

# Understanding PCSO powers

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This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course BXY138 *Professional PCSO practice (work-based learning)*

<https://www5.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/programmes-england/police-community-support-of-ficer-apprenticeship>.

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## Introduction

Welcome to this free OpenLearn course *Understanding PCSO powers*.

Following the introduction of the PCSO in 2002, the role has become embedded in modern-day policing and is, for many communities, the only contact they have with someone they can pass information on to and raise issues of concern with.

This course will introduce you to some of the powers that PCSOs in England and Wales rely on every day while carrying out their duties. You will look at how the role of a PCSO complements response policing in the UK and consider how PCSO powers and procedures can be exercised fairly and without bias.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of study from the module [BXY138 Professional PCSO practice \(work-based learning\)](#), part of the PCSO apprenticeship programme which is delivered jointly by The Open University and North Yorkshire Police.

## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- identify key legislation outlining PCSO powers in England and Wales
- understand how powers are designated to a PCSO
- recognise certain situations where a PCSO can exercise their powers.

# 1 The role of the PCSO

The way that policing is undertaken has changed in recent years and so too have the roles within police services. Some aspects of policing, such as community policing, are no longer the sole responsibility of warranted police officers. For almost 20 years, police officers have been supported in their role by police community support officers (PCSOs). In 2002, the role of the PCSO was introduced by way of Schedule 4 of the Police Reform Act 2002. The powers that were initially available for the PCSO enabled them to deal with low-level crime and antisocial behaviour. However, in 2017, the Policing and Crime Act introduced changes to the Police Reform Act 2002. It created a set of preserved powers specific to PCSOs only and empowered the chief constables to grant at their discretion other powers to enable them to continue to deal with low-level crime, antisocial behaviour, and issues pertaining to their communities.



Figure 1 PCSOs are highly visible in communities

There is now a wider set of powers that can potentially be designated to a PCSO. In essence, PCSOs can have any power or duty of a constable other than a few specified 'police officer only' powers, for example stop and search. It is the decision of the chief constable of each force to determine which powers their PCSOs will have. PCSOs can assist warranted officers by specialising in different roles, such as investigating domestic abuse and online child sexual exploitation. It is quite possible that a PCSO in one police area will have slightly different powers to another police area a few miles away.

The role of PCSO is now highly visible and widely known to the public. In some police areas, PCSOs will be referred to as community support officers (CSOs). The PCSO role is predominately to give support to police officers in the community, and to be the link between the public and the police on the ground. The main reason for high visibility in communities is because that is what they are primarily required to do: get out in the local community and seek to interact with it, bring a visible presence to frontline policing, and reduce the fear of crime. PCSOs gather valuable intelligence from the community; they are often the eyes and ears of policing and their presence in the community has become important on a local level as a result of regular police officers' increasing involvement in other duties.

Policing is not just about responding to emergency calls but also about preventing crime from happening. This is especially true of the role of PCSO, which is a key part of community policing. To do this, it's necessary for police to get to know their neighbourhoods, which may be made up of different communities.

Being part of a community is fundamental to human wellbeing and it is how we learn to understand each other's needs and concerns. However, in life, it is possible to belong to more than one community (for example, geographic, academic, sporting and religious communities). These different communities will have varying needs from one another and are likely to be affected by different issues. Benefits can be wide ranging if, through PCSOs, the police can engage with all the different communities and work with them to understand the issues that concern them. These benefits can range from increasing

public confidence in reducing crime, collecting police intelligence and ensuring that no time or other valuable resources are wasted on ineffective policing.

You will now look at some of the powers that are applicable to PCSOs.

## 2 Introduction to powers applicable to PCSOs

Individual discretion plays a significant part in policing. It is individual police officers and PCSOs who will decide if it is necessary to, for example, detain someone, seize alcohol or tobacco from someone underage, or issue a fixed penalty notice (FPN). In order for PCSOs and police officers to deal with situations fairly, there is legislation in place that ensures this.



**Figure 2**


Figure 2 Female PCSO in uniform on patrol using a force-issued radio

PCSOs are employed directly by the local police authority they work for and some of their powers can be amended if need be by the local chief officer (College of Policing, 2019). Therefore, a PCSO in one police area may well have different powers to PCSOs in another police area. PCSO powers have been updated since the introduction of the Police Reform Act 2002, with specific powers conferred (these conferred powers are also applied at the discretion of the Chief Constable). PCSOs have been given additional discretionary powers, should the chief officer of their police area deem them necessary. The additional powers include, among others:

- seizing property
- issuing fixed penalty notices for parking in restricted areas outside schools
- cycling without lights and carrying a passenger on a cycle.

