeing someone trump around their station pretending to be a Chief Inspector or whatever, when they're not. I feel it's like an insult to the Regular supervision, who've passed exams, have specific powers, carry massive operational responsibilities their Specials equivalents just don't. The ranks to me are important but they are not equivalent in that way to the regs. Pretending they are does us no favours." (Special Constable)**

**"I don't think it helps having two different types of Inspector, and all that. Our leaders should be called something different. Still show they're senior, but not that they're Superintendent whatever. I heard the story of a senior Special who turned up at an incident, and some there thought he'd be taking over command of it. There are risks in the model of ranks we currently have, some real confusion for everybody." (Special Constable)**

## Replacing Special supervisors with regular supervision

Most Specials support maintaining Specials ranks. However, many would like to see regular supervision playing a 'bigger role'. Those Specials typically frame this argument in terms of achieving better integration into regular teams. It appears such views are more prevalent amongst newer in service, regular-pathway Specials, who broadly tend to identify more with the regular service and less with the Special Constabulary.

**"Do away with the hierarchy that's for the Specials and integrate them into the Regular workforce." (Special Constable)**

**"I certainly think we could make more use of Regular Sergeants to supervise Specials and to sort of allocate tutors, call them in for duties, with the assistance of a Regular, of a Special Sergeant, the two types of Sergeant could work together, I think, a lot more." (Special Constable)**

**"I'm just not sure that the senior management for the Specials is integrating as well as they should with the Regulars. I think if the Specials were managed by the Regulars, Inspectors and so on, there would be a lot more integration, there would be much more use made of them." (Special Constable)**

Having said that, some are sceptical of moves towards a greater regular role in supervision, feeling that regulars tend to be very busy, have a large number of competing demands, bring variable levels of interest and support towards Specials, and bring varying levels of skill and understanding in respect of volunteers.

**I know some places have done away with it, and it's been a disaster." (Special Constable)**

**"I think the [Specials] rank structure provides so much, but that isn't always seen by everyone. We'd quickly miss it if it wasn't there. It's low visibility but high importance and impact, in my opinion." (Special Constable)**

**"Some will say just do away with it, but Specials supervisors do so much to fix problems, organise things, support people, welfare." (Special Constable)**

# Leadership models and structures

## Design and execution of rank structures

There appears to be a mixed picture of the effectiveness of design and delivery of Specials rank arrangements. In some forces, substantial progress has been made to develop properly structured, and rigorously managed approaches. In others, it is clear that gaps in basic design and management remain.

For some leaders in the Special Constabulary, getting these 'basics' right within their force was the most important aspect that needed addressing.

**“That absence of basic process, it’s lamentable. People get promoted, not always the right people, but the main thing is then they’re not supported, they’re not trained, they’re not even told what is expected of them. If they’re failing in the role, they’re typically not told that either.”** *(Special Chief Inspector)*

**“I was promoted to sergeant, absolutely no guidance or support or anything. If there was anything on paper about the role, I never saw it. To this day I have no idea, to answer your question, if any of our roles, including my current one, have a role description.”** *(Special Inspector)*

Such perceived gaps in design, standards, structure and process included a range of elements spanning recruitment, induction, supervision, performance and training. Particularly foregrounded by many Specials leaders were perceptions that training represented a particular gap.

**“We want to aspire to better support Specials leaders... We don’t give any of our supervisors, we don’t give them any training at all as a supervisor. They get promoted, they’re expected to go on and**

**do something, and there is no training whatsoever. If you said to lots of them what’s a major incident, they wouldn’t know, or if you asked what would you do in these circumstances. We don’t put in place any of that but some of it can and should be.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

Alongside training, recruitment was the other key area that Specials leaders felt was neglected in terms of process and achieving the desired robust, structured approach. In some cases, there was the right process in place, but challenges to achieving the process being seen as 'real', or for it to be 'taken seriously'.

**“A new posting of Special Sergeant would have to be advertised. Usually there would be an interview. I don’t know if the interviews have got any better, but I can remember being on a panel and the regular senior officer [also on the panel] said, and said to me who was there as a Special myself, ‘we don’t need to worry about this one, we can just get through it notionally, they’re only a Special, we just need to write the answers in but she’ll pass’, and I thought well that’s what we’re accepting, and I didn’t feel in a position to be able to change that.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

One specific challenge to achieving effective and robust processes across rank arrangements was the challenge of attracting Specials to take on promoted roles. This absence of willing volunteers for roles was seen as either leading to the appointment of less suitable or experienced individuals, or to the creation of 'temporary' and 'acting' arrangements over prolonged periods of time.

**“Quite often we hear Sergeants, well nobody told me that was my job. Well they need to be made clear before they take the job on, what the job is. But it’s finding suitable, interested people in the first place and there aren’t that many**

# Leadership models and structures

around at the moment.” (*Special Inspector*)

“We put stop gaps in all the time. Until we can grow somebody who wants that responsibility, we have a gap. We either fill that gap, perhaps not with quite the right person or we live with having a gap. Perhaps wrongly we often do the former, I think.” (*Special Chief Officer*)

In some cases and contexts, there were views that the usage of ‘temporary’ arrangements was in part a mechanism for circumventing a more robust and transparent recruitment process.

“Jobs for the boys. Jobs for their mates. There was one went from sergeant to temporary chief inspector in a year, he played football with the superintendent.” (*Special Inspector*)

“Jobs for mates. They get round the process by making everything acting, then after a while it quietly becomes full. Or if someone has acted for three years they’re a shoe-in anyway.” (*Special Inspector*)

Having identified such issues, it should also be reflected that many Specials felt that there had been a lot of progress from their perspectives of moving on from poor past processes and behaviours.

“It’s not like the bad old days. Now every post is advertised, there is a board, there’s a process. Involving senior regs and HR as well as our leaders. It’s much better than it was.” (*Special Inspector*)

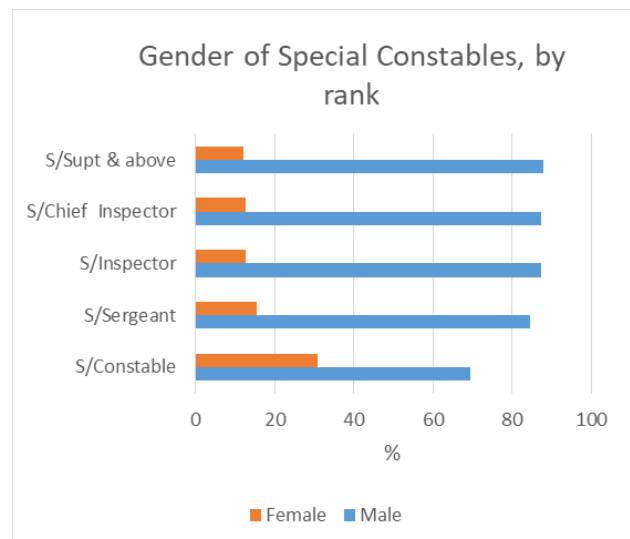
## Gender and leadership

Data about demographics across Special Constables is difficult to obtain from forces, due to poor data collection processes, unreliable datasets (many are out of date) and resource limitations to export and clean datasets for

sharing. Data relating to gender has been collected to inform this report, however data relating to ethnicity was not available at this time. This will be a priority for further analytical work.

Data across the Special Constabulary reflects that female Specials are significantly under-represented in promoted ranks. The gender balance at different ranks, across all Special Constabularies in England and Wales, is summarised in the table and graph below.

% for each rank	Male	Female
S/Constable	69.3	30.7
S/Sergeant	84.5	15.5
S/Inspector	87.3	12.7
S/Chief Inspector	87.4	12.6
S/Supt & above	88.0	12.0



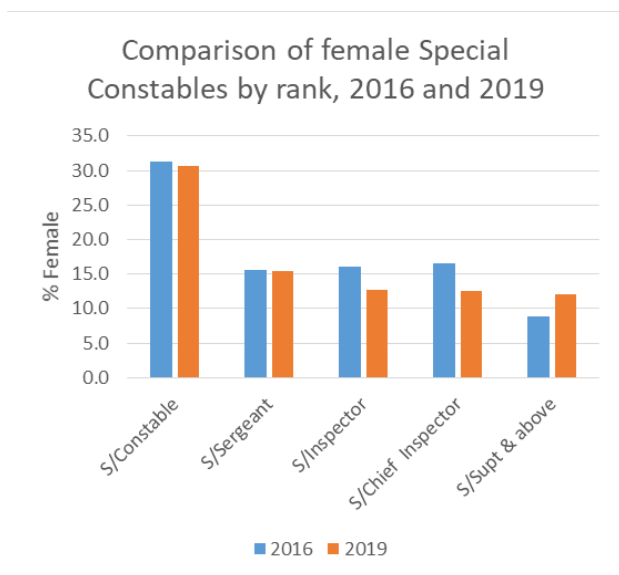
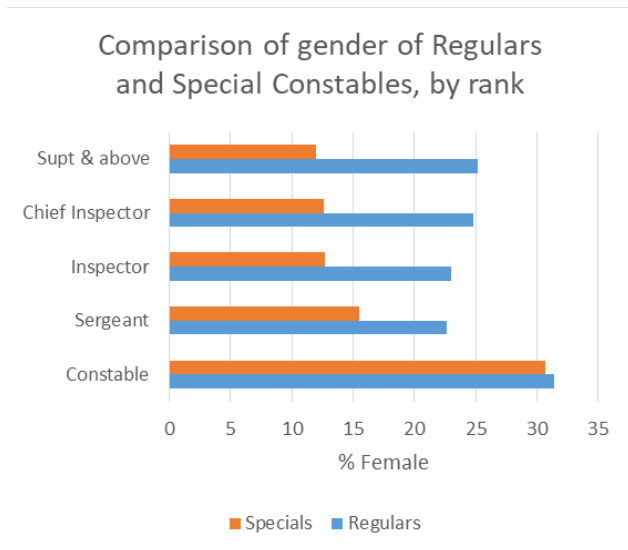
Looking at trends in female representation in promoted ranks, the pattern of change over the past three years presents a mixed picture. There has been some increase in the proportion of females (albeit from a very low base) in the highest ranks of S/Superintendent and above. The proportion of female S/Sergeants has

# Leadership models and structures

remained the same, and proportions of female S/Inspectors and S/Chief Inspectors have both fallen.

% Female by rank	2016	2019
S/Constable	31.3	30.7
S/Sergeant	15.6	15.5
S/Inspector	16.1	12.7
S/Chief Inspector	16.6	12.6
S/Supt & above	8.8	12.0

Female representation at rank is greater for regulars than it is in the Special Constabulary.



% Female by rank	Regulars	Specials
Constable	31.4	30.7
Sergeant	22.6	15.5
Inspector	23.0	12.7
Chief Inspector	24.8	12.6
Supt & above	25.2	12.0

Alongside this statistical picture, many Special leaders recognise the importance and the scale of challenge in achieving a more equitable engagement of female Specials within leadership teams.

**“Nearly half of our Special Constables are female. Nearly all our sergeants and inspectors are male. Is that a problem? You bet it is. Look at who leaves the service most, it’s our female officers.”**  
*(Special Inspector)*

For some female Specials who are in promoted ranks, there was a sense of continuing challenges, including operating with some elements of a masculine culture and the isolating effect of ‘being the only woman in the room’.

