



Ride Along Policy

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Accessibility	The document view can be changed to suit individual needs – click Design, Page Colour, choose page background colour).
Policy development support	There is guidance throughout this template to assist in the writing of this policy. This text can be deleted once the document is in full draft. There is a table of contacts at the end of the document for more specific support.

Document history/change log

Date: 30/07/25

Author/reviewer: Temporary Chief Inspector Sanders

Amendment(s) and rationale: Due to the changes in staffing this policy needs to adapted to remove the need for citizens in policing input.

Date of approval/adoption:

Ride along policy – quick guide

This page is a quick guide; it does not replace the need to read the full policy or procedure.

- The policy is designed to allow members of the public to have an insight in frontline policing with the objective of improving overall confidence in policing.
- All ride along applicants must complete an application form which can be located:
<https://www.westmercia.police.uk/police-forces/west-mercia-police/areas/west-mercia/about-us/about-us/ride-along-scheme/ride-along-scheme/>
- All applicants will be subject to police national computer (PNC) and local checks by the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) Sergeant for the area to ensure suitability for the scheme. Any final decisions on suitability for the ride along scheme is to be made by the SNT Sergeant.
- Any checks that result in safeguarding concerns will result in the person not being eligible for the ride along scheme. If the Sergeant is unsure this may be escalated to the relevant SNT Inspector.
- The ride along is to be allocated to a Safer Neighbourhood Officer, who must follow the process map, officer guidance, complete the risk assessment and ensure the declaration is completed.
- Once the ride along has been completed a feedback form is to be sent out.
- Any queries around the scheme to be directed to Temporary Chief Inspector Sanders.

A policy is a statement of intent or a set of rules that governs the behaviour of the workforce or parts of it. The policies of the force establish clear rules that may be referred back to in the future.

1 Policy outline

- 1.1 To provide guidance for members of staff and lay observers accompanying police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) on patrol duties.
- 1.2 This policy applies to members of staff and lay observers accompanying police officers and PCSOs on patrol duties.

2 Purpose of the policy

- 2.1 The ride along scheme offers members of the public the opportunity to join officers on patrol and experience daily policing first hand. The scheme is open to anyone aged 18 and over and it is geared towards applicants living within the West Mercia Police area.

The ride along scheme is a key engagement and outreach tool that performs a vital role in themes around trust and confidence with all our communities. It enables members of the public to see the type of work performed by the police. It also gives an insight to those thinking of joining the police and encourages participants to share their experiences widely. The nature of policing is inherently complex and therefore the ride along scheme offers the opportunity for transparency and accountability in policing processes.

- 2.2 The scheme is not intended as blue light experience, but is designed to provide members of the community a chance to see how their local policing team operates. This not only enables community members to witness first-hand the roles, responsibilities and challenges of policing but also presents an opportunity to share experiences to better inform and improve our understanding of community perceptions.
- 2.3 This policy gives clear guidance for those either administering or participating in the scheme. West Mercia Police staff will follow the same application process and procedures as members of the public. This is due to insurance cover and other factors such as variations in training. West Mercia staff should make clear on their application who they are and for which department they work.

3 Implications of the policy

- 3.1 Adherence to this policy will protect officers and police staff in the undertaking of their duties and reduce the risk of legal action against West Mercia Police, protecting the reputational standing and the credibility of the force.

4 Policy – The ride along

- 4.1 Operational, political and community relations' considerations make it advantageous for West Mercia Police to allow a wide range of people to patrol as observers with police officers and PCSOs within SNT and Patrol.
- 4.2 Adherence to this policy will contribute to reducing the risk of:
- Injury to any observer patrolling with police officers and PCSOs; and/or
 - Litigation; and/or
 - Prosecution under health and safety legislation
- 4.3 Examples of persons likely to undertake observations are:
- Members of the public
 - Members of staff
 - Police and Crime Commissioner and his/her deputy
 - Journalists and other media workers
 - Staff from partner agencies
 - Members of Parliament
 - Members of Independent Advisory Groups or other scrutiny groups
 - Members of the Police Cadet scheme and
 - Advocates of Citizen Academies
- 4.4 There may be occasions where the observers are from partner agencies or have specific skills and the observer may feel that their skills are being called upon in the circumstances which present themselves during the ride along. Possibilities are wide ranging, but an example could be where a member of a mental health partner agency is observing an officer and through interaction with a person suffering from a mental illness, their skills or expertise is required to deal with the dynamic incident.
- 4.5 The officer will need to balance the need of the member of the public, their own duty as a police officer and the risk to all parties concerned. All incidents must be brought to the attention of the local duty Inspector and circumstances and rationales for any decisions need to be fully documented.