Now complete the following activity, in which you will consider the powers that you think PCSOs need in order to do their job.

### Activity 1 A day in the life of a PCSO

 Allow approximately 10 minutes.

Based upon the knowledge you've gained so far, and from your own observations of PCSOs where you live or work, create a list of the main powers you think they need to carry out their role. Are there any that police officers have that PCSOs do not, or



vice-versa? You do not need to include information on legislation; just create a practical overview of which powers would help them do their job on a day-to-day basis. Type your answer in the text box below.

*Provide your answer...*

The powers conferred on PCSOs are quite wide ranging and certainly go beyond what many people understand them to be able to do (College of Policing, 2019). Perhaps one of the main differences in the powers of a PCSO compared to a police officer is the power to arrest. A PCSO cannot arrest anyone using the powers given to them, although they do retain citizen powers of arrest that are found under both common law and Section 24A of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. If the power is conferred upon them by a Chief Constable, a PCSO can detain a person for up to 30 minutes to allow for a police officer to arrive who might arrest the person. If the suspect does not comply with this, then they commit a further offence. This varies from one police area to another. For example, at the time of writing this course a PCSO in North Yorkshire can do this whereas a PCSO working in Lancashire police area cannot.

## 2.1 Powers that cannot be granted to PCSOs

Designated PCSO powers are granted under Schedule 3C of the Police Reform Act 2002, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The act amended PCSO powers by allowing chief officers the discretion to designate powers that were not previously available. This meant that rather than having a limited generic suite of powers, chief officers could designate a wider variety of powers, duties and functions to meet the needs of their organisation and the needs of the public.

There are, however, powers that cannot be designated and are only available to a police officer. The box below shows the powers that cannot be designated to PCSOs.

### **Key law: Powers that cannot be designated to a PCSO**

Part 1, Schedule 3C of the Police Reform Act 2002, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, sets out the list of powers that are reserved solely for use by police constables and that cannot be designated to PCSOs. This includes:

- any power or duty of a constable to make an arrest
- any power or duty of a constable to stop and search an individual or a vehicle or other thing
- performing the role of custody officer
- any power that is exercisable only by a constable of a particular rank
- any power of a constable under the Terrorism Acts 2000–2015
- any power of a constable under the Official Secret Acts 1911–1989
- making an application for a warrant.

Click the link below to explore the powers that are specific to PCSOs. Open the link in a new tab or window so you can easily return to the course.

[PCSO specific powers](#) [Open the link in a new tab or window so you can easily return to the course.]

## 2.2 The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, commonly referred to as PACE, was introduced in the wake of several high-profile events in the 1980s, where the legitimacy of the police and the way they were conducting themselves was called into question. Events included the 1981 Brixton Riots in South London, police corruption, the treatment of people detained in custody and miscarriages of justice with police concocting false confessions. This meant that a greater need for 'procedural safeguards' (Newburn, 2011, p. 93) was needed to avoid similar abuses of police powers in the future and to establish greater public confidence in policing. An inquiry led by Lord Scarman followed the Brixton Riots and major police reform was recommended. This inquiry was the catalyst for the subsequent introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

PACE provides officers with a multitude of powers to enable them to effectively carry out their duties, and not only to provide safeguard for suspects in custody but also to guide police officers, non-police investigative staff and special constables in their investigative duties generally. Now, of course, there are elements of PACE that are applicable to the role of a PCSO, and you must understand and apply them where necessary. Areas such as searching, using force to enter premises, and questioning of persons detained are all enshrined in PACE and impact upon many aspects of the PCSO's role so must be followed by PCSOs and police officers alike.

## 3 PCSO powers – to search and seize

Whilst PCSOs do not have the power to stop and search individuals, which is restricted to police officers only, they do have limited powers to search persons and premises and seize articles. This can vary between forces. Though the search powers of PCSOs are limited, the way in which search and seizure procedures are carried out must be lawful, in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the codes of practice (specifically Code A).

There are several police powers and procedures that tend to divide opinion within communities and the media. One such power is stop and search, which has proved contentious for decades and remains so today. There has been much criticism of the use of stop and search powers by the police, centring on the use and misuse of this power; particularly in respect to individuals from Black and minority ethnic groups (Bowling, Parmar and Phillips, 2011).



