

ILEC Session 5

British Transport Police Federation

Second Tier Policing

The British Transport Police is one of the oldest police forces in the UK and its sole concern is the provision of a police service to the travelling railway public and the protection of railway stations, the rail system and railway property generally. We also have police powers and jurisdiction throughout England Wales and Scotland. We are the only Force to have permanent jurisdiction in Europe in connection with Eurostar trains, stations and their vicinity.

I would identify at least two types of second tier policing.

Each police service has its regular officers recruited through a qualifying set of rigorous standards. Where there is a shortfall in the strength of a force there can be external pressure to drop the standards of recruit either in educational levels, physical prowess or even in standard of character. A similar pressure on standards can arise where a police force does not adequately reflect in its composition the ethnic make-up of the community it polices. Both these pressures can result in substandard recruits entering the force and giving an inferior or second tier of policing to the public.

The second type of second tier policing and the main object of our considerations is the institutionalisation of support services to the regular force into a separate body usually still regulated or supervised by the regular force. This can take the form of having special constables integrated into the force, police community support officers, traffic wardens and so on.

The Special Constabulary is the UK's part-time police force. The BTP has around 300 specials and is trying to recruit a further 400. It is made up of members of the public who volunteer to spend some of their time helping to police their local community. Every 'Special' is sworn in at court or in the presence of a magistrate in the same manner as a full-time ("regular") police officer.

Specials work alongside their regular colleagues and have the same powers in law, within their area of jurisdiction. The duties carried out by a Special Constable vary between forces but essentially they are the same as those carried out by any regular police officer.

There is no average shift but generally Specials will support the regular officers as necessary, from patrolling on foot or in a car, alone, with another special, or with a regular.

Specials are likely to get involved in all aspects of modern policing, including crime prevention, raids and warrants, special events, football matches, missing person

enquiries, road traffic accidents etc as well as dealing with crime such as anti-social behaviour, burglaries, fights and damage.

Specials will sometimes be required to attend court (Magistrates court, or Crown court which includes a jury). They may be required to give evidence about arrests they have made or incidents they were involved in where a person is being tried for an offence.

The Special Constabulary has grades similar to the ranks of regular police. It used to be the same throughout Britain, but was changed some years ago. Now it's starting to change back again and in many forces now you will find grades with names such as "special sergeants" and "special inspectors".

The modern structure is pretty much the same in every force – although the grade names and insignia may vary, the responsibilities are broadly the same.

The uniform of the Special Constable is nearly identical to that of a regular police officer. Minor uniform differences vary from force to force but include differentiated collar numbers and possibly a Special Constabulary jacket badge, or the letters "SC", sometimes with a crown above it, on the epaulettes.

In most forces, Specials carry identical kit (baton, handcuffs, CS spray etc) to their regular colleagues and are provided with access to safety equipment including stab vests. Different forces carry varying equipment – for example, some use a side-handled baton while others use the extending "ASP" baton.

Specials come from all walks of life and usually no formal qualifications are required. You need to be a European Economic Area citizen (or have unrestricted right to remain in the country), and you must be at least 18 years and 3 months, or under 50 at the time of application (this upper age limit does vary between forces.)

Potential Specials need to have reasonable reading and writing skills, and of course must be law abiding, respectful of others and community focused.

Specials are not paid. There is provision for payments to be made by individual Forces - bear in mind that the UK has 52 separate police forces. The jury is still out on whether it is worth paying Specials. Evaluation is still going on. In 1997 there were almost 20,000 Specials. By 2004 the figure had slumped to 11,000 with a further 2,500 applications coming forward to join. The current figure is around 13,000.

The main reason for the massive fall is officially put down to "external commitments". People are a lot busier these days in their full-time employment. I also suspect that people eventually resent giving up their time for nothing and secondly, the job is dangerous and quite obviously so.

The main points to note are:

- 1 As a supplement to regular officers the specials work quite well and are useful when large numbers of officers are required. The argument for specials, any unpaid reserve or police community service officers is totally cost driven. It will be dressed up as providing a vital link with the community and getting policing in on the ground with the local community. The reality is that specials or unpaid reservists are expected to work for free and to save the state the cost of providing the public with the professional police service they have paid for with their taxes and have a right to expect.
- 2 As a police federation we have chosen to represent Specials in discipline allegations only and to work with them. Failure to work with or co-operate would be to disobey a lawful order which would be a disciplinary offence and a public relations disaster.
- 3 What is of greater concern to us as a Federation is not the Specials but the growing recruitment in Britain of Police Community Support Officers - PCSO's This new brand of pseudo policing poses a bigger threat because these people will gradually be entrusted with police powers and take on police duties. They already have limited powers of detention of the public. They are paid less than police officers and are therefore much cheaper to employ.
- 4 My long-term view is that there whilst PCSO's are here to stay due to purely financial considerations they will have a direct effect on the number of properly trained police officers in the future. We envisage cutbacks in numbers. Currently we do not represent PCSO's, perhaps this is a wise move due to the increasing number of serious complaints they are attracting due to lack of training. But I can envisage a time when they may be represented by us.

British Transport Police Federation
October 2006