**“I look up that leadership, right up to the top, it’s men... do I have it, that fight in me, one woman in that room of men?... yes, there’s still banter, yes, 21<sup>st</sup> century and section meetings I make coffees, yes I have been asked out by a senior Special, two of them as it happens”**  
*(Special Sergeant)*

**“Do I think it’s a sexist organisation [the Special Constabulary]? Yes, sometimes I think it is.”**  
*(Special Sergeant)*

Female leaders in the Specials generally talked of seeking a balance. On the one hand, of not wanting to be viewed in terms of their gender. On the other, of feeling that there are dimensions of what females typically bring to

# Leadership models and structures

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leadership environments that are distinctive to females and add value.

**“I don’t think of gender very often. I can see when people look at me differently, they might expect some different things from me. But I’ve never looked at it that way. I’m a female superintendent, get over it.” (Special Superintendent)**

**“There’s differences. Not getting into stereotypes, but women do bring different skills, different ways of thinking sometimes to men.” (Special Inspector)**

A number of Specials leaders reflect the particular challenge of shifting the position in respect of gender engagement at rank. They highlight this as being a difficult issue for predominantly male leadership teams to make progress on, and also the sense of an absence of a ‘pipeline’ of female Specials who might evolve and progress in time to occupy more senior and strategic leadership roles in the future.

**“Is there a connection made between being a man and being a leader? I think that’s true across the whole of everything, not just Specials. It is difficult when every leader is a man, to effect that change. If we’re not careful, there aren’t women coming through [the ranks]. If there’s no, or hardly any, of us as sergeants and inspectors now, it’s not gonna magically happen we have a female chief officer in five years, is it?” (Special Inspector)**

Some leaders challenge what they see as a gradual, evolutionary progression of the issue of female engagement in Specials leadership and look towards something more pro-active and perhaps more revolutionary, to create the required step-change from the current position.

**“I do look across the men leading the Special Constabulary, and I obviously include myself within this, within that, and**

**I do ask myself, how equipped we, all us men of [a] certain age, are going to be to change it. It needs mixing up, the parallel I look for is in political parties, with quotas of MPs, female only shortlists. Not that long ago all legislatures around the world were men, now some are majority female, in most western countries it has begun to look different. It can change, but I’m not sure it ever can or will change gradually, it needs that jolt of lightning through it, like what those political parties have done, or we’re going to still be having this conversation, about us all being men, in ten or twenty or more years’ time. I look down into my rank structure, and how does it look at present, the succession, my successor, and it’s all men.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For some at senior level, there was an ambition that the Special Constabulary could ‘forge the path’ and ‘lead the way’ in terms of diversity and gender, but only if it were able to move beyond current challenges and establish a stronger and more progressive position. Once again, the challenge is seen to be the absence of diversity of current leaders, in terms of being a barrier to achieving change in the future.

Overall, there is recognition of the need for change in the gender profile of the Special Constabulary, but also some realism that such change has not been achieved over many years now, and that to achieve it will require something different to what has been tried before.

# **Special Chief Officers**

# Special Chief Officers

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## Introduction

This chapter of the report focuses on the senior, strategic leadership of the Special Constabulary, particularly the role of Special Chief Officer. A majority of police forces across the country have a Special Chief Officer role, which is the most senior ranked Special in the force with a lead, strategic role in respect of the Special Constabulary. There is a very wide variation in role design and in how Special Chief Officers operate in different force contexts.

Presently, 31 of the 44 Special Constabularies have a Special Chief Officer role. Of the 13 that do not have a Special Chief Officer:

- one force has a vacancy in role for Chief Officer;
- two forces have Special Superintendent ranked leadership roles, which largely reflect the role of Special Constabulary Chief Officer;
- one force, Sussex, has a Special Constable as Head of the Special Constabulary but this is not a formally ranked position (as the force does not presently have ranks in its Special Constabulary);
- the other nine forces have alternative models of senior leadership involving a role other than a volunteer Special Constable leading the Special Constabulary, in most cases a senior ranked regular officer.

There has been a decrease in the number of forces with a Special Chief Officer role over the past 2-3 years, with 36 forces having such a role in 2016.

This chapter of the report primarily draws from one-to-one research interviews conducted with twenty-four Special Chief Officers from forces across England and Wales. What is presented here only represents a brief summary of key themes from those research interviews; the findings of that research project will also be reported in more detail in other products beyond this summary chapter. This research represents the most comprehensive qualitative research study of volunteer Special Constabulary senior leadership ever undertaken.

Inevitably research of this nature will emphasise challenges and areas for development and improvement. It is important to balance that by reflecting also upon the quality, contribution and commitment of those who volunteer such a great deal of their time in such senior and demanding roles.

## Strategic direction and challenge

A majority of the Special Chief Officers interviewed reflected that they saw the current point in time as being a particularly significant and challenging one for the Special Constabulary. In many cases this was framed as a point of 'crisis' for the future of Special Constables, with concerns for the future viability of the model of Special Constables unless there is fundamental strategic repositioning of contribution, role and capability.

**“If this isn’t a crisis for the Special Constabulary, I am at a loss knowing what would constitute one. I could see us not having one [a Special Constabulary] within five, ten years, and you know that might very well be what some of them want.” (Special Chief Officer)**

# Special Chief Officers

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In broad terms, this sense of ‘crisis’ strategically for the Special Constabulary was framed as manifesting in three interconnecting ways:

- A sharp reduction in numbers, and associated hours served and capability (albeit most Special Chiefs were also anxious not to focus unduly on the ‘numbers’ rather than quality and impact);
- Significant perceived problems of efficiency and effectiveness which they saw as eroding the viability of the Specials model; particularly in respect of retention, a lack of consistency of standards and professionalism, and problems of culture, integration and deployment;
- A sense that policing is changing, but that the Special Constabulary is not changing sufficiently to ‘keep up’ and to ‘adapt’, with perceptions of the absence of overarching strategy and direction.

Some Chiefs think a fundamental strategic review is required. This reflected frustrations at what was perceived as the slow pace and limited scale of reform. For some Special Chiefs, current reform efforts were seen to be tactical and tentative at a time when they would like instead to see a more strategic and bold agenda of change.

**It’s important not to waste a good crisis, maybe this is our moment to seize the future, the Phoenix principle, you know, destroy to rebuild. So, maybe not burn it to the ground, but be prepared to dig right back to first base and do some major surgery. All I see at national level is lip service and tinkers, not real change.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

For those who wished to see a review of the Special Constabulary, some framed it as being akin to calls for a ‘Royal Commission’ for policing; as an opportunity for a fundamental, root and branch assessment of the current state of the Special Constabulary, with the opportunity to make bold and fundamental recommendations for change.

**“What we need is the Royal Commission for the Special Constabulary, we need root and branch reform. There is so much to learn from the military, and from how they do this over in policing in the States, from the lifeboats. I don’t think policing is able to think that way, think sufficiently differently, on its own. It needs fresh people from outside, so yes, a Royal Commission, that would bring in those new heads.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

**“So, I think there needs to be a fundamental review, legislatively, as to what our role, our responsibility is in the future.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

A phrase commonly used across interviews was ‘disruptive change’, with a number of Special Chief Officers feeling that this was something that was generally lacking. This was both specifically in respect of the Special Constabulary, but also more broadly across policing. For some Chiefs, they felt that policing as a whole was ‘pedestrian’, ‘bland’, ‘traditional’, ‘vanilla’, at a strategic level, lacking in ability or will to genuinely, radically change operationally or organisationally. One Special Chief talked of seeing the Special Constabulary as a potential ‘weapon of disruptive change’, but felt frustrated that regular officer senior leaders just saw it as a ‘side issue’ and ‘unimportant’. Several of the Special Chiefs saw themselves personally as being a source of ‘disruptive change’, often reflecting thinking,



# Special Chief Officers

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experience and styles of operating they felt they were bringing as outsiders into policing.

**“Policing isn’t good at disruptive change. To be honest I think they see me just as disruptive, well I know they do, perhaps that’s what I am, a thorn in the side. If it doesn’t change radically, I do think that it’s going to die.” (Special Chief Officer)**

This sort of strategic and bold thinking and change was viewed by Special Chiefs as being challenging organisationally and culturally; as being a major step beyond the styles of strategic leadership currently exercised in policing more broadly.

**“We talked about change is changing - that kind of change is, today I think is still a step too far.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Another phrase commonly used was ‘they won’t let you do it’; that the policing organisation did not provide a context in which Special Constable leaders were enabled or encouraged to be bold or innovative, despite the Special Chiefs themselves feeling that this was essential for future growth and development.

**“We try to push the boundaries with things like – PSU was one of the first things I did when I became Chief Officer... ..And straight away a Regular Superintendent who I get on with really well, said to me “You’re off your rocker.” He said, “If you’re going to try and do that you are heading for a fall straight away. Don’t do it. They will never let you do that in this force.”” (Special Chief Officer)**

There was a recognition of the challenge of achieving strategic change from ‘top’ to ‘bottom’ across forces and Special Constabularies. This included a sense of a ‘sticky middle’. The context they painted in interviews was that Special Chiefs sometimes were able to

work effectively at senior level for change, and also that the Special Constabulary was making progress in terms of development and relationships on the front-line, but that there was a body of middle-ranking regular officers who were seen as ‘conservative’, ‘resistant’ and ‘blockers’.

**“You actually need to put what is said into practice and I think, on occasions, it gets lost in translation. Similar to [this Chief Officer’s work context], we at the top end may be very supportive of a collaboration idea or whatever. The only problem is that once it starts going down the chain, it either gets lost in translation or it just plain gets lost. And I think it’s that understanding really that Special Constables can provide real value to the Regular Force. It can provide real specialist value to the Force because a lot of my Officers, same throughout the country, have got very specific skill sets within their profession and I think it needs to be realised from the top to the bottom that we can serve together and add value, instead of people feeling threatened.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For some Special Chiefs, the issue of the strategic future of the Special Constabulary has been neglected. They raised deeper questions of, in effect, whether anyone is exercising national strategic leadership in respect of the Special Constabulary.

**“It seems to me that these truly are such troubling times for the Special Constabulary. The years of neglect, locally, nationally, strategically in Government, by the NPIA and then the College, they are catching up with us all. Policing has been asleep at the wheel. As I see it, the problem is that nobody is running it. In fact, let’s not say asleep at the wheel, the Special Constabulary, nationally, it’s driverless, rudderless in a stormy sea. The Regular Chiefs, NPCC,**

# Special Chief Officers

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**would never let us Specials Chiefs do that, let us run it, but they've not been taking it on themselves either.” (Special Chief Officer)**

In broad terms, the strategic aspirations for the future of the Special Constabulary, reflected across the Special Chief Officer interviews, point to four main areas of development:

- Enthusiasm to explore new roles, expand contribution and better focus contribution on key strategic policing gaps and challenges;
- A desire to professionalise, and to build credibility, capability and consistency;
- Interest in exploring different models, including learning from military ‘reserves’ and similar contexts;
- Seeking a more prioritised, valued, integrated and resourced model for the Special Constabulary.