Figure 3 A student is searched by a police officer and a PCSO during a demonstration

### 3.2 Defining a PCSO search and seizure

PCSOs working in the community will encounter many different people from different backgrounds. There are several scenarios that enable them to search a person and seize certain items of property. Some require prior consent from the person they wish to search, others do not. There are also age parameters that need to be considered relating to the search and seizure of alcohol and tobacco.

Annex C of PACE Code A (Home Office, 2014) provides a summary of PCSO powers to search and seize. It identifies three categories of search and seizure:

- Category 1 requires the consent of the person before the search can take place.
- Category 2 does not require consent, but there are conditions that need to be satisfied before the search can take place.

- Category 3 relates to the seizure of controlled drugs.

### Key law: Categories of search and seizure

#### Category 1 – Powers to search requiring the consent of the person and seizure

Where a person has been lawfully detained, the PCSO may search the person provided the person gives consent to such a search in relation to the following:

- persons for alcohol or a container for alcohol in an area covered by a public space protection order (PSPO)
- persons under 18 years old for alcohol in a public place
- persons under 16 years old found smoking tobacco or cigarette papers in a public place.

#### Category 2 – Powers to search not requiring the consent of the person and seizure

As set out in Category 3 to the Police Reform Act 2002, if the person has been lawfully detained, the PCSO may search the person without the need for that person's consent in relation to the following:

- persons made subject to a requirement to wait for objects that might be used to cause physical injury to the person or the PCSO in any place where the requirement to wait has been made.
- persons made subject to a requirement to wait for items that might be used to assist escape in any place where the requirement to wait has been made.

Please note that the threshold for conducting this search is 'reason to believe' (Police Reform Act 2002, Schedule 3C 8(2)).

#### Category 3 – Powers to seize without consent other items if found during a lawful search

This power applies when drugs are found during any search mentioned in Category 1 or Category 2:

- controlled drugs in a person's possession in any place where the person is in possession of the drug.

Please note that if the drugs are found in the course of a search on premises, then Section 19 of PACE will apply and this grants a general power of seizure.

## 3.3 Core knowledge required to undertake a search and seizure

The majority of searches and seizures conducted by PCSOs are carried out under the powers provided by the Police Reform Act 2002. The Police Reform Act 2002 also provides provision for a PCSO to enter and search premises for the purposes of saving life and limb or preventing serious damage to property, as governed by Section 17 of PACE. However, as in all search scenarios, PCSOs must follow the same PACE guidelines undertaken by police officers.

## Use of force

The use of force in policing is a very emotive subject. PCSOs do have the power to use reasonable force but only in certain circumstances.

If a person is lawfully detained by a PCSO who has been conferred with the power to detain, they are not under arrest. If that person is detained pending arrest by a constable and they refuse to remain with the PCSO, then the PCSO can use reasonable force to keep the person detained. If a PCSO has reasonable grounds to believe that the person has something on them that they could use to injure themselves or the PCSO, or which they can use to escape being detained, they can also be searched using reasonable force as provided for by Schedule 3C, Paragraph 11 of the Police Reform Act 2002. This can be tricky to communicate to a member of the public who may well never have had any dealings with the police. A firm grasp of the core knowledge will demonstrate a PCSO's professionalism and that the search will be dealt with in a courteous, fair and legal manner.

Activity 2 is designed to give you an understanding of the practical application of stop and search powers and procedures.

### Activity 2 Applying PCSO search and seizure powers operationally

 Allow approximately 30 minutes.

#### Part A

Listen to Audio 1, which introduces the procedures associated with stop and search for officers, and search and seizure for PCSOs. You may find it helpful to take notes as you listen or to revisit any sections you do not understand. When you have finished listening to the audio, move on to the questions below.

Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio 1 Stop and search procedures

- i. Barry is in a fashion clothing shop on the high street. He is seen by a member of the public putting a leather jacket from a display into his bag and leaves the shop without paying for it. The member of public points out Barry to a PCSO who is on patrol near the shop. The PCSO follows Barry along the high street and into the cinema that is just along the street from the shop. Barry does not buy a ticket but does walk into one of the screens where the PCSO stops him. The PCSO requests the person's name and address and Barry refuses. The PCSO then waits for a police officer to attend to search Barry.

Can the police officer, when they arrive, search Barry even though members of the public should pay to go into the cinema?

