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Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Recruit Assessment Centre

Information for Candidates

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1. Introduction

We have received your application to become a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) and would like to invite you to take part in an assessment centre.

The assessment centre for the selection of PCSOs is known as the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre.

This document will provide you with all the information you need to know about the assessment centre in relation to what it will involve, how you will be assessed, how you can prepare and what happens afterwards. We advise you to take time to study this document before you come to the assessment centre.

The assessment centre will take approximately three hours. There may be an opportunity for a limited break in between exercises to have a small snack or drink so you may wish to bring something with you. This will not always be possible so candidates are advised to ensure that they have eaten before attending the assessment centre where possible.

Please bring the following documents with you to the assessment centre to confirm your identity.

- A full 10-year passport or **two** of the following:
 - British driving licence
 - P45
 - Birth certificate (issued within six weeks of your birth)
 - Chequebook and bank card (with three statements and proof of your signature)
 - Credit card with your photo on it
 - Proof of where you live (for example, a council tax bill, gas bill, electricity bill, water bill or phone bill).

If you do not bring the documents as listed above you will not be able to take part in the assessment centre.

When you arrive at the assessment centre we will check your identification documents. We will give you an outline of the assessment centre followed by a full briefing before each stage of the assessment. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and sort out any concerns you may have about the assessment centre.

The assessment centre will follow a strict timetable. You must arrive by the time we have set. If you arrive late you will not be able to take part in the assessment centre at that time. We may let you take part in another assessment centre later that day or week, but only in exceptional circumstances.

It is important to remember that you will be under assessment conditions for the duration of the assessment centre, even between exercises. You are expected to act in line with the Code of Ethics at all times and you are therefore advised to behave appropriately at all times during your assessment

centre. Failure to do so can result in you receiving an automatic fail at the assessment centre under the Penalising Unacceptable Language and Behaviour policy. For further details please see page 8 of this document.

Please note that you can not sit the Police SEARCH® Recruit Assessment Centre within six months of sitting the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre.

2. What is an assessment centre?

An assessment centre is a process where we look at how you perform in a variety of exercises.

We include the following processes in the assessment centre:

- We assess **what** you do and **how** you do it
- Trained assessors measure how you perform in exercises which relate to specific competencies
- We use information from all of the exercises to determine whether or not you have met the national standard by how well you demonstrated evidence across the competency areas being assessed.

Although your performance may meet the minimum national standard at the assessment centre, this does not necessarily guarantee you a post within the force you are applying to. For example, forces may have more candidates who have met the national standard than they have vacancies, therefore may choose to prioritise candidates by those who have achieved the highest scores above the minimum standard or by adding an additional assessment criteria (e.g. a subsequent force interview) in order to meet their own resourcing demands.

3. What does the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre involve?

The PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre consists of the following:

- interactive exercises
- a competency based structured interview

All candidates must also demonstrate an acceptable level of competence in written communication. Forces have a number of options in how they assess written communication as outlined below:

- Complete two written exercises completed **before** the assessment centre – candidates would need to pass the written exercises to attend the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre.
- Complete two written exercises **during** the assessment centre – candidates would need to pass the written exercises in order to be successful at the assessment centre.
- Accept a qualification of written English **before** the assessment centre – forces may ask candidates to complete a specific qualification, or provide evidence of having completed a specific qualification before they are able to attend the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre. The

qualification can be at force discretion but must be at a minimum level of Functional Skills Level 2 English (or equivalent).

- Accept a qualification of written English obtained **after** the assessment centre – forces may ask candidates to complete or provide evidence of having completed a specific qualification after they have attended the assessment centre. Candidates must have completed the qualification prior to being signed off as a PCSO.

If you are unclear on which of the above methods your force has chosen to use please contact the recruitment department for the force to which you have applied.

If you are sitting the two PCSO written exercises either in advance of or at the assessment centre please make sure you are familiar with the information which can be found on page 7 of this document.

The requirements set at one force may not be the same as at another force, but they will be at a comparable level. However you may be required to complete additional tests should you apply to another force.

All candidates will have competence tested across the same areas and we will assess each exercise equally. Other people will take the assessment centre at the same time as you. However, they may take the exercises in a different order. We will tell you in the briefing we give you on the day the order in which you will carry out the exercises.

All of the assessment centre documents were produced in line with the Plain English Campaign guidelines.