For many Special Chiefs, the Special Constabulary represents an ‘unfulfilled potential’ and they see the future role for Specials as only being limited by culture and imagination.

**“What are we waiting for? Strategically? We’re only limited by our imaginations, our courage, and our culture. Policing resists change, WPCs, PCSOs, radios, throughout its long history. Every time, over time, it then comes to accept and eventually then to champion those things. The specialists, the cyber geeks, Specials in white hats [specialist roads policing], Special detectives, like all those things that have gone before, it’s just another change.” (Special Chief Officer)**

There were frustrations about lack of systematic planning and structured strategic analysis. For some, they saw the police service as being ‘very

poor at strategy’. They reflected that strategic planning was undertaken in very different and more structured, data-based, professionalised ways in their ‘day job’ contexts. A number of the Special Chiefs were bringing contexts in those ‘day jobs’ where they are strategic consultants, senior executives or involved in other ways in corporate strategy. They sometimes found that those skill-sets were not appreciated or engaged with in their policing leadership roles.

**“Apply some science, some business strategy to it all. Needs. Gaps. Capability.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“The police write lots of strategies but they don’t even know what a strategy is. What a plan should look like.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For a number of the Special Chiefs, fundamental to the future strategic direction of the Special Constabulary were issues of professionalism and credibility.

**“It all boils down, in its fundamentals, to a credibility. If we can professionalise, shift the perceptions of who Specials are and what they can do, that is then the critical foundations upon which we then influence and shift and build something genuinely new and very different.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For others, the need was to be more radical and to create something genuinely new and different. Central to such considerations was the idea of a ‘police reserve’.

**“It’s time to rip up the rule book and for us to do something new. A policing reserve, not a Special Constabulary.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Overall, a sentiment across the interviews was a desire to ‘get serious’ about the future strategic

# Special Chief Officers

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ambition and direction of the Special Constabulary. For many it was felt that the Special Constabulary was something of a Cinderella element within policing, an aspect of the organisation which had not benefited much from attention or resource over a prolonged period of time, and that because of this the potential risked being lost.

**“I think the difficulty you have still got is that there is a small budget for Special Constabulary and we are on occasion not seen as integral. If we are going to do this, we should be serious about doing it well. You get out what you put in, and in recent years that hasn’t been very much.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

## Interpretations of the Special Chief Officer role

The current picture of the senior leadership of the Special Constabulary is a complex and confused one, with a wide range of different models across force contexts. The role of Special Chief Officer has grown and evolved over many years, with relatively little steer or guidance, and often with little or no sharing of learning across force contexts. There is no system in place to advise nationally on Chief Officer roles or appointments, or to share best practice, albeit such support and coordination does occur on a more ad hoc basis, for example through the support of the Association of Special Constabulary Officers.

There is a sense of development in constructs of the role; many Special Chiefs saw themselves as having a stronger and more pro-active approach to their leadership than they perceived had been the case with their predecessors.

**“My predecessor... in reality he used to pop into headquarters about once a week and he used to go and see the Specials coordinator to say ‘is there anything you need be to do’, and that was the sum total.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

The focus for most Chiefs was on being there to support and to represent the Specials in their force. Special Chiefs often saw this as something they were uniquely well situated to do, and that they and they alone were dedicated to that role, rather than it sitting alongside a number of other competing priorities.

**“That phrase that leaders eat last. It is about that focus on supporting volunteers. We have the luxury, because it is our raison d’etre, of supporting volunteers, if you’re a regular superintendent then supporting volunteers is still there but only as one small part of your role, and actually it’s not seen as that important alongside everything else.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

Alongside this prioritised element of visibly leading Specials, several Special Chiefs framed their roles as being about ‘change’, and within that of achieving changes in ‘style’ and in ‘culture’ for the Special Constabulary. Such ambitions were typically framed as ‘reform’, ‘professionalisation’ and ‘modernisation’.

**“We talk about policing culture, and we talk about organisational culture, well there’s a culture in volunteering as well, especially sometimes around this specific of police constable volunteers. That’s what we’re up against still, an archaic, old club mentality, that’s the cultural shift I wanted to make, move away from that, further professionalise.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

Some framed their role more broadly in terms of ‘change’, seeing themselves as catalysts and

# Special Chief Officers

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agitators for change more broadly across organisational reform and management approaches in policing. This connects with frustrations about the style, as it was perceived, of some regular officer leaders.

**“I think you need to be a diplomat, and I’m more of a disrupter than a diplomat. But I think disruption is really good today in policing. Policing aren’t ready for that, but the dementors in the organisation, some of the middle management, old dinosaurs, silverbacks that exist need disruption, they need to - well they need to go. It’s really simple because they’re the ones that are holding back the force from proper effective change to get anywhere.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

Whilst Special Chiefs had, inevitably, different takes on their approach to their roles, there was a very strong caucus of support for greater consistency and coordination nationally. For many, the current lack of definition or recognition of the role at national level seriously undermines its status and credibility.

**“As long as everywhere is different, it’s all splintered forty however many times, we’re never going to get anywhere. Divide and rule, as they say.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

**“I think if we want professionalisation of not only this Chief Officer role but ranks in general, the balance to that is we are going to have to accept that you also need consistency. It’s impossible to progress together and to walk down forty four different paths at the same time.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

There were desires to maintain the benefits of local discretion, and recognition that Special Chief Officer roles logically would continue to have some differences in terms of their dimensions and execution to fit local

circumstances. However, the current ‘free for all’ was seen as ‘unhealthy’, and ultimately as being ‘destructive to the role and its wider credibility’; with arguments that forces being able to remove the role ‘at a whim’ undermined, in broader terms, all Special Chiefs nationally across forces.

**“Local discretion matters, but it matters less than national standards and consistency.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

There was optimism that there may be a growing enthusiasm at national level, both to support a national recognition of the role, and to produce guidance and support for the role. However, there were misgivings about the degree to which Chief Constables would be welcoming of, or accepting towards, a stronger, more directive framework of national standards and guidance and commensurate loss of local discretion.

**“I do think, from conversations I have had, I think that the current NPCC portfolio [the national Specials portfolio] sees the need for greater regulation, standardisation [of Specials ranks], but I don’t see them standing up to the Chiefs [Chief Constables], who always want to do it their own way.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

In terms of role design, it was recognised that the role is currently very demanding of time and commitment. This is felt to limit the individuals who are able to put themselves forward for such roles, and many Special Chiefs talked about how they were fortunate that their work and their personal circumstances allowed them a great deal of flexibility.

**“When I think of the twenty five hours a week, on average, I need to put into this. Everything has changed completely, wholly different role we’re dealing with. I**

# Special Chief Officers

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**don't know how many people [could commit to the time requirement of the role]. I am lucky with the flexibility my work allows me.” (Special Chief Officer)**

When asked what motivated them to apply for, and then to continue in, the Special Chief Officer role, Special Chiefs tended towards two primary areas of motivation:

- A personal desire to support Specials;
- Being driven by the sense of a need for change, and ‘the love of a challenge’.

**“If it was easy I don't think I'd still be here. It's the scale of challenge that keeps me here.” (Special Chief Officer)**

## Value of role

Special Chief Officers feel that they bring significant skills and experience from outside of policing both to their role and into the wider executive context of policing. They also highlighted the stability of appointment of most Special Chiefs, who tend to serve much longer in role than regular leads of the Special Constabulary, which provides valuable continuity.

There were perceived benefits of ‘Specials leading Specials’, in terms of authenticity of leadership and thoroughly understanding the context and nature of the role.

**“Why have this role, my role? I am a volunteer. I am a police constable who is still on the front-line. If it's a regular officer, or if it is a police staff role, which heads the SC, they aren't one and perhaps aren't either of those things.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“It is that aspect that I am what they are. I am a Special Constable. I like to think**

**people see me and trust me because I am an SC. I am not sure the same can ever be the case if it's just the latest assignment for the next few months for a regular Inspector, however committed they are, and in fairness that's not always very committed, they always have one eye on what next...” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“That authenticity, that understanding, which if you haven't worn this uniform as a volunteer, I do think it is very difficult to replicate that.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Although they feel that their forces are often unaware or under-appreciative of what they bring from their external experience into the police service, Special Chiefs feel that they bring a great deal of skills, experience and strategic perspective that is of real value, and provides useful additionality to the skill sets and experience within the organisation.

**“Putting modesty aside, I bring a whole list of qualities to this role. I have been, I am, a Special myself. I have two decades at executive-level, top leadership teams, businesses many times larger [than this police force]... I bring some of that expertise into this police force which it doesn't have and, again modesty notwithstanding, which it badly needs.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“.... I did an MBA at Cranfield and spent 14 years as a management consultant.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“I'm a manager for a national construction firm. I've been responsible for delivery, circa nearly £10 million of work. I lead a team of managers, which I do in the Specials. [In my day job] I need to implement different ways of working, implement change and get people's buy-in, which I do in the Specials as well.” (Special Chief Officer)**

# Special Chief Officers

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'Continuity' and 'stability' were seen as important qualities in the leadership of the Special Constabulary, and Special Chiefs felt that they were effectively providing both of those things. In many of the interviews, they commented on the 'churn' and 'short-termism' that they saw in regular officer rank assignments, and that promotion processes and personal advancement were foregrounded before stability in regular rank appointments.

**"A stability, that's what we bring. I am onto my fourth chief constable, lost count of how many leads we have had at [regular] Chief Inspector level." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"I doubt if many people take notice but I am the most experienced, I am the longest-serving member of our chief officer team." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"Continuity, in a service where there is almost constant change." (Special Chief Officer)**

Akin to the development of more specialist roles, training and contribution for Specials, Special Chief Officers felt that the visibility of Specials operating at a senior, strategic and respected level within the organisation enhanced the overall positioning and status of the Specials as a whole, as well as carrying a sense of aspiration of future opportunities for some Specials who would be interested in occupying such roles in the future.

**"Any ranks, leadership structure, it is partly about aspiration, about younger Specials who might aspire to be in these kinds of roles in the future. Something to aim for and to achieve." (Special Chief Officer)**

## Appointment, tenure and succession

As with all aspects of Specials leadership, there is little if any consistency in the appointment processes, and related management of tenure and succession, for Special Chief Officer roles.

In all cases of those Special Chief Officers engaged in this research, there had been a formal process of appointment, albeit these varied in terms of how 'real' and 'substantive' they were, and in some cases were perhaps more of a 'formality'.

In some cases, which appears to be an element of best practice, the appointment mirrored those of other Chief Officers in the force. The direct involvement of the Chief Constable in selection processes was also seen as effective in symbolising the importance of the role and weight of support 'right from the top' for the new appointee.

In some cases the appointment was also opened to serving Specials from other forces, and occasionally also to individuals who were not serving Specials but who could apply as 'direct entrants'. The opening up of processes is considered best practice, as it helps to widen senior and strategic leadership progression opportunities for Specials, as well as helping to import fresh thinking and learning at strategic levels across force boundaries.

The impact of 'direct entry' at this level is still unclear – there are advantages in broadening the reach of skills and experience and in opening up to innovators and very different thinking. However, there are challenges in terms of direct entrants building up their experience,

# Special Chief Officers

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credibility and authenticity as a volunteer constable.

Many Special Chiefs feel that they, and the police service as a whole, need to do much more to support effective succession planning into senior Specials roles.