- Yes, the public do have access to the cinema even though they should really buy a ticket to get in.
- Yes, but only if the person works there.
- No, there is no right in law to stop and search someone in a privately run cinema, even if the public can buy a ticket to watch a film.

No, the cinema has to be free to get into to mean it is truly a public place.....

Section 1(1)(a) of PACE states that a public place is any place where ‘the public or any section of the public has access, on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission’ (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984).

Barry should have bought a ticket but didn’t. However, the police can still search him in the building, as it is usually open to the public and they have ready access.

- ii. You are working as support in the town centre with plain clothes officers on a planned operation aimed at tackling an increase in scooter robberies in the area. The operation requires your police officer colleagues to wear plain, non-uniform clothes instead of their usual police uniform. One of your plain-clothes colleagues speaks to a female, who they suspect has a stolen mobile phone in her jacket pocket, and detains her for the purposes of a stop and search.

Does your colleague have to show her their warrant card?

- No, as long as you tell her who you are.
- No, there is no requirement for officers to identify themselves.
- Yes, officers in plain clothes should show their warrant card to the person being searched.
- Yes, but only because it is a specially planned operation.....

If you are in plain clothes, then you should show your warrant card to the person being searched. It is not sufficient simply to tell them who you are or, worse still, not identify yourself at all. The fact that it is a planned operation has no impact upon a stop and search procedure.

PACE Code A (Section 3.8) states:

Before any search of a detained person or attended vehicle takes place the officer must take reasonable steps, if not in uniform (see *paragraph 3.9*), to show their warrant card to the person to be searched or in charge of the vehicle to be searched.

(Home Office, 2014)

- iii. Can physical appearance alone be enough for an officer to form reasonable suspicion to stop and search someone?

- Yes, if the officer knows people who look like that take part in crime.
- Yes, if there is supporting information or intelligence that gives a description.
- No, you can never use a person’s physical appearance to help you form reasonable suspicion.
- No, protected characteristics such as age, gender, religion and race cannot be used to form reasonable suspicion.....

Personal factors such as a person’s physical appearance alone can never be used to support reasonable suspicion. However, Section 2.2B of PACE Code A does state that it is permissible if ‘the police have information or intelligence which *provides a description* of a person’ carrying an article (Home Office, 2014).

## 4 PCSO powers – traffic-related matters

Traffic-related matters are often a source of complaints from the community. They can range from bad and inconsiderate parking to cars meeting at various places causing noise and nuisance. Depending on which police area they work in, a PCSO has several powers to deal with road-traffic-related matters.

### 4.1 Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002

The antisocial use of motor vehicles encompasses a wide range of activities that impact on communities, pedestrians and other road users. Although some individuals may see it as harmless fun, the offenders are not only committing offences but also placing people at risk.

Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 is a key power designated to PCSOs to help tackle the antisocial use of vehicles. It grants a PCSO the power to seize a vehicle which the PCSO has reason to believe is being used in a manner which contravenes Sections 3 or 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. This includes careless and inconsiderate driving and prohibition of off-road driving and causing alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public.

#### Key law: Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002

##### Vehicles used in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance

1. Where a constable in uniform has reasonable grounds for believing that a motor vehicle is being used on any occasion in a manner which—
  - a. contravenes Section 3 or 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 (c. 52) (careless and inconsiderate driving and prohibition of off-road driving), and
  - b. is causing, or is likely to cause, alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public,

he shall have the powers set out in subsection (3).

(Police Reform Act, 2002)

Police forces will have different policies regarding the use of such powers. For example, North Yorkshire Police's policy is that an officer must see the manner of driving to enact their powers under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002. The powers cannot be exercised unless the driver is both using the vehicle antisocially and committing offences under either Section 3 or Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. If someone is driving in a way that might be considered antisocial but not committing either of these Road Traffic Act 1988 offences, they are not liable to having their vehicle seized. If someone is committing a different motoring offence, they are also not liable to having their vehicle seized.

Under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002, the driver of the vehicle is initially given a warning, which lasts for 12 months. If that driver is dealt with again for antisocial use of a motor vehicle, the vehicle will be seized. It's worth noting here that a Section 59 warning applies to both the driver and the vehicle, so if someone else drives the same vehicle in an antisocial manner in the enforcing period then the same penalties apply.

A PCSO has the same powers as a police officer under the legislation except for the power stated in Section 59(3)(c) of the Act, a power of entry. It should be noted that a PCSO can only enter premises in the presence of a constable.