In the interactive and written exercises you will play the part of a newly appointed Customer Services Officer at a retail and leisure complex called The Westshire[®] Centre. The Westshire[®] Centre is a fictional place created for the assessment centre only. We have set out full details of the main duties and responsibilities of a Customer Services Officer and information about the complex in The Westshire[®] Centre Welcome Pack. We recommend that you read the information in the Welcome Pack as this will help you prepare for the exercises. You do not need to memorise the details of the documents in the pack as we will provide you with all the information you need in the preparation phases of the exercises.

For each of the interactive and written exercises we will give you all the information you need to deal with the situations and you **should not** introduce any extra information.

4. Which competencies will you assess at the assessment centre?

We assess competencies which are particularly relevant to the role of a PCSO. Skills for Justice have set out detailed descriptions of each of these competencies, which can be found in Appendix A. In addition we assess oral communication across the interactive and interview exercises and written skills in the written exercises as these are relevant for the role of a PCSO.

5. Interactive Exercises

What will happen during the interactive exercises?

Each of the two interactive exercises will be split into two five minute parts. The first part will be the preparation phase and the second will be the activity phase, where you will meet a role actor.

Preparation phase

During this phase we will give you written information relevant to the exercise you will carry out. We will give you a desk or room where you will have five minutes to study the information and prepare for the activity phase. If you want to make notes you may do so and you may refer to them during the activity phase. We will not assess you on your preparation. After five minutes a buzzer will sound and you will move to an activity room, taking any notes you have made with you for the activity phase.

Activity phase

In this part you will interact for five minutes with a role actor, in your role as a new Customer Services Officer. In each exercise the role actor may be male or female and the written information we give you in the preparation phase will have taken this into account. You will start the activity and they will respond to you using a strict set of lines which they have rehearsed beforehand. In this phase you are not allowed to write anything. A trained assessor will be in the same room and they will make notes of what you do and how you do it. An independent observer may also be present.

What information can you give me about the interactive exercises?

The following is an outline of the two interactive exercises that you will carry out in your assessment centre. The names we use refer to the last name of the role actor in the activity phase of each exercise.

- Garner, a shop owner in The Westshire[®] Centre, wants to discuss an incident that happened at the centre.
- Kowalski, a shop owner in The Westshire[®] Centre, wants to discuss an incident at their shop.

6. Interview

What will happen during the interview?

The interview will last for 20 minutes and we will ask you four questions. There will be two questions about your motivations and values and how these relate to the Police Service. There will be two questions about how you have dealt with specific situations in the past. Each of the four questions will be related to the competency areas relevant to the role of a PCSO, which can be found in Appendix A. We will give you up to five minutes to answer each question. The person interviewing you will stop you if you go over the five minutes. As the person interviewing you asks you the question, they will also give you a written copy of the question to refer to. They may ask you further questions to help you to give a full response. When you consider your responses to the interview questions, please only choose examples that you feel comfortable discussing with the person interviewing you.

The person who interviews you will assess your responses against the type of behaviours you need to perform effectively in the role.

What information can you give me about the interviews?

We will assess you on six different competencies during the 20 minute interview and some competencies will be assessed multiple times. Oral Communication will also be assessed throughout the interview. The competencies being assessed are:

- Decision Making
- Service Delivery
- Serving the Public
- Professionalism
- Openness to Change
- Working with Others

7. Written Exercises

How will my written skills be tested?

The written skills we will be testing at the assessment centre are your ability to comprehend and summarise information accurately, structure responses logically and to use spelling and grammar correctly.

What will happen during the written exercises?

Regardless of whether the written tests are completed prior to or during the assessment centre, candidates will complete two written exercises. Both exercises will last for approximately 30 minutes. We will show you into the exercise room along with the other candidates in your group. We will give you a thorough briefing before you start each exercise. We will provide paper and pens, together with documents to write your response. You may make rough notes on a separate piece of paper, which we will not assess. We will tell you when you have five minutes left and again when you have one minute left. We will assess the written exercises after you have finished the assessment centre.

What information can you give me about the written exercises?

The following is an overview of the written exercises that you will complete at your assessment centre:

- Written exercise one – you will be asked to read typed instructions before using this information to complete an incident report form.
- Written exercise two – you will be asked to make notes while watching a DVD of a person being interviewed about an incident that they have witnessed. You will then use these notes to complete an incident report form.

8. Preparing for your assessment process

How can I prepare for the interview, interactive and written exercises?

You can practise and improve your skills in relation to the competencies we assess. It may be useful for you to carefully consider your ability in relation to each of the six competencies. You could carry out a detailed and honest self-assessment and think of anything you could improve. You may also want to discuss your own situation in relation to the six competencies with your colleagues, friends or family.

We advise you to approach any assessment centre with an open mind, be yourself and behave as naturally as the circumstances allow.