**“So I’ve seen a whole bunch of Senior Chief Officers come and go. Some got there because they wanted the braid on their shoulder. Some got there because they were the last one standing.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Many Special Chiefs reflected that there was nothing structured or systematically in place to identify and develop future senior leaders. Some also reflected that they could not see where, within their current ranks, were the strategic leaders of the future. There is merit in thinking more holistically about succession in Specials leadership, of which this aspect of ‘leadership at the top’ is just one key component.

Tenure and related issues of opportunity at senior level present challenges. As reflected earlier in this report, there are perceived to be advantages in the stability of longer-serving senior Specials, contrasted against what is a constant ‘churn’ of portfolios for regular senior ranked officers. However, that stability can also freeze out opportunities for new people, approaches and thinking, and create a ceiling for progression. In some contexts, progression in the Special Constabulary at senior level is, as one Chief Officer put it somewhat flippantly, ‘like waiting for the Pope to die’. There were some concerns that the pattern of Special Chiefs serving often for a decade or longer could sometimes result in senior leadership becoming ‘stale’.

Some forces are operating a model of fixed-term tenure for Special Chief Officer roles; typically of three years or five years, and typically with opportunity (with formal process) for one period of extension. Such a model appears to have significant merit. It was identified by some that such models produce a challenge of what fixed-tenure Special Chiefs do after their period as Chief Officer is over, and in essence how to retain them in other roles. For some Chiefs, no doubt this will not personally present a problem and they will be happy to return to lower-ranked roles in the Specials. However, for others there is a risk of such arrangements triggering the departure of talented individuals who still have a great deal to give. Some of the options discussed later in this report, in the next chapter on the national context, may provide answers for some such individuals, in terms of options to consider building more regional and national opportunities for Specials leaders.

## Working with and ‘fitting in’ with other ‘Citizens in Policing’ roles

Whilst the picture has a lot of variability, with some police forces losing police staff resourcing for supporting Specials and volunteers, on the whole recent years have seen an increase in both police staff and regular officer roles supporting Specials, and in many forces a coming together of such roles under the new umbrella construct of ‘Citizens in Policing’.

Special Chief Officers welcome this injection of increased resource and support where it has taken place, but also tend to have experienced some difficulties in how their own roles have fitted with the formations of these broader CiP teams.

# Special Chief Officers

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**“I think if anything my role has become more ambiguous as other resources have come in and grown. So since Citizens in Policing, as a team, started to form some 18 months ago now, there’s been increasing tension, for me it hasn’t been a happy place to work at all. You know I’ve had to stop most of my [Special leadership] team from resigning, and I’ve had times when I’ve considered, should I carry on?” (Special Chief Officer)**

For some Special Chiefs in a few force contexts, there is an impression that the formation of a CiP model has been actively resistant to their presence and role, and has ‘not had room’ or has ‘actively worked around’ the concept of Specials in leadership roles.

**“I don’t think we fit their vision or are seen as being in their [Citizens in Policing] team. They seem to want a future where they don’t have any ranked Specials, so maybe it would be easier if we all quit.” (Special Chief Officer)**

In some cases, this has been in part about personalities. In others simply a question of natural complexities and working out new relationships, with challenges for all parties understanding the ‘wiring’ and communication when several roles, some of them still very new, are working across a similar territory.

**“It’s just very hard work at the moment. There are the anomalies of who I meet with, which events, boards, I attend. And which the CiP team leader attends. I’ve asked to have regular meetings, I feel there are things I see, I understand and feel need an attention, which some of those police staff roles do not understand in quite the same depth, quite the same way” (Special Chief Officer)**

A quite common theme from Special Chiefs was a sense of being supported and respected, but nevertheless of not being ‘in the loop’ or ‘at the

centre of things’. There were feelings that in some force contexts CiP teams had taken the focus of conversations and decision-making away from Special Chiefs and their senior Specials teams.

**“People are friendly, they do talk to me, engage me. It’s short, gossipy chats, though, not the opportunities to chew over or shape issues. My impression is other people are seen as doing that, not me.” (Special Chief Officer)**  
**“But yes, so I think I am consulted, I am involved at a strategic level but I do sometimes think, things can occasionally be a fait accompli before it gets to me which then makes it difficult to push back.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“The investment is tremendous and we all welcome it, of course we do. This reform, this force-wide change project [focused on the Special Constabulary] has been run by others and has been run around me and around my team. From my standpoint, of course, I see that as a shame, but I also do not want to take anything away from what has been achieved. Perhaps in time our roles, my role, will settle down, will establish once again, once we achieve some of those project objectives.” (Special Chief Officer)**

As with all aspects of the picture in respect of Special Constabulary leadership, the dynamics referenced above apply to *some* police force contexts, and not all. In parallel to the above experiences in some areas, in other forces the picture seems more integrative of and collaborative with Special Chiefs.

## Identity and status as ‘Chief Officers’

Whilst there is widespread variation across the country, the interviews with Special Chief Officers revealed that for most there were



# Special Chief Officers

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significant cultural challenges at senior level in terms of their status, role and relationships.

In many cases, this reflected a tension between being formally designated as being a 'Chief Officer' and having membership of the police force Chief Officer team, but of not in reality being enabled to occupy, or being seen as having the authority and status of, that position of executive seniority within the organisation. There were also challenges of some force contexts in which the Special Chief Officer role does not have the leadership space, responsibility and ability to 'call the shots', in a manner that resulted in the role being only 'partial' or 'symbolic' in its execution.

**"I wear this uniform, the uniform of an Assistant Chief Constable. The Chief Constable has said he sees that as being my level in the organisation. But I'm not sure, with every day the experiences I have, that he, or perhaps it's the people around him, actually means it." (Special Chief Officer)**

As a senior voluntary role, within a context where other executive strategic roles are regular officers or police staff, the Special Chief Officer role seems to occupy an unhelpfully ambiguous space in most police forces.

**"Am I a real one? That's how I feel." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"I sit at the ACC level, allegedly." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"I am line managed by the Deputy Chief Constable... a few feathers were ruffled achieving that, and that line management is very loose, I have not seen my line manager for several months... So this is the anomaly, they see me, they say, as the executive lead for citizens in policing, but there is an SRO [senior responsible**

**officer] who is an ACC, there are other senior managerial roles that effectively also lead. So they have given me a sort of titular responsibility, like an archbishop who is given some title from a distant part of the world but has never travelled there, just to say he is the archbishop of somewhere, but it doesn't really mean anything. In reality I carry none of the responsibility, I don't carry the budget. So I am announced by the title, but in the end of the day what does that mean, it doesn't give me any responsibility, it doesn't give me any authority." (Special Chief Officer)**

There are descriptions of the status and authority of being a Special Chief Officer as often being experienced 'in theory, but not in practice'. A theoretical senior status of being a Chief Officer is, in effect, undermined by cultural assumptions that all Special Constables are subordinate to, and outranked by, all regular officers. This sense of 'subordination' had undermining effects on the ability to position and function as a genuine executive-level leader.

**"In theory, yes. In practice, there is no power apart from what people will do out of respect to me personally. If I ask a regular officer to do something, at the end of the day they still see an SC, most of them will see that relationship as them outranking me, whatever uniform they wear and I wear." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"So, all of this, it's very nebulous really. I achieve things through my personality, relationships, who I can influence, who I can bring with me. If people say 'why should we', then that's as far as I can go. So, lots of influence and I think respect, yes, but that all feels very personal. There is very little positional or formal authority and power specifically down to this rank, this role." (Special Chief Officer)**

For some of the Special Chief Officers, they have experienced their positioning within the

# Special Chief Officers

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organisation as being seen as a 'threat' by senior ranked regular colleagues.

**"Sometimes it is threatening, there is an established culture, pecking order, authority, we come in, we are outsiders to that and we challenge that, we disrupt it. It is very clubbable at the top of policing, many senior officers have known each other for a very long time. They are not always sure where we fit in that, if we fit in it at all." (Special Chief Officer)**

It is evident across a number of the Special Chief Officer interviews that they see the existence of a strongly established 'order' of close (and closed) relationships and entrenched ways of working and thinking amongst senior regular officers, that the Special Chief Officers feel like they 'rub up against' and 'don't quite belong to'.

**"You get them who are here all day, they've got their network and that holds more sway than somebody who steps in, steps out... Specials are easy to ignore." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"It's a bit like coercive control... a controlling relationship from the regular side of the business, so they keep you powerless, they're always trying to undermine you, if we [Special Chief Officers] don't do what they want then they take it out [remove the role]... you are effectively powerless and it's not healthy." (Special Chief Officer)**

Reflecting what they saw as their cultural positioning within the organisation, many of the Special Chief Officers expressed frustrations at the sense of 'blockage' that this cultural context presented to 'getting things done'.

**"It's a frustrating role. You make a recommendation and they are often ignored, quite honestly" (Special Chief Officer)**

**"It takes so long to establish anything because of our status..." (Special Chief Officer)**

This context means that for many of the Special Chief Officers, they do not feel that their forces recognise, appreciate or utilise the skills sets and experience that they bring.

**"But also why criticise and demean me because what they don't realise is everything I bring... but they won't trust me to make a decision... we are just discounted... I think we ought to use a skills analysis to say let's not demean Specials, let's utilise them." (Special Chief Officer)**

**"I manage this organisation [where the Special Chief works as their 'day job']. I argue with Chief Constables that I could manage their organisation. I don't have to be a warranted officer to manage the Police Force as a business... but we should use those skill sets and I think the whole issue around rank structure, I do think it's the insecurity of the Regulars. They feel threatened and I think that's not a good mature relationship." (Special Chief Officer)**

The part-time, volunteer nature of Special Chief Officers also collides with 9-5 weekday executive patterns of working in police forces.

**"The senior meetings are starts between 9 and 10, finishes at 3 or 4, on a weekday. If the role [as Special Chief Officer] requires attending that, it rules most people out of the role. I once suggested we hold some meetings at weekends and the looks on the faces..." (Special Chief Officer)**

## Professional development and support of senior leaders

There was a recognition that more could be done to develop a structured model of

# Special Chief Officers

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professional development for senior leaders in the Special Constabulary. This could involve:

- Further delivery of national training delivered by the College of Policing; this has been well received historically by Specials leaders. The College is currently in the process of re-commencing this programme of training for more senior ranked Specials;
- There is an argument for building an additional training and development programme aimed at a more strategic, senior level above the ranks primarily targeted in the currently re-commencing College provision. If this were only aimed at newly appointed senior Specials, a challenge to this would be relatively low numbers; for example, if it were aimed at new in role Chiefs and equivalents, then typically there are only two or three such appointments per year nationally presently;
- Additionally, or alternatively to that, another model might be a developmental programme, involving tailored CPD, mentoring and other aspects, which could be provided across all Special Chiefs, and perhaps a small number of other senior ranked Specials.

There is also an opportunity to better engage Specials leaders across the current broader national senior leadership provision in policing. Participation by senior Specials in national policing leadership and related developmental programmes is currently very limited.

Several Special Chiefs suggested that enabling attendance on the Strategic Command Course would be beneficial; albeit there were also

reflections that for many the time commitment that this would involve would be prohibitive.