5 The ride along process

- 5.1 The SNT shall have responsibility for the administration and application of the process and how the policy is implemented by prospective observers on the ride along. The Sergeant in

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charge of the local policing team shall be responsible for the arrangements of the ride along once screening is completed, in observance of this policy.

- 5.2 The provision of documentation with this procedure is to ensure that a standardised approach is taken in relation to each request.
- 5.3 All applications must be made via the SNT and will initially be managed by the Sergeant in each local policing team.
- 5.4 This will involve a local due diligence check to determine the suitability of the applicant. The Sergeant on receipt of the application will:

- Check for self-disclosed convictions
- Do a search on the PNC.

Should any of these checks show a record, the administrator will send the applicant a Non Police Personal Vetting Form 1 (NPPPV1) for the applicant to complete then send to vetting. When a response has been received the applicant will either get the acceptance or non-acceptance email (Appendix A).

Previous convictions may not necessarily stop participation; all requests will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

Applicants under the age of 18 will not be considered for this scheme, due to safeguarding concerns.

- 5.5 After this due diligence check an emailed response will be sent to the applicant Informing them that their application was either:
- Successful; or
 - Unsuccessful
- 5.6 Successful applicants will then be contacted by the local policing team to agree a time and date, using the information provided on the initial application.
- 5.7 The Sergeant in charge of that policing team will then make the necessary arrangements appointing an officer to act as the single point of contact (SPOC) for the observer. The SPOC must be an officer with a wide experience of policing incidents and the risks involved. This is likely to make the role more suited to SNT than Response. The SPOC should be appointed to that role and given guidance on the type of incident they can take the observer to and when to terminate a ride along, this briefing will include a briefing on the current risk assessment.
- 5.8 The SPOC will contact the applicant to arrange a suitable, mutually convenient date and time for the ride along.
- 5.9 A ride along experience should last no longer than three hours.

- 5.10 After the ride along the SNO in charge of the ride along will send the observer a survey to enable the force to monitor and improve its scheme which will be sent via Neighbourhood Matters, the force messaging system.
- 5.11 A map of this process is attached (Appendix C).

6 Risk assessment

- 6.1 A specific risk assessment is attached (Appendix D). This should be reviewed by officers prior to the commencement of a ride along with the usual risk assessments for Patrol and Mobile Patrol. Officers and PCSOs should conduct their usual Dynamic Risk Assessment throughout their patrol with consideration of the observer.
- 6.2 A briefing document is available on the shared drive which gives specific guidance to officers in relation to being a SPOC under the scheme with observers.
- 6.3 Legal, and Health and Safety responsibilities require that the full procedure should be followed in each case.

7 Journalists

- 7.1 Where the prospective observer is a journalist or other member of staff from the media, the Corporate Communications function must be informed.

8 Social media guidance

- 8.1 The use of any camera, mobile phone or other recording device can only be used with the express permission of the escorting officer. In no circumstances is live filming for social media allowed.
- 8.2 The ride along scheme by its very nature means that participants will be as close as possible to the activity they are observing. The observer is therefore to observe strict confidentiality guidelines in respect of any information or documentation that is seen heard or read. Information includes but is not limited to spoken word including radio communications written and printed material computer systems including those within police cars and confidentiality waste.
- 8.3 Whilst participants can talk in general terms about what they saw as part of the ride along such as the general nature of a crime officers respond to, participants must not talk or write about or post on social media any information that could identify any individuals involved in a crime or any victims of crime as this may conflict with an individual's right to confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 2018 for example names, addresses, date of birth, photographs, and recordings.
- 8.4 Participants should seek advice from the SPOC and their agreement if in doubt about the contents of their social media post.

- 8.5 No notes, photographs, tape recordings, or similar may be taken without prior agreement of the West Mercia Police force.
- 8.6 In certain circumstances police have a duty to inform the Crown Prosecution Service of the existence of such material and participants could be required to provide copies of it to the police.
- 8.7 Discussion or further disclosure of such information or retention of any documentation received during the ride along is a breach of the Data Protection Act (2018), improper use may constitute an offence under the Official Secrets Act (1989) and the Computer Misuse Act (1990).

9 Dress code

- 9.1 Participants are to wear appropriate footwear for walking, and clothing which is suitable for the time of year. This should include a waterproof jacket or similar.