For your information, the College of Policing does not endorse any training companies providing training or any training materials in relation to the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre.

9. Frequently Asked Questions

➤ **What is the Penalising Unacceptable Language and Behaviour (automatic fail) policy?**

Candidates are expected to act in line with the principles and standards of behaviour as set out within the Code of Ethics at all times during the assessment centre. If a candidate is believed to have acted in contravention of the code, been inappropriate to others inside or outside of exercises, or acted in a way which would provide them an unfair advantage over other candidates, the Quality Assurance (QA) team at the assessment centre will be notified. The QA team will independently review any evidence in relation to the candidate concerned and decide if there is sufficient evidence to award the candidate an automatic fail. Candidates cannot appeal against an automatic fail which is received at the assessment centre.

Candidates should treat all exercises at the assessment centre as they would any other tests or examination. Once you arrive at the assessment centre you should **not** refer to any notes that you have made outside of the exercises, and should not use mobile phones or other electronic devices. Please listen carefully to and follow instructions which are given to you by assessment centre staff. Failure to do so may be interpreted as an attempt to gain an unfair advantage, in breach of the Code of Ethics, and result in candidates receiving an automatic fail.

➤ **How do you assess me during the interview and interactive exercises?**

We have designed the assessment centre to make sure that we assess each of the six competencies relevant to the role of a PCSO more than once. You should not be concerned if you feel that you have not done well in any one particular exercise as you will have at least two other exercises where we will assess the same competencies again.

We will award your performance a grade on a scale from A to D, in each competency area within the exercises. We give As to the highest performing candidates and Ds to the candidates who do not perform so well. We award grades in relation to **what** you did and **how** you did it.

You do not need to know about customer services or the law or procedures relating to police work.

➤ **Who are the assessors, role actors and interviewers?**

The assessors, role actors and interviewers are either police officers or people who have been specifically chosen from the community. All the assessors, role actors and interviewers are highly trained and they are continually monitored throughout the assessment centre.

➤ **What information do the assessors, role actors and interviewers have about me?**

The assessors, role actors and interviewers will only know your candidate number, which we will give you when you arrive. They will have no other information about you.

➤ **What accommodation or reasonable adjustment can be provided?**

Should you have any condition, temporary or otherwise (e.g. pregnancy, injury, disability, including dyslexia etc.) that might cause you to be disadvantaged during the assessment centre you **may** be entitled to accommodation or reasonable adjustment. If you believe you may have a condition that could disadvantage you at the assessment centre, please contact the force you are applying to, who will be able to assist you with your application for accommodation or reasonable adjustment.

Any accommodation or reasonable adjustment provided for the assessment centre will be based on the information provided to us in a relevant report produced by an appropriately qualified professional. Reasonable adjustments may include additional time, use of coloured overlays or having material printed in a different font in the written exercises, interactive preparation or other adjustments as recommended by a specialist.

➤ **How will you give me my results?**

You will receive a 'Candidate Feedback Report' providing detailed information on how you performed in the assessment centre. The aim of the report is to show how you performed in each of the competency areas and exercises. Your force will give you your report. Please **do not** contact College of Policing Selection & Assessment directly to ask about the release date for results or candidate feedback reports.

➤ **How do I give feedback about the assessment centre?**

As part of the monitoring and development of the PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre, we would like your views and experiences of the process and you can give us feedback online by filling in a candidate feedback questionnaire. We will give you the website address after your assessment centre. We will not count any feedback you give us within that questionnaire as a formal appeal.

➤ **What is the appeals procedure?**

If you have a concern about an issue that occurs at a PCSO Recruit Assessment Centre you should raise it with your Candidate Co-ordinator on the day in the first instance. If it is not resolved and you still wish to report any extenuating circumstances or procedural concerns that you believe may have adversely affected your performance, you must do so in the form of a written appeal to the force you are applying to. It is your responsibility to provide supporting evidence at the time of writing.

YOU MUST SUBMIT THE APPEAL TO THE FORCE RECRUITING DEPARTMENT WITHIN SEVEN DAYS OF YOUR ATTENDANCE AT THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE. REPORTS RECEIVED AFTER THIS DATE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

Please note that views expressed through the candidate feedback questionnaire will **NOT** constitute a formal appeal. You should not expect a response to issues raised through this channel.

If you have met the national standard in the assessment centre your appeal will not be considered further. Only if you have not met the national standard will your appeal be considered. Procedural issues, however, will still be investigated as they may have important implications for the assessment centre as a whole.