Linking to these debates of professional development and support for senior Specials leaders, there were views that there also needs to be a more developed 'future leaders' model for the Special Constabulary. This could involve a nationally coordinated scheme through which forces identified Specials from their Special Constabularies with aspiration and potential to develop into the senior leaders of the future.

## Greater flexibility of leadership journeys within policing

Some Specials leaders saw a future vision where there was much greater flexibility in, and across, all aspects of leadership in policing. They could foresee a future where regular senior leaders had careers which were more flexible, and took them in and out of policing, including growth of more direct entry and similar models. In this context, a future could be contemplated in which a regular leader may take time out of policing in another sector or leadership role, and retain a direct involvement in policing through exercising a leadership role voluntarily in the Specials during that time. Or a volunteer Specials leader might have a period of time when they became paid and occupied a different, full-time leadership role in policing. In such thinking about the future, one Special Chief talked of getting beyond the "different species" model of thinking about volunteer and paid leaders, to a much more mutually respectful and interchangeable context.

# Special Chief Officers

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## Other models of senior leadership and command

The background research for this section of the report has focused on interviewing volunteer Special Chief Officers; it is recognised, as such, that it has focused on those forces with Chiefs, and paid much less attention to those models which do not have Chiefs, and those which also do not have senior Special ranks more generally.

Whilst the IPSCJ has not directly researched and interviewed those who are leading the Special Constabulary but are not volunteers, it has worked directly with almost every individual in such a role over the past two years, and had many discussions about the pros and cons of the different arrangements. Broadly speaking, the perceived 'pros' of having a regular officer, or other paid role, heading the Special Constabulary are:

- The regular often has stronger relationships, influence and leverage across the force to enable them to 'get things done';
- The regular is able to be around more, and attend meetings and network in the force on behalf of Specials, because they simply have many more hours in their full-time working day to give to the role, and in particular are more available 9-5 weekdays when many meetings occur and key stakeholders are available;
- The regular is often seen to have a clearer 'command' authority, which helps in 'getting things done';
- Having a regular in the role is seen as helping with a more integrated, and less separate, approach;

- Several forces feel they have had problems with the style and approach of their volunteer Chiefs, in effect finding them difficult to 'manage', there being clashes of personalities, or thinking that they are not performing. Some forces which have recently stepped away from having the role have been influenced by such factors. As such, one perceived advantage of a regular is that they are more clearly under command and seen as manageable;

The 'cons' can broadly be summarised as:

- A loss of the authenticity, 'voice' and experience-based understanding that comes (or should come) when volunteer Specials are led by a volunteer Special;
- The short-term regular appointments model and resultant churn of regulars in such roles, which often means every 12-18 months there is a new individual in role;
- Sometimes regulars in such roles have limited history, understanding and briefing in respect of the Special Constabulary when they come into the role;
- In contrast to the time aspect discussed as a 'pro' above, some regulars in such roles have a broader portfolio of which the Specials is just one part, and therefore only have limited time available to dedicate to the agenda;
- Sometimes regulars are placed in such roles because of wider contextual factors, which preclude them from other roles, rather than as a positive choice or selection;

# Special Chief Officers

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- There are aspirational (i.e. other Specials aspiring to occupy leadership roles) and symbolic (i.e. a senior volunteer officer being seen to have influence, status and authority) which are lost if the Specials are not led by one of their own;
- In some models, where the whole of senior ranks are removed, there can be a resultant lack of focus and capacity on Specials leadership issues;
- What volunteer Special Chiefs may be perceived to lack in terms of their internal network and leverage (their 'insider' benefits), they can more than make up for in terms of their external skills sets, experience, culture and experience, which can potentially be highly valued assets in senior teams.

nationally, to enable and empower Special Chiefs to operate and to break down some of the cultural barriers that they often face, there do seem to be some significant advantages to having a Special Chief role. Where Special Chief roles work well, they contribute a distinct and significant value, and not only directly to the Specials but also more widely to the strategic leadership of their force.

Beyond this high-level summation of 'pros' and 'cons' there sits a wide variation in execution of role both by volunteer Chiefs and by regular leads. There are regular leads who are highly visible, empathetic, incredibly well informed and personally committed leaders of their Specials, and there are some Special Chiefs who are little visible and out-of-touch with their front-lines. Likewise, there are some Special Chiefs who operate in an empowered way at very senior levels and are highly influential in force, and some regular leads who carry little ability to influence and achieve change. As with all things in the Special Constabulary, the picture is very mixed, and any attempt to summarise and simplify will immediately be challenged by exceptions to the rule.

Overall, whilst there is much that can and needs to be done to clarify the Special Chief role, to produce a clearer and more consistent sense of the standard and leadership expectation

# **National leadership**

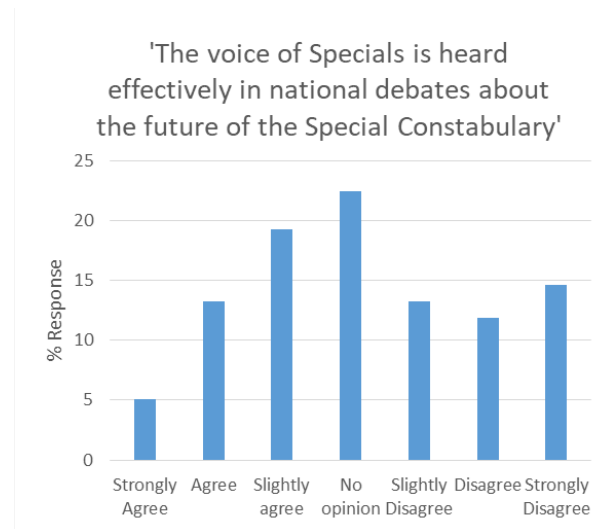
# National leadership

## Introduction

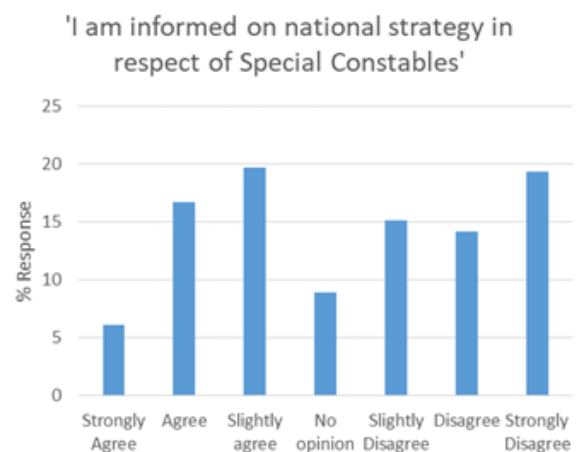
This chapter of the report focuses on leadership in the Special Constabulary beyond the level of individual forces, analysing how Special Constabulary leadership comes together collaboratively across forces, and at a national level in respect of strategy, national 'voice' and representation. It is clear from the research activity that most of the energy and resource of Special Constabulary leaders is currently concentrated within their police forces. Whilst this is their primary focus, it does mean that models of leadership collaboratively and at a national level are less formed and resourced. For most Special Constabulary leaders there is some occasional attendance at regional coordination meetings, but in the majority of cases there is no engagement at national level.

Drawing on the responses of Special Constables in the national survey, perspectives are mixed about how effectively the voice of Special Constables is heard in national debates about the future of the Special Constables. Tellingly, the largest single category of response (over one in five Specials) was 'no opinion', suggesting this is an aspect regarding which Specials are less well informed, interested and engaged.

Whilst over a third of Specials felt that the voice of Specials is heard nationally in such debates, the majority of that agreement was in the 'slightly agree' response. Only 5% of Specials 'strongly agreed' that the voice of Specials is heard in national debates, with a larger proportion (almost 15%) 'strongly disagreeing'.



Likewise, perspectives were mixed in the national survey as to whether Special Constables felt informed about national strategy in respect of the Special Constabulary. Whilst, positively, 43% of Specials agreed that they felt well informed, almost half (49%) disagreed, with approximately a fifth (19%) 'strongly disagreeing'.



## Senior projection of the Special Constabulary

A theme which was identified across a number of interviews, particularly with the Special Chief Officers, was a concern about how the Special

# National leadership

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Constabulary was projecting itself at the senior, strategic national level in policing, feeling that there were problems with the tone and style, and gaps in a national-level leadership conversation and consensus. There were concerns from some that Special Constabulary leaders did not always project themselves ‘credibly’.

**“We really don’t help ourselves though, do we? I mean, we don’t sell ourselves nationally [as Special Chief Officers] as a terribly credible bunch.” (Special Chief Officer)**

Part of this sentiment reflected concerns over the ‘tone’ of the debate. In particular relating to social media, several Special Chief Officers were concerned that what they variously described as ‘twitter spats’ and ‘Linked In battles’ between Special Chief Officers risked negatively impacting upon the reputation of Special leaders more broadly in policing.

**“I hate to see some of what’s on social media. We do sometimes let ourselves down with a tone that is unguarded and unprofessional. Having said all of that, I 100% understand why many colleagues feel that way. The official voice [ASCO], it doesn’t have spark and it doesn’t have bite. So, yes, I dislike it, the social media, but I also do understand why it’s happening.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For others, there was a frustration that Special Constabulary leaders, and within that specifically Special Chief Officers, had difficulty in reaching consensus positions and a common ground about the way forward on many issues.

**“It would help if we ever agreed on anything.” (Special Chief Officer)**

## Getting together

One specific concern related to the lack of infrastructure and opportunities to ‘come together’, as leaders of Special Constabularies. Many interviews regretted the absence since 2016 of what had previously been well-received bi-annual national Special Constabulary conferences, and reflected that the ASCO national conference in Moreton-in-Marsh in 2017 was the last occasion when a majority of Special Chiefs had been in the same room at the same time.

**“We used to have the conference, at least. It wasn’t perfect, I could tell you some tales, but it was an opportunity for us all, or at least most of us, to be together. Now they’ve even taken that away. We all have to be Citizens in Policing now. If we never see each other, and for the past two or three years, since Chepstow, I actually have not seen that many of my colleague Chiefs, we will never get better at working together.” (Special Chief Officer)**

There was discussion across interviews with Special Chief Officers about the benefits of various forms of remote and virtual working together, including via ‘What’s App’ groups and similar. However, there was a broad consensus that meeting up physically was a very important, but recently neglected, aspect of senior Special Constabulary leaders working more effectively together.

**“We need to meet [as Special Chiefs]. Once a year for a day, even twice a year. I am a strong believer in dialogue. ASCO can’t do that for us at the moment, most of us aren’t even in it anymore, so perhaps the College could do that for us? Or CiP [the national Citizens in Policing portfolio]?” (Special Chief Officer)**



# National leadership

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For many Specials leaders, even at Special Chief Officer rank, there was a sense of estrangement from the national agenda and debate. For many, this amounted to a conscious decision to not engage. This sense of ‘keeping a distance’ from the national context seems partly driven through a desire to focus time and energy on their local Special Constabulary and partly borne of a frustration with the national scene.

