



**PROACTIVE POLICING:
THE ROLE OF A POLICE
COMMUNITY SUPPORT
OFFICER AND THE VALUE
OF COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

**Work Based Learning
Report**

Kelly Grant

[Note from the Editor:

Part of the assessed work for Criminology and Criminal Justice students who undertake work based learning as part of their final year studies is a poster presentation. The students submit their posters together with a brief overview of their time in placement and the issues that they found particularly interesting. Kelly undertook her placement with the Devon and Cornwall Police and examined the role of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who, as part of the wider police family, play a valuable role in further community engagement with the service. Her poster is a depiction of the issues relating to this topic.]

The final year of my BSc Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies degree programme incorporated a placement with Devon and Cornwall Police, where I was given the opportunity to shadow police officers and police staff, and work closely with local Police Community Support Officers (PCSO). This invaluable experience allowed me to gain first-hand knowledge of the everyday work of job roles within the police.

I particularly enjoyed the proactive element of my placement where I closely shadowed a PCSO. The duties that I assisted with included patrolling the community, tackling anti-social behaviour, assisting with house to house enquiries, gathering intelligence and engaging with the community. Assisting with all these elements allowed me to gain further understanding of a PCSOs work. The taught element of my degree programme provided an underpinning for my work placement, and it was in the work placement that I was able to apply theoretical knowledge gained from my course to real experiences.

Academic study allowed me to research the introduction of PCSOs under the Police Reform Act 2002, and the confusion that ensued surrounding their role. The slow

process of public acceptance, which was advocated by increasing reports of improved public confidence in the police, which directly correlated with the rise in police visibility (Thorpe, 2009) promoted my interest in the importance of PCSOs in the community. The England riots of 2011 also influenced my interest in the breakdown of relations between the police and the public, and the importance of community engagement in encouraging positive and mutually beneficial relations.

I applied my knowledge gained from my studies to first-hand experience and often discussed issues concerning PCSOs within my work placement. It was clear that financial resources and funding for PCSOs, along with job security, was a common concern amongst them. This came as a shock to me, since my own experiences and observations had confirmed the importance of PCSOs in the community. My poster demonstrated the value of PCSOs, not only for building relations in the community, breaking down cultural barriers, and providing a visual police presence to promote a safer community, but also in aiding police with gathering intelligence and allowing them to focus on more serious offending.

My placement with Devon and Cornwall Police, not only allowed me to apply theoretical knowledge to practical experience, but also provided an invaluable insight into police work with the intention of informing and supporting future career prospects. It also allowed me to investigate real issues concerning real people. For these reasons, I would recommend that students should consider work based learning as part of their course in order to apply what they have learned in University to practice, for a more informed and practical level of learning, and also to acquire a new set of skills associated with the workplace in preparation for the big wide world of work.

Reference

Thorpe, K. (2009). Public perceptions of the police and local partners – results from the BCS year ending September 2008, in Moon, D., Flatley, J. and Parfremment-Hopkins, J. (2011). *Perceptions of crime, engagement with the police, authorities dealing with antisocial behaviour and Community Payback: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office.



Proactive policing: The role of a Police Community Support Officer and the value of community engagement



INTRODUCTION

Police Community Support Officer's (PCSO's) were introduced under the Police Reform Act 2002, in response to public demand for increased visual police presence and improved community engagement. In recent years, the Government has removed the hindrance of government targets and 'bureaucratic accountability', allowing the police to focus on and respond to the public and their local communities more directly. PCSO's have been at the forefront of this approach, focusing on 'neighbourhood policing' and allowing police officers to concentrate on issues requiring their expertise.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Over time, as the role of PCSO's has developed and their purpose has become clearer, the public response to the employment of PCSO's has become increasingly positive. Thorpe (2009) found a strong correlation between high visual presence and improved public confidence in the police. Flatley et al (2010) found that those people who have confidence in the police and local council in dealing with low-level crime and anti-social behaviour were more likely to be aware of their local neighbourhood policing team (Home Office, 2010). This reinforces the importance of community engagement.

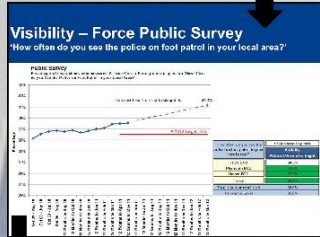
POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF PCSO ACTIVITY

- Visible police presence
- Community engagement
- Building trust and relationships with the community
- Breaking down cultural barriers
- Intelligence led policing
- Allow police to focus on serious offending
- Better representation of female and ethnic minority population
- Involvement in community projects
- Multi-agency approach

Recorded crime by Devon and Cornwall Police fell by 12% in 2010 (The national average of recorded crime fell by 8%). Sexual offences rose by 15% and drug offences rose by 6%, although this was as a result of awareness campaigns and targeting by the police.
Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-11597070>

Antisocial behaviour down by 13,190 incidents*

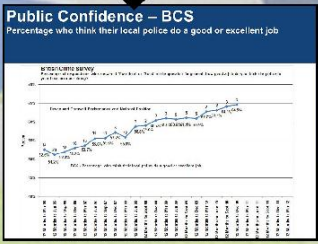
Devon and Cornwall has the 4th lowest crime rate in England and Wales



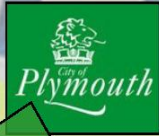
THE ROLE OF A PCSO

- Supporting the police in increasing public safety
- Tackling anti-social behaviour and underage drinking
- Contributing to the regeneration of local communities
- Dealing with truants, graffiti and litter
- Assisting with missing persons enquiries
- Helping to support victims
- Assisting with house to house enquiries
- Involvement in patrolling major public events
- Helping to control crowds
- Protecting the public from security threats

Source: <http://neighbourhoodpolicing.devon-cornwall.police.uk/Pages/PCSOs.aspx>



Graphs from: <http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/Info/Pages/ChiefNewsPartners/Pages/JulyNews.aspx>



'Plymouth City Council opposes any measure which would reduce, or threaten to reduce the number of Police Community Support Officers or full time equivalent Police Officers in Plymouth'

Plymouth City Council, Motion (No 7 09/10) and subsequent amendments, 1 February 2010.

ISSUES FACING PCSO's

- Lack of powers
- Budget cuts
- Little job security—classed as 'police staff'
- Lack of leadership at present time
- New Police and Crime Commissioner



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