10 Briefing for observers

- 10.1 A briefing document for observers is attached (Appendix E). It is designed to be accessible to the public on the force website, alongside this policy, and is referenced in the initial application.
- 10.2 Any reasonable adjustments are to be identified, and it is the responsibility of the observer to make the SPOC aware of any physical or mental restrictions on health these will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis with the support of the staff disability association if necessary. If it is felt they are not suitable for the ride along scheme, consideration will be given to placing them in an observer role where they can observe non-sensitive information on day-to-day activities i.e. in an operational unit in a police station.
- 10.3 The observer and the SPOC will read and sign their respective safety briefs as the last thing they do before leaving the station. These documents will be held by the SNT with a copy scanned and sent to the Duty Inspector. The original documents will be held by the SNT as per the current retention policy.

11 Guidance and risk assessments for SPOCs

- 11.1 The SPOCS will be given training on the appropriate guidance, including the safety of the observer.
- 11.2 On the day of the ride along the SPOC must check that the participant has brought with them an official form of photo identification. Participants must be already briefed that they will comply strictly with all instructions that they are given by the SPOC.
- 11.3 The SPOC will get the observer to sign the indemnity document/Official Secrets Act (Appendix F).
- 11.4 The SPOC will give the observer a copy of the observer's briefing sheet.

12 Guidance for supervisors

- 12.1 Supervisors should ensure that the SPOC is an experienced and trained officer with a wide knowledge of policing and the risks involved.
- 12.2 Supervisors should have oversight of the types of incidents that might be attended by the observer, as some incidents are by their very nature distressing and have wide implications on communities including families. Consideration should be made of the appropriateness of the observer's attendance and whether their presence may have an impact on the escalation of that situation on both the members of the public and to the observer. Incidents an observer must not be involved in include:

- Pursuits and follows
- Blue light response
- Sudden deaths
- Incidents of domestic violence
- Firearms
- Any incident where there is an apparent risk of violence
- Child abuse
- Serious sexual offences
- Serious road traffic collisions (RTC) where death or life changing injuries may have occurred
- Mental health incidents

If the observer is a police staff member there can be exceptions to the above if they can be justified on a case-by-case basis where it is relevant to their role. This justification would need to be recorded on the ride along documentation.

- 12.3 The local policing team supervision must ensure that the SPOC is fully briefed and completely understands the risk assessment and the visibility of tasks they may be party to, it is then for the SPOC to fully brief the observer with all possible risks and dangers both mental and physical which they may be exposed to. The force operations room must be made aware of the observer's presence at the start of communications.
- 12.4 The observer does not have a right of entry to private dwellings and permission must be sought before they can enter. The ride along must not be used as a first response to any incident.

13 On going risk assessment during ride along

- 13.1 The observer will be inexperienced in policing and therefore a duty of care exists to ensure that they are kept safe. Harm includes physical, emotional and psychological harm, or injury. In order to mitigate the risks that may arise to the observer's physical health the following control measures exist:
- Observers must not be allowed to handle any weapon, sharp object, or chemicals or any substance that may pose a risk to their health.
 - Observers are not permitted to access, unescorted, any police station department or area.
 - Observers in any police station must not be permitted to enter any custody suite unless it would be unsafe for them to remain elsewhere.

14 Observers own risk assessment

- 14.1 Where the observer works for an external organisation or company their employer should conduct their own risk assessments of their activity and interaction with operational policing and provide appropriate controls which should be examined to ensure it is suitable and sufficient.

15 Supervision by SPOCs

- 15.1 Ideally there should be a minimum of two SPOCs to observe with a non-driver having direct oversight of the observer.
- 15.2 Wherever possible observers should not be exposed to confrontation and violent situations. Consideration should be given to ensuring they are either dropped off at a place of safety or instructed to remain in the car. The SPOC will draw upon their training and policing experience in making such decisions.
- 15.3 Supervision of the observer is to be allocated to the SPOC who will be briefed on their responsibilities and the agreed scope of activities to be undertaken.
- 15.4 If during the ride along the SPOC identifies that calls for service are increasing, or there is a major incident, the observer should ideally be returned to the police station or escorted to a place of safety at the direction of the SPOC. This could be a local train station, bus station, shop or café. The observer must be in position to make their way back to a police station.
- 15.5 Consideration must be given to the duty of care for the observer, regarding the ride along times, the time should not, for example, involve a night shift, and the observer should be able to return to home safely after the ride along, on public transport if necessary.
- 15.6 SPOCs are to contact their supervisor should advice or support be required in risk assessing the continuance or termination of the ride along.