**“I never hear anything [about the national picture relating to the Special Constabulary]. I am sure people are doing good work, but I never see any of it. Couldn’t tell you a thing about it.” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“Nationally? Am I allowed to swear... there, that’s my assessment of that. I learnt a very long time ago to stay right away from it. I assume they’re all still having their meetings, planning their gongs, but I never hear anything. Which, don’t get me wrong, I find that a good thing. I’m very happy here in force, concentrating on our people.” (Special Chief Officer)**

These findings would point to the need for:

- A model for all Special Chiefs to be able to meet together, at least annually;
- To improve upon current models to have a single, managed communication network amongst senior leaders in the Special Constabulary – accessible to all, and engaged by all. Current arrangements risk engaging *some* but not all senior leaders;
- A reinstatement of the Special Constabulary conference model.

## National ‘voice’ and representation

Whilst the issue of representation of Special Constables is a broader one than simply being about leadership, views about the national ‘voice’ and ‘influence’ of the Special Constabulary were very much focused upon by research participants, particularly Special Chiefs. The discussion mainly focused upon ASCO (the Association of Special Constabulary Officers), as the primary national ‘voice’ and organisation for Specials. A caveat to the discussion of findings that follows is that some fieldwork was undertaken as long as 18 months ago, and ASCO is on a change journey as an association, which may mean things have already changed.

The Association of Special Constabulary Officers (ASCO) is the primary representational and engagement body for Special Constables at a national level. Evolving from its predecessor, the Association of Special Constabulary Chief Officers (ASCCO), the organisation has evolved with an intent to broaden its membership and focus to seek to represent all Special Constables at a national level.

For Special Chief Officers, the vast majority of interviews expressed some degree of frustration in respect of ASCO, in terms of what they saw as past limitations and also reflecting a scepticism of many Special Chiefs of the likelihood of future change. More broadly, beyond Special Chiefs and across the Special Constabulary as a whole, for Special Constables the pattern is of a patchy knowledge of ASCO, with that awareness seemingly highly variable between different force contexts.

The common framing of the past of ASCO was of an ‘old boys’ club’, a phrase used multiple times

# National leadership

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and across a majority of interviews with Special Chiefs.

**“When it [ASCO] first started it was an absolute old boys club, it was a select bunch of Special Commandants... an organisation that really just looked after Special Chiefs and looked after itself.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

For many, there was a mix of respect for those leading ASCO alongside doubts that ‘it can never change’.

**“To be honest, I like the people [leading ASCO] and I see and I respect the effort [that they put into ASCO]. But it’s never going to change. It is a bottleneck, it is a blocker”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

Special Chief Officers seemed to divide into three broad areas of opinions in respect of future national organisation for the Special Constabulary:

- The larger group (perhaps just over half) who are presently largely or entirely disengaged from the national scene, who are sceptical in respect of ASCO, and who would present themselves as likely remaining ‘passive’ or disengaged with any future national developments;
- A smaller group (perhaps a quarter) who feel that ASCO needs to change, but carry a greater optimism that a way forward is achievable to reform ASCO. Most of these individuals are currently actively engaged in ASCO;
- Another smaller group of Special Chief Officers who are more active in agitating for change beyond the current ASCO model and who would wish to establish a direct alternative to ASCO.

**“We are, as I have said, entering a new era, very different challenges. So, yes times like this call for new institutions not window dressing of current ones. Is ASCO a dog that’s had its day? Probably, but that is just my personal opinion, and I haven’t been involved in it at all for such a long time.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

**“The intention has to be to develop the organisation [ASCO]. Reform does feel like swimming upstream against an established order, what’s described as an old boy’s club, moving on from a club for select Special Chief Officers based on the adapted constitution of a golf club. So it is difficult but I believe, yes, I believe it is possible.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

Whilst there was recognition of the scale of journey that Special Chief Officers felt ASCO needed to make, there were also pockets of positivity about the progress that was perceived as now being made, and of optimism about the future, if the scale of change required was embraced.

**“I think we do recognise that, that if ASCO does not change it is probably going to die. A huge amount is happening, membership is up, there’s been a year or two of building new foundations but soon I do believe the change will be visible.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

**“Do I think ASCO can change? Tentatively, yes, I think I do. It’s from a low base, most of us even at Chief level aren’t there, round that table, engaged in it in any way, aren’t in that inner sanctum, and if it’s going to be reborn, it has to be all of us on that journey together, not a clique. It needs new blood, desperately needs new blood.”**  
*(Special Chief Officer)*

Some Special Chief Officers questioned whether there was a clear enough sense of what ‘the future state needs to look like’. For some, this lay with stakeholders such as the Home Office

# National leadership

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and the College of Policing being clearer about their expectations. Whilst for others, they felt that the future definition of an association for Special Constables should lie with Specials themselves.

**“I am aware that there have been many discussions with the Home Office about Specials and representation. What I don’t see is that clear remit, criteria, terms of reference. Does the Home Office really know what it wants, and is it clear what support it is prepared to provide to get it?” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“It is for us to define. I am not sure if we know what we want. We all know what we think is wrong with what we’ve got, but that’s a different matter.” (Special Chief Officer)**

For some, there was a need for a definitive moment to define the future direction, with some feeling that ‘the issue is in a state of permanent drift’ or ‘not really going anywhere’.

**“It is the responsibility of us all. We need a national summit, to set out what we need a future organisation, association, to do for us. Perhaps if we had that bigger dialogue and debate, people would start coming back together and working together.” (Special Chief Officer)**

It is not for a report such as this to suggest how Special Constables organise their representation; that rightly must remain a matter owned by and managed by Specials themselves. However, the report does point to some substantial, deep-seated concerns and frustrations with the current picture. It is clear that Specials are currently not represented, and do not have a structured representational ‘voice’, to anything like an equivalent level, or with the resourcing, that other elements of the policing family do. It is also clear that a large

majority of Specials are not currently members of, or engaged with, any representational organisation.

## The development of national roles and secondments

Whilst the focus for senior Specials leaders was, as reflected in the discussion above, mostly on the future of representation and ASCO, there is also a wider picture of national ‘voice’, strategic contribution and influence.

One set of arguments put forward by some Special Chiefs, relates to how leaders in the Special Constabulary contribute nationally to the strategic direction and development of the Specials model in more structured, planned and resourced ways. There is an argument to seeing parallels to national secondment opportunities and arrangements for regulars, through which a number of regular officers have roles working with or seconded into the College of Policing, or working directly with the Home Office and NPCC.

Presently there are only a handful of Specials leaders who occupy roles with a national reach or portfolio. There are a few roles in ASCO which partly occupy that type of space. There is a Special Chief who, combining with his police staff CiP leadership day job, strategically supports the national NPCC portfolio lead for Specials. There are a small number of Specials leaders who act as ambassadors for the College of Policing. There have been occasional ad hoc secondment-type opportunities developed for Specials leaders with the College. There is a Special Chief who is seconded to lead the CSCV (CyberSpecials and CyberVolunteers) project nationally. More recently, a number of Specials

# National leadership

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leaders have been designated as workstream leads through the national Special Constabulary strategic action plan. But overall, such roles are currently quite limited in number and in some cases, limited in how they have operated.

There is an argument for developing a much more extensive and developed range of nationally focused roles for Specials leaders. The number and scale of these would need to be limited and managed, as it is in the regular service, so as not to unduly divert from the leadership attention locally. But the careful and managed introduction, over time, of maybe twenty or so such roles nationally, might begin to fill a gap in the national engagement and infrastructure of senior Specials in leading the Special Constabulary at national level. As is the case with the regular service, such opportunities could be undertaken alongside individuals continuing in local, force leadership, or they could be dedicated secondment-like arrangements. Such an infrastructure of roles could develop through the College, NPCC, Home Office, ASCO, or indeed all of the above.

For some Special Chiefs, they would also like to see the NPCC portfolio lead role filled by a Special Constable. The majority of Special Chiefs are very supportive of the current NPCC portfolio lead, and do not see that as a short-term move, but as Specials leadership arrangements grow and evolve at national level over coming years, they would see it as an ultimate medium-term goal. Such an arrangement would raise broader questions about the relationship between NPCC (and how it is constituted), and those in senior, strategic Special Constabulary leadership roles.

Such an approach could also be considered in time for roles leading on Specials and CiP in the College and Home Office. Some would argue that the evolution of such a model should involve some remuneration of the volunteer Specials leads in such roles, to encourage and enable engagement in the roles.

## Getting involved strategically in policing nationally

Much of the focus in discussions on the national picture was on leadership and strategy specifically for the Special Constabulary. However, there were also many reflections about how Special Constabulary leaders, and indeed Specials more generally, could contribute much more than they currently are enabled to do into wider strategy and leadership of policing at a national level.

**“Even just looking at Specials chiefs, we have cyber expertise, aviation expertise, financial expertise, consultancy expertise, training and university expertise, and the list goes on. All skills that can impact, that could help transform policing at a national level, if policing is interested” (Special Chief Officer)**

**“If you step back, [to consider] expertise, experience, we could bring so much to the party nationally [for policing]. If you’re talking about twenty years of working in education or medicine or cyber, or the military experience some of us bring, and those who have been at a top, top level organisationally, managerially, that is by definition not what any regular police officer of whatever rank can bring. We are added value.” (Special Chief Officer)**

There were frustrations from some Special Chief Officers who felt there were cultural barriers to organisation such as NPCC, College of Policing and the Home Office seeing and engaging with

# National leadership

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this dimension of the external experience and added value that senior leaders in the Special Constabulary could bring.

**“Even right up at that national level, we’re seen as just a volunteer. We are seen as bringing that little bit less. In many ways we’re not seen, not seen at all. We’re not on their radar, not considered at all. When was the last time the College thought, where’s the expertise across the service on this or that particular issue, might that be a Special Constable, might it be a Special Chief?”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

**“When you analyse where those strategic discussions take place, it is the College, its NPCC. Both clubs to which we don’t have membership, or at least that’s how it feels. Run by regulars for regulars. That’s a shame and a waste because there are unique contributions... we’re different, but that should be embraced and seen in a good way, it shouldn’t mean that we’re ignored.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

These findings point towards an opportunity for national policing leads, primarily the College and NPCC, to consider how the talents and contribution of Special Constabulary leaders could be better identified and engaged in wider strategic work nationally across policing. This may involve more actively and overtly opening up secondments and similar national roles to Specials. Again, this would also prompt considerations of a model of remunerating those volunteer officers.

## Collaboration and interoperability

There are many strong examples of Special Constabularies collaborating and working together, either operationally or in terms of organisation and development. However, looking across the Special Constabulary at a

national scale, the degree of collaboration remains relatively limited.

**“Perhaps the most neglected aspect of all is Special Constabularies working together.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

There is little collaborative learning, co-production and joint development of practice across the Special Constabulary. For example, a number of forces, or consortia of forces, are working separately around issues of training, or leadership development, or the development of new roles or specialisms for Specials, with little collaborative learning.

**“Specialisms, yes, very good. However, yet again, each force on its own. Where is the national coordination, support, advice? I don’t know what the College thinks is its job in respect of the Special Constabulary, but there’s one suggestion for a role.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

Interoperability was felt to bring considerable opportunities, and there were a handful of examples of practice where Special Constabularies have served together across force boundaries operationally. However, again this was felt to be limited, and a majority of Special Constabularies have little or no operationally collaborative activity with other forces.