## 4.2 Vehicles illegally parked and causing an obstruction

Vehicles that are illegally parked or are parked in such a way that they are causing an obstruction to pedestrians, can give rise to neighbour disputes. They can also make access for wheelchair users difficult, causing problems for other people with mobility issues, people with young children, and the elderly. There is also the issue of impairing the vision of drivers, which could lead to road traffic collisions, particularly if the offending vehicle is parked in a dangerous position. Poorly parked vehicles can also cause issues for the emergency services, who may require access to an area to deal with an emergency. The same applies to broken down and abandoned vehicles: abandoned vehicles can lower the general appearance of an area and may lead to low-level crimes such as damage and graffiti. This is known as the Broken Windows Theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982).



Figure 4 Vehicle parked on the pavement causing an obstruction

Another issue that may be raised by members of the public is people riding pedal cycles on the pavement. The views of the public will vary in relation to pedal cycles, and this can lead to dispute and/or confrontation.

Click the link below to reveal the powers that a PCSO may have in order to deal with illegally parked vehicles and cyclists riding on footpaths. The offences highlighted in the interactive are not definitive but are included because they are illustrative of the types of powers a PCSO has.

[PCSO traffic related powers](#) [Open the link in a new tab or window so you can easily return to the course.]



## 5 PCSO powers – alcohol offences

Although the sale of alcohol is a large part of the nighttime economy, it is also one of the main contributing factors to the demand not only on police resources but also those of the other emergency services. There will be a range of situations a PCSO will face where at least one of the people involved is either drunk or under the influence of alcohol. The effects of drinking excess alcohol can cause some people to become aggressive (Paton, 2005) towards other people and property, and pose a danger to themselves.



**Figure 5**

Figure 5 PCSOs dispose of alcohol confiscated from youths drinking in the street

Alcohol can contribute to antisocial, disorderly and criminal behaviour, particularly in young people. This is compounded when they are young and inexperienced drinkers. The problem does not just stay in the town centres on a Saturday night but is an all too common occurrence in our parks and open spaces. It is also an opportunity for others to exploit young persons under the influence of alcohol.

For a PCSO to deal with young people and alcohol, they have the power under Schedule 3C, Paragraph 4(1) of the Police Reform Act 2002 to require the surrender of alcohol from under 18s. This is accompanied by Section 1(1) of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997.

### 5.1 Confiscation of alcohol from young people

It is not unusual to come across under 18 year olds drinking in public places, such as playing fields, parks, outside community buildings and in the street. Dealing with the problem can be time-consuming for the police and sometimes a precursor to wider issues. Complaints from local residents about late-night noise, littering, minor criminal damage and broken glass in children's play areas often lead to the police being tied up dealing with underage drinking issues for long periods of time.

#### **Key law: 1(1) Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997**

The definition for the offence is provided below. It should be noted that although the legislation uses 'constable', the power is exercisable by either a constable or duly authorised PCSO.

Where a constable [or PCSO] reasonably suspects that a person in a relevant place is in possession of alcohol and that either—

- a. he is under the age of 18; or
- b. he intends that any of the alcohol should be consumed by a person under the age of 18 in that or any other relevant place; or
- c. a person under the age of 18 who is, or has recently been, with him has recently consumed alcohol in that or any other relevant place.

the constable [or PCSO] may require him to surrender anything in his possession which is, or which the constable [or PCSO] reasonably believes to be, alcohol or a container for alcohol.

(Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997)

In the first instance, a PCSO has the power to request a person's name and address in relation to Section 1(1AA) of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997, and it is an offence if the person does not give this information.

In respect of the confiscation of alcohol, PCSOs have the power to dispose of the alcohol and container in an appropriate manner.

## 5.2 Other alcohol offences – drunk and disorderly, and being found drunk

A PCSO on patrol in a neighbourhood will often come across people who are drunk. As a PCSO, it's important they understand what behaviour is classed as 'drunk' and what behaviour is classed as 'disorderly'. If conferred upon them by their Chief Constable, PCSOs have the power to deal with drunk and disorderly and being found drunk on the highway by way of a penalty notice for disorder (PND). This significantly reduces administration time for the police and courts in dealing with relatively minor offences. However, someone who is drunk cannot be issued with a PND whilst drunk, meaning a PCSO would usually have to call upon the assistance of a police officer colleague to arrest the drunk person, should that be necessary in the circumstances. The offence can be dealt with through the court and is triable summarily, with the penalty applicable being a fine or one month's imprisonment.