Extenuating Circumstances

Extenuating circumstances are likely to be a serious event or series of events, such as illness, accident or injury, or the death or serious illness of a family member. Lack of preparation and/or a heavy workload prior to attendance at the assessment centre are not considered to be extenuating circumstances.

If you are aware of any extenuating circumstances prior to, or on the day of the assessment centre, you should report any problems that may affect your performance to the Candidate Co-ordinator before your assessment centre commences as these will not be grounds for appeal after the assessment centre. You will be given the opportunity to raise any issues with the Candidate Co-ordinator prior to the start of your assessment centre. It will be your decision as to whether you continue with the assessment centre or withdraw and attend a later assessment centre.

If you withdraw before the assessment centre commences you will be given the opportunity to attend the next available assessment centre. You will not need to re-apply, or wait the six month period that is applicable if you withdraw once the assessment centre has commenced; that is, if you have been exposed to the assessment centre exercise material. Once you have decided to commence, extenuating circumstances will not be grounds for appeal. The Candidate Co-ordinator will have explained this in the initial briefing.

On receipt of your results

After attending the assessment centre, you will have needed to have lodged an appeal within **seven days** of attendance at the assessment centre through formal channels. This is the only opportunity for you to submit an appeal. Appeals that were not received within the specified time scale will not be considered. Therefore appeals **cannot** be lodged having received your **result**.

Procedural Concerns

Procedural concerns will be investigated by the organisation responsible for managing the assessment centre.

Force recruitment representatives should respond directly to you to acknowledge receipt of the appeal. If the appeal has not been resolved within six weeks from the receipt of the appeal, the force representative should write to you to explain that your appeal is still being considered.

Successful appeals will not result in a fail result being changed into a pass. However, if upheld, you will be permitted, where possible, to attend another assessment centre when the exercises are changed or six months after your original assessment centre, whichever is sooner, without reapplication.

We hope this information is helpful and we would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success at the assessment centre.

Appendix A - Competencies Relevant to the Role of Police Community Support Officer

Practitioner (Constable, PCSO, Special and police staff practitioner)

Serving the public
Demonstrates a real belief in public service, focusing on what matters to the public and will best serve their interests. Understands the expectations, changing needs and concerns of different communities, and strives to address them. Builds public confidence by talking with people in local communities to explore their viewpoints and break down barriers between them and the police. Understands the impact and benefits of policing for different communities, and identifies the best way to deliver services to them. Works in partnership with other agencies to deliver the best possible overall service to the public.
Openness to change
Positive about change, adapting rapidly to different ways of working and putting effort into making them work. Flexible and open to alternative approaches to solving problems. Finds better, more cost-effective ways to do things, making suggestions for change and putting forward ideas for improvement. Takes an innovative and creative approach to solving problems.
Service delivery
Understands the organisation's objectives and priorities, and how own work fits into these. Plans and organises tasks effectively, taking a structured and methodical approach to achieving outcomes. Manages multiple tasks effectively by thinking things through in advance, prioritising and managing time well. Focuses on the outcomes to be achieved, working quickly and accurately and seeking guidance when appropriate.
Professionalism
Acts with integrity, in line with the values and ethical standards of the Police Service. Takes ownership for resolving problems, demonstrating courage and resilience in dealing with difficult and potentially volatile situations. Acts on own initiative to address issues, showing a strong work ethic and demonstrating extra effort when required. Upholds professional standards, acting honestly and ethically, and challenges unprofessional conduct or discriminatory behaviour. Asks for and acts on feedback, learning from experience and developing own professional skills and knowledge. Remains calm and professional under pressure, defusing conflict and being prepared to step forward and take control when required.
Decision making
Gathers, verifies and assesses all appropriate and available information to gain an accurate understanding of situations. Considers a range of possible options before making clear, timely, justifiable decisions. Reviews decisions in the light of new information and changing circumstances. Balances risks, costs and benefits, thinking about the wider impact of decisions. Exercises discretion and applies professional judgement, ensuring actions and decisions are proportionate and in the public interest.
Working with others
Works co-operatively with others to get things done, willingly giving help and support to colleagues. Is approachable, developing positive working relationships. Explains things well, focusing on the key points and talking to people using language they understand. Listens carefully and asks questions to clarify understanding, expressing own views positively and constructively. Persuades people by stressing the benefits of a particular approach, keeps them informed of progress and manages their expectations. Is courteous, polite and considerate, showing empathy and compassion. Deals with people as individuals and addresses their specific needs and concerns. Treats people with respect and dignity, dealing with them fairly and without prejudice regardless of their background or circumstances.