**“We could do so much more if we came together operationally more, pool all that experience and expertise, scale our effect. Every Special Constabulary is an island and we rarely talk or engage in that way.”** *(Special Chief Officer)*

There was a sense that working together requires greater consistency of models and standards, but that the rewards of doing so could be considerable.

# National leadership

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**“The prize [for working together] is huge. The barriers are too, different ranks, different standards, what we call an operationally qualified officer isn’t the same as they do.” (Special Chief Officer)**

The models for regional coordination and cooperation across Special Constabularies vary; in some cases, they are quite strong in being led by and engaging Specials leaders, in others less so. In some cases, the regional coordinating arrangements are reasonably matured and effective, whereas in others they still operate in a more limited way. Some Special Chiefs argue for the benefits of considering a regional coordination role, for a Special Constabulary leader, in each region. This would likely be a Special of senior rank, but would not necessarily be a Special Chief Officer rank. Such a role, it is argued, might involve:

- Chairing regional Specials meetings and coordinating across Special Chiefs in the region;
- Identifying and championing best practice, and facilitating learning across the region between forces;
- Leading on facilitating a step-change in the level of collaborative activity between Special Constabularies (operationally, but also in areas such as training);
- Where, as is the case in most regions, there are specialist policing teams and functions structured across multiple forces or regionally, leading on supporting the Special Constabularies in the region to engage in those specialisms.

# **Options for the future**

# Options for the future

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## Conclusions: A leadership model that is 'not fit for purpose'

There are many highly committed and capable volunteers, paid staff and officers who are effective leaders within the Special Constabulary. However, this report highlights some significant challenges that show the current leadership model is not fit for purpose.

Overall, a majority of Specials are positive across most measures of their experience of leadership. For many Specials the experience is a good one. Most Specials leaders would recommend being in a promoted rank to others. There is evidently much that is positive about current leaders and their leadership.

It is also important to recognise that one facet of the extremely high levels of variability nationally is that such variations can mask pockets of excellence. There are some forces which 'buck the trend' in terms of many (not all, but many) of the critiques of leadership reflected across this report.

Nevertheless, the assessment that leadership of the Special Constabulary is not fit for purpose is primarily shaped by five factors:

- 1) Standards and experience of leadership appear to be highly inconsistent across the service. There are some very poor contexts and experiences in some teams and some forces. Alongside the positive experiences mentioned above, there is also a sizeable minority of dissatisfaction with leadership, poor experience and poor deployment. This in turn drives existential problems for the Special Constabulary in terms of the eroding effects that resultant disengagement and resignation have on 'effect' and value for
- 2) Diversity across Specials leadership remains very limited. The vast majority of Specials leaders, particularly in more senior roles, are white men. There is little that is being done convincingly locally or nationally to address that. There are no particularly positive trends or indications in diversity data.
- 3) These are strategically important times for the Special Constabulary. The capacity of leadership to envision and lead strategic change is questionable in many contexts at local force level, and largely appears lacking (particularly in terms of its capacity, coordination, influence and leverage) at national level. Those deficits sit alongside some highly significant challenges for the Special Constabulary, during what is generally accepted to be an upcoming period of significant, strategic change.
- 4) Culturally the almost 1,700 Specials in promoted ranks sit in a muddled ambiguous position; many in policing not seeing their roles as 'real' or as carrying authority, either formally in terms of command, or more informally in terms of wider responsibility and seniority within their forces organisationally.
- 5) Leadership in the Special Constabulary nationally has long been a profoundly neglected issue, and the result has been a chaotic picture of piecemeal reform at local force level, with many such local processes tending to 'go around in circles' on the issue. In that context, the 'prospects for

money. There has been little if any progress made nationally to set and achieve standards or to create a more cohesive, consistent picture.



# Options for the future

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improvement' seem limited, unless a very different strategic approach is adopted.

## The challenges of reform

The two key challenges for a national process of reform across Specials leadership are:

- Firstly, that there is such a very wide diversity of views on fundamental elements of future direction, and;
- Secondly, that the very wide variation in current models and practice in different forces means that any attempts at national convergence and reform start from a widely disparate set of local approaches.

These challenges make charting a future coherent path of reform complicated.

To just provide a handful of illustrative examples, some key aspects of the different visions and views for the future include:

- Views on future direction on ranks and volunteer leadership roles range widely, from on the one hand majorly strengthening volunteer leadership roles in terms of number, scope and authority, to on the other hand abolishing ranks altogether;
- Views range from a desire for full equality of ranks with regulars, to re-emphasising the distinction between them;
- Linked to that, somewhat polemical positions held in different forces about insignia and epaulettes;

- More fundamentally and strategically, there are very different visions for the future role and capability of the Special Constabulary. Some are very ambitious on scale, role and capability, others much more modest in ambitions. Some would like to see more radical change to the model, for example towards 'Reserve' approaches;
- There are markedly different perceptions of the relationships and connections between the Special Constabulary and the wider canvas of 'Citizens in Policing'. Some see the future as one that is very much integrated across CiP, and indeed in terms of senior and influential stakeholders for future reform who are regulars and police staff in forces, many have roles which are framed as Citizens in Policing. On the other hand, for others the future lies in a path for the Specials distinct from that wider CiP umbrella of volunteering in policing.

This lack of consensus on future direction is a key factor in the very limited progress that has been made over many years nationally in developing a more effective and coherent picture of Specials leadership.

These challenges are further compounded by the long history of Special Constabulary models being led at, and decisions made at, local force level; largely unfettered by national considerations, requirements or guidance. Any move to a more coherent and convergent national model will require some compromising of local discretion to a 'greater good' of national consistency. The impression is that negotiating and marshalling Chief Constables and forces towards a nationally regulated and consistent model may be a challenge.

# Options for the future

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As reflected in this report, there are some issues of poor relationships, and a general lack of communication nationally, amongst Specials leaders, which looks set to continue to challenge and hinder the move towards toward reform.

As set out in the preceding chapter, the national context is presently one of particularly limited resource. Many Specials leaders currently do not have confidence in national arrangements, are not cognisant of national work, and are not engaged in it.

## Support for reform

Despite these challenges, there is also a widespread support for reform, and for a more consistent and regulated national approach. The current inconsistency and variation in models and standards is widely agreed to be something that needs addressing, and there is a widely drawn caucus of support to achieve 'one version of the truth' for Specials leadership (albeit, reflecting the preceding discussion, less consensus on some of the details of what that 'one version' should look like). There seem very few, if any, strategic voices who argue that the current leadership arrangements stand competent and ready in the face of future strategic challenges and the need for change. Participants in the research underlying this report have expressed hopes that this final report does not 'sit on the fence' and is bold and clear in its recommendations.

## Options for the future

The above discussions conclude that the current leadership model is in some key respects not fit for purpose, and that there is a widespread support for national coherence, convergence, standards and change. A number of

fundamental challenges are also highlighted that need to be overcome to achieve that change.

Given the complexity of achieving the progression of national reform, it is key that any future reform process spends time building consensus and engagement across forces, including at the most senior levels. As such, this report steps short of making a series of definitive and specific *recommendations* for the future, as that should arise from future processes of consensus-building. The report does provide some pointers to *options*, based upon the evidence presented and discussed, for future reform.

## ***National framework***

There is a compelling case for the need for a single national framework for Specials leadership. The history of the Special Constabulary is somewhat riddled with past agreements at national level (e.g. a single framework for training, and indeed a single model for ranks) which have quickly dissipated back into local discretion and the pursuit of multiple different models. It is recognised therefore that this represents a significant strategic challenge to achieve. However, some greater coherence and clarity of standards is critical to taking the issue of Specials leadership forwards.

### **OPTION 1: National Framework**

The College of Policing could work with the National Police Chiefs Council, Special Constabulary Chief Officers and other key stakeholders to produce a single national framework for Special Constabulary leadership.

# Options for the future

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This might include:

- A single national version of agreed role descriptions and expectations for each rank;
- Agreed national consistency across rank nomenclature, insignia, etc.;
- Agreed standards of qualification, training, etc. for ranks;
- Clarity of formal authority and command of ranks, including the legal position regarding command authority;
- Guidance on best practice for appointment, induction, probationary periods, appraisal, supervision, support and tenure for ranks.

## **OPTION 2: Clarify authority**

Building on one of the elements outlined above, there would be major benefit in the national framework for Specials leadership being explicit as to the authority, seniority and command invested in Specials ranks.

This may require legal clarification in respect of command authority. There is a need for clarification, and national consistency, in terms of the legal, legislative basis of the capacity of Specials ranks to issue lawful orders to Specials, to issue lawful orders to regulars, and any other related elements of command and operational authorities.

Beyond those aspects of formal operational command, it is recognised that a national framework can, in effect, never regulate for the broader and somewhat subjective and situational dynamics of authority and seniority of roles within forces. However, such a framework could also usefully include some

guidance as to broad expectations in that regard.

## **OPTION 3: Rank titles**

Building on option 1 above, a national framework could seek to agree a single model of rank titles and insignia. Agreement should be sought to apply this in all force contexts.

Over time a greater convergence in numbers of ranks, and indeed consideration of those forces without them, might be desirable. However, in the short-medium term, a more pragmatic achievement nationally would be to accept some variation in the scale and shape (and indeed existence) of rank structures, but to achieve a national consistency in rank nomenclature, role and insignia for those ranks that do exist in each force.

Issues of insignia and rank titles may seem a side-issue and trivia to some, but the current variation across forces impacts upon interoperability and credibility of Specials ranks across the service. A gathering of regular Chief Officers across forces would reflect differences in uniform nationally, but all present the same rank insignia. A gathering of Special Chief Officers would exhibit five or six different interpretations of rank insignia.

## ***How ranks operate and their equivalency***

At present there is no realistic short-to-medium term path to establish operational equivalency (in terms of training, qualification, operational experience and command credibility) between regular supervisors and their rank title equivalent Special supervisors. A minority of

# Options for the future

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individuals might be able and willing to contribute the time and demonstrate the skills and experience to do so. However, it is impractical to consider moving all 1,700 to that point of complete equivalency, or to set the bar for national standard at that level. This would generate a training and development requirement that most individuals and their forces cannot achieve, or afford.

## **OPTION 4: Role profiles**

The more pragmatic path to rank professionalism in the Special Constabulary might be:

- To establish agreed role profiles and expectations for each rank, and as far as possible to do so consistently on a national level;
- Such rank profiles will include aspects of leadership requirement which are distinct to and go beyond regular 'equivalent' ranks (e.g. most obviously in terms of leading volunteers);
- They would also be envisaged to incorporate a proportion of the equivalent regular rank requirement, and as such to put the Special Constabulary nationally on a journey which seeks to raise the expectations of promoted, leadership roles.

Such a process of establishing rank profiles would need to be undertaken in a way that engages across Special Constabularies, and seeks to understand the variations in current position and practice. The practical challenges of implementing new profiles need to be explored and collectively resolved. Without genuine engagement, a paper exercise will be completed

'at the centre', and forces will not implement (indeed, may not be able to implement) the necessary changes.

## **OPTION 5: Rank differences**

Further work should be undertaken to understand the more senior leadership roles in the Special Constabulary (i.e. Chief Inspector, Superintendent, etc.). There are clearly substantive differences in practice in relation to how such roles operate, and several forces have removed such roles in recent years, partly because they have not been satisfied with how they have been operating. Feeding into the process in Option 4, it would be useful to specifically focus on how such senior elements of Specials leadership teams function most effectively, and to build 'best practice' into the future profiles.