### Key law: Section 91(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 1967

The definition for this offence is:

Any person who in any public place is guilty, while drunk, of disorderly behaviour shall be liable.

(Criminal Justice Act 1967)

The legislation does not stipulate what 'drunk' is, but the Oxford English Dictionary uses the explanation 'has drunk intoxicating liquor to an extent which affects steady self-control; intoxicated, inebriated' ('Drunk', 2022). Similarly, 'disorderly' uses the standard Oxford English Dictionary definition of 'opposed to or violating moral order, constituted authority, or recognized rule or method; not submissive to rule, lawless; unruly; tumultuous, riotous. (Of persons, or their actions, etc.)' ('Disorderly', 2022). Evidence of the defendant's behaviour can be from an officer giving a witness testimony.

On occasion, a PCSO may be called to assist police officer colleagues to deal with such incidents, such as offences relating to drunkenness on licensed premises. However, it is generally more likely they will encounter young people and alcohol, and those who are drunk and disorderly away from pubs and clubs.

### Activity 3 Dealing with young people and alcohol

 Allow approximately 10 minutes.

A PCSO is on duty in the town that they are regularly posted to. Their patrol takes them past a local playground, which has a shelter, some swings and other play equipment. The area is overlooked on three sides by residential properties. Historically, there have been reports of youths drinking alcohol in the area. The PCSO sees a group of youths, possibly around 14 or 15 years old, who appear to be drinking from a large plastic bottle of cider. The group see the PCSO and one of them hides the bottle under their coat. The PCSO lawfully asks for their names and addresses and checks them with the control room. Most of the youths are under 18, except for one male who is 18. On the ground are two carrier bags. The PCSO identifies, through questioning, that the bags belong to the 18-year-old male. In one of the carrier bags, they see what they believe to be another bottle of cider.

In relation to the unopened bottle of cider in one of the carrier bags, which of the following statements is correct?

- a) As the unopened bottle of cider belongs to the person over 18, it cannot be confiscated.
- b) The PCSO can request that the person over 18 gives the alcohol to them.
- c) The PCSO can require the person over 18 to give the alcohol to them and return the bottles to the station as they are unopened.
- d) The PCSO can require the person over 18 to give them the alcohol and dispose of it.

.....

#### Answer Comment

The correct answer is d. With all the information the PCSO has, the persons under the age of 18 have been consuming alcohol with a person over 18. This allows the PCSO to require them to surrender the alcohol, which they can then dispose of.

## Summary

The activity that you've just completed, along with the rest of this course, has allowed you to gain a greater understanding of the role of a PCSO. The scope of the role and how the incidents and situations that PCSOs must deal with can vary greatly from one police area to another. Their powers and responsibilities are reflected in this variety and these too can be different from one police area to the next. You have studied an overview of the designated powers of a PCSO.

The course has also looked at further offence legislation used at typical incidents. You will be starting to appreciate the breadth of legislation that a PCSO needs to learn and understand. But these are just some of the powers that a PCSO uses on a regular basis because there are too many to cover in one short course. Others include powers that allow them to deal with vulnerability, such as civil disputes, dealing with offensive weapons, dealing with psychoactive substances, traffic and roads incidents, antisocial behaviour and the gathering of information and intelligence in the community, amongst many others.

## Conclusion

This free course, *Understanding PCSO powers*, set out to help you gain a greater understanding of the role of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and consider some of their powers and responsibilities.

The main learning points for the course are:

- The PCSO role is predominately to give support to police officers in the community, and to be the link between the public and the police on the ground.
- They are required to get out in the local community and seek to interact with it, bringing a visible presence to frontline policing, and reduce the fear of crime.
- They engage with every local community, working with them to understand the issues that concern them. The benefits of this approach range from increasing public confidence to reducing crime and gathering valuable police intelligence.
- PCSOs are employed directly by the local police authority they work for and some of their powers can be amended, if need be, by the local chief officer. This means it is quite possible that a PCSO in one police area will have slightly different powers to another PCSO in a different police area.
- They have powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) to search people and seize property.
- They also have powers under other legislation to deal with a variety of situations. This includes where vehicles are used in manner which causes alarm, distress or annoyance, seizing alcohol from under 18s, and dealing with people who are drunk and disorderly.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [BXY138 Professional PCSO practice \(work-based learning\)](#).

## Acknowledgements

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## Further reading

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Paton, A. (2005) 'ABC of alcohol: alcohol in the body', *British Medical Journal*, 330(7482), pp. 85–87.

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