- 15.7 An appropriate communication strategy should be agreed with the observer, ideally a mobile phone number, to be given to the SPOCs, to use in case of emergency or becoming separated.
- 15.8 Guidance should be given and agreed actions taken if a confrontational situation or other potential hazard is encountered.

16 Observers mental health - stress and trauma

- 16.1 SPOCs should monitor the welfare of the observer, including stress, and inform their supervisors of any concerns and consideration should be given to terminating the ride along.

17 SPOC welfare considerations

- 17.1 Observers, by their presence or their behaviour, must not place an unacceptable strain on the police officers accompanying them. SPOCs should terminate the ride along if such a situation arises.
- 17.2 The SPOC should contact a supervisor if, after risk assessing the ride along, it is felt necessary to terminate the ride along.
- 17.3 The SPOC should dynamically risk assess and terminate the ride along if there is unacceptable risk of harm to the observer from the nature of the calls being attended.

18 Ongoing considerations for the ride along scheme

- 18.1 Policing may involve attending calls that are by their very nature traumatic, or where there are vulnerabilities present, SPOCs need to consider the appropriateness of the participant's presence, and what impact this could have on the victims, witnesses, and other members of the public. This may mean explaining the observer's role to any interested parties at any incident. This is a further reason why this scheme is less suited to Response Policing and where possible SNT should be the first option.
- 18.2 In terms of guidance around the appropriateness of incidents attended, those involving sudden death, suicide, child abuse, serious sexual offences, and serious RTCs where death or life changing injuries may have occurred must not be attended. These incidents have a greater potential to affect the participant due to mental trauma, as well as the potential impact on evidence. Consideration should be given to terminating the ride along if such a deployment is being considered.
- 18.3 For personal safety, as is already covered in the risk assessment process, the observer must understand that they are to comply with the directions of the SPOC, who in turn makes dynamic risk assessments.

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- 18.4 Under no circumstances should an observer be carried in police vehicles with detainees unless the detainee is held in a secure cage. This is irrespective of whether there is a pre-arranged agreement, or it results from a welfare or safety issue following any incident.
- 18.5 To allow the SPOC to monitor and understand the effects of incidents on the observer the SPOC should explain the nature of the call and debrief after the event. This will help the SPOC assess suitability for attendance at future calls and identify any issues after the event in respect of welfare or procedure
- 18.6 Police officers have the statutory power to enter private premises without the authority of the occupier, in certain circumstances this power does not extend to observers who are accompanying them. Consideration for a written digital record proving authorisation from the occupier should be considered.
- 18.7 It is imperative that the observer understands and complies with the Data Protection Act (2018) and Computer Misuse Act (1990) etc in relation to the information they may be exposed to during their ride along. They must also be aware that anything they witness or could be involved in, is confidential, unless they're told otherwise.

19 Post ride along

- 19.1 By its very nature police work can be both dangerous and stressful. Observers, by accompanying officers, may be exposed to incidents that are shocking, violent and distressing, therefore SPOCs are encouraged to debrief with the observer, what they have experienced on the ride along.

20 Data protection impact assessment

Is a DPIA required? No

21 Appendices

Appendix A Communications emails

- Ride Along Policy Communication emails Appendix A

Appendix B Process Map

- Ride Along Policy Process Map Appendix B

Appendix C Risk Assessment

- Ride Along Policy FRA 30 February 24 Appendix C

Appendix D Officer Guidance (for SPOC)

- Ride Along Policy Officer Guidance Appendix D

Appendix E Briefing for Observer

- Ride Along Policy Safety Briefing Appendix E

Appendix F Indemnity and Official Secrets Act document.

- Ride Along Policy Indemnity and OSS act Appendix F

22 Consultation

- West Mercia Federation
- West Mercia Unison
- Force Health and Safety Manager
- Force Welfare Department
- Superintendent Association
- Staff Support Groups
- SNT Chief Inspectors

Business lead/Chief Officer date consulted: ?

Extensive consultation with Clive Griffiths, Force Health and Safety Officer: February 2024

23 Document history

The history and rationale for change to policy will be recorded using the below chart.

Date: 05/02/24

Author/reviewer amendment(s): Citizens in Policing

Amendments/rationale: Change of name from Lay Observation to Ride Along Policy

Date: 26/08/25

Author/reviewer amendment(s): Temporary Chief Inspector Sanders

Amendments/rationale: Removal of Citizens in Policing department from Ride Along policy process

24 Assessment and analysis

The Equality Assessment (EA), Health and Safety Assessment (HAS) and Risk Assessment (RA) associated with this document are available on request.