## **OPTION 6: Regular supervisors**

Alongside the development of Special rank profiles, national guidance should be produced outlining 'best practice' in respect of the role of Regular supervisors in respect of the leadership and supervision of Specials. Presently there is wide variation in practice, and related issues of expectations, training and support for Regular supervisors in terms of undertaking such roles.

It would be sensible for Options 4, 5 and Option 7 to be undertaken as a joint exercise.

## ***Development of leaders***

There is a need to create a new, and much more coherent, framework for leadership development across the Special Constabulary.

# Options for the future

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## **OPTION 7: Leader induction**

Some forces have structured models of leader induction, the completion of leader probationary periods, and models for initial competency development and sign off. Such practice could usefully be codified into one consistent model nationally, and rolled out as a single coherent model across all new leaders in Special Constabularies.

## **OPTION 8: Leader training**

There are approximately 16 different training models in forces for S/Sergeants and S/Inspectors. The learning across those models should be pulled together to establish a single framework, and ideally a much more unified model of training content and delivery.

The training work developed in South Yorkshire, and delivered now in several forces, has been referenced repeatedly during our research work as representing a good model to emulate and potentially roll out more widely.

## **OPTION 9: Senior leader training**

The College of Policing is currently relaunching national training for more senior ranks of Specials, and this development will be welcomed by many. Previous training has been well received.

## **OPTION 10: Wider training**

There are clear advantages for Specials leaders training together with their leadership colleagues across their forces.

The access to leadership courses and other support for Specials is variable in different forces. Special leaders should have access to training in the same way as other force leaders, and this should be collectively agreed, nationally. Forces should consider ways of facilitating better access to such training for Special leaders, not least by considering when course delivery takes place. If this is always during the 9-5, Monday-Friday training paradigm in policing, then more flexible models might be considered and deliverable in the future.

The question of whether Special Chief Officers might be enabled to attend the Strategic Command Course could be given consideration. Clearly, such an option would be prohibitive for many, given the time commitment involved. But it may not be prohibitive for all, and attendance even of only a very small number of Chiefs spread over a period of years would represent a symbolic change, as well as providing a high-quality development opportunity for the individuals concerned.

## **OPTION 11: Mentoring**

Mentoring models are utilised in some force contexts for Special leaders. There are real advantages for Special leaders to have the opportunity to be mentored by regular force leaders.

Equally, Special leaders bring a great deal of skills and experience and should have opportunities to mentor regular colleagues.

# Options for the future

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## ***Future leaders and succession***

There is little current strategic attention paid to succession in Special leadership. A small number of forces have some degree of succession planning. And, again only in a small number of forces, there are specific initiatives geared at identifying and supporting the development of future leaders (e.g. current innovative work being undertaken in Merseyside).

### **OPTION 12: Future leaders programme**

Develop a national 'Future Leaders' programme across the Special Constabulary.

This could fit with and embed in existing similar models where they exist at force-level, but could also carry the benefits of engaging Special leaders across forces.

Understandings of practice and perspectives on the Special Constabulary strategically and beyond force level are limited in current models, particularly at the more senior level, and such a programme could support the development of strategic thinking and adaptability of the Special Constabulary moving forward.

### **OPTION 13: Direct-entry**

An additional piece of research work should be undertaken to consider direct-entry models of leadership recruitment into the Special Constabulary. Little is currently known about the effectiveness of existing practice in this regard, which has been relatively small in scale. Learning could also be identified from other police direct-entry models.

There is a related consideration, which such work could also engage with, of how ex-regulars might enter the Special Constabulary at rank, and the different dimensions for consideration of such models.

## ***Focusing on improving supervision and support***

Fundamental to improving the experience, retention and impact of Special Constables is improving their supervision and support.

### **OPTION 14: Supervision and support**

Engaging across Special Constabularies, develop national standards for Special Constable supervision and support.

This would helpfully link with, and feed into, Option 4.

### **OPTION 15: S/Sergeant development**

The S/Sergeant role is particularly important in driving the positive (or otherwise) experience of supervision and support for Specials. Many forces are facing difficulties recruiting and retaining S/Sergeants.

S/Sergeants need to be given more voice and need to be supported in creating a 'what works' approach to managing the role. A consultative network could be set up to facilitate this.

This work should align with Option 4, the development of consistent role profiles, and engage with existing work being undertaken by the College of Policing on front-line supervision.

# Options for the future

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## ***Focusing upon improving deployment***

Effective deployment is fundamental to Special Constable experience, retention and effectiveness. Delivering effective deployment should be a priority for Specials leadership teams.

### **OPTION 16: Deployment strategy**

The leadership of each Special Constabulary should develop a force deployment strategy for Special Constables.

## ***Vision and strategic leadership***

At a more strategic level, it is important that the leadership of the Special Constabulary nationally and locally in each force has a vision and sets a strategy for the future role, capability and contribution of Special Constables.

### **OPTION 17: Vision for the future**

The leadership of the Special Constabulary should set a vision for the future, and from that develop a 'Blueprint' for delivery.

### **OPTION 18: Strategic plan**

The leadership of the Special Constabulary should develop a strategic plan to build the future desired capability of Special Constables, spanning recruitment, skills, training, development and retention.

## ***Focusing upon improving opportunities and development***

Further improving the opportunities that Special Constables have to develop their skills and experience, and to maximise the impact of their volunteering, is a fundamental developmental task for Special leaders.

### **OPTION 19: Skills strategy**

The leadership of the Special Constabulary should effectively audit the skills of all Specials, and have a skills strategy for the further development, and the utilisation, of skills, mapped against demand and prioritised areas of policing.

### **OPTION 20: Specialist roles**

Special Constabulary leaders should further develop specialist roles and contribution across their Special Constables, focused on prioritised areas of policing need.

## ***Diversity of Special Constabulary leaders***

There is a fundamental strategic challenge of improving the diversity of Special Constabulary leadership. Progress on this issue has been limited over a number of years and there seems little energy or plan to improve upon this.

Whilst much of the progress on this issue will be achieved in the future at force level, there are some key developments that could be considered more generally and at national level.

### **OPTION 21: Diversity working group**

# Options for the future

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Establish a national working group of Specials, with a diverse membership, to give this agenda the energy, expertise and experience that it needs to move forward.

Such a model could also engage expertise, and diverse perspectives and experience, from outside of the Special Constabulary and from outside of policing (whilst ensuring that diverse perspectives within the Special Constabulary are paramount and heard).

The 'Future leaders' programme discussed at Option 12, the mentoring models discussed at Option 11, and the direct entry further explorations discussed at Option 13, could all be developed and focused to provide a positive action and pro-active approach to addressing issues of broadening and deepening leadership diversity.

## **OPTION 22: Positive action**

Models from beyond the policing sector could be considered to import into the Specials context. Such examples might include:

- Agreement that Specials leaders would not engage in panels, conference speaking events, and the like if there is not female, and not BME, senior representation. Such an approach is increasingly being adopted in several different sectors, as an antidote to the continuity of all white male panels at conferences and similar events;
- A Specials conference event could be organised, exclusively for female Specials, or exclusively for BME Specials, (or similar thinking);

- 'Champions' could be considered, to figurehead and drive the agenda for change;
- Quotas and more assertive positive action approaches could be considered to achieve a step-change in poor representation. Such models, e.g. all female shortlists in political representation settings, have been shown to effect quite rapid change in settings that would perhaps otherwise have changed only very slowly.

Due consideration of these models at the national and senior level across forces needs to be evidenced. Where decisions are taken not to engage these models, the rationale for those decisions and alternative routes of action to improve diversity in Specials leadership should be clear and transparent.

## ***Executive-level, senior strategic leadership of the Special Constabulary***

### **OPTION 23: Special Chief Officer role**

There are considerable advantages in having a senior, 'Chief', volunteer Special role. It is recommended that each force works towards having a Chief Officer role, taking time to design and implement the role in a way which properly integrates with force strategic and operational planning, performance management and delivery. To enable this, and as part of Option 4, an agreed national role profile for the Special Chief Officer should be created.

However, it is recognised that policing nationally is far from a consensus position on this issue,



# Options for the future

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with some widely differing views held at senior level.

Further engagement with Northumbria and Sussex (for example) should be undertaken to better understand those force contexts without rank structure, the pros and cons of such models, plans for leadership development in the future, and how those fit with the wider options being discussed in this report.

The current patchwork where some forces do have a Chief role, and some don't, and where such roles are being removed in some forces effectively because of personality or personnel issues, has an undermining effect on the 31 roles that remain.

## ***Coming together and the national picture***

The national picture of Special leadership is a challenging one. There is much that needs to be achieved in coming years at national level, and serious strategic questions about current capacity at national level to deliver on this.

The Special Constabulary at leadership level, and particularly at senior leader level, is in a period where national dialogue, communication and engagement across leaders is poor. For progress to be made across the Special Constabulary, and across the options discussed in this report, this context needs to improve.

### **OPTION 24: National meetings**

Senior leaders need to meet at a national level.

There should be a forum facilitated, perhaps by the College of Policing, for Special Chiefs to meet once or twice a year.

## **Conclusions**

Leadership in the Special Constabulary is important and there are some major challenges. The leadership of Specials has been a neglected issue at national level, and this has resulted in a very wide variation of practice and models across forces, and some significant problems which raise the question as to whether current leadership is 'fit for purpose', which this report concludes that it is not.

It is recognised that Specials leadership is also a contested arena, and that there are some widely contrasting but strongly held convictions on the subject in terms of future direction. Adding to that mix the sheer variety of current models and approaches means that taking this agenda forward in a coherent and collaborative way nationally is going to be a complex task. This will require considerable engagement across all Special Constabularies and consensus-building as solutions are developed.

This report provides useful evidence and thinking to form some of the foundations for the future development of Specials leadership, but at the same time it points to several remaining knowledge gaps.

It is striking in some ways how little has changed over recent years in respect of the issues engaged with in this report. Progress needs energy, organisation and leadership at the national level, and will require engagement and compromise at force level. It is simply not possible to develop a consistent national model across forces (and all the significant advantages

# Options for the future

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that would bring in terms of standards, interoperability, professionalisation and effectiveness) whilst also retaining a position of complete independence to pursue any path at force level. Ultimately, progression of the Special Constabulary leadership agenda will rest on the degree to which the right blend of local discretion and national standards and mandating can be found.

The options in this report are intended to be a start; to provide some beginning material to work from for those with national responsibility for leading the Special Constabulary and developing its leadership models for the future.

Finally, it just remains to thank the many Specials, and Special Constabulary leaders, who have contributed to this report, and without whose contribution its production would not have been possible. This report represents the largest ever engagement exercise in terms of Specials leadership. Effort has been made throughout to ensure the voice of Specials themselves be heard; hence the large volume of quotes across the report, allowing the perspectives and arguments of Specials across the whole debate on leadership to be expressed in their own words. It seems clear that whatever paths are taken to further develop the leadership of the Special Constabulary in the future, retaining that major focus on engaging Specials themselves, and their leaders, in all facets of that work will be critical to its success.





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