

Avon and Somerset PCSOs' power of arrest considered

The new Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police is to consider giving Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) the power of arrest.

Nick Gargan said he would also review the equipment provided to them.

Most members of the area's police and crime panel said they would support the move.

But the local Police Federation warned it could lead to PCSOs being used as a cheaper alternative to trained police officers.

There are currently 384 PCSOs in Avon and Somerset.

Since 2007, the Chief Constable of each force has had the discretion to give their PCSOs the power of arrest.

British Transport Police PCSOs can arrest people in the West's railway stations, but Avon and Somerset PCSOs do not have that power.

'Powerful message'

Mr Gargan said: "The PCC [Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mountstevens] and I have discussed that this week she will be formally asking me to review the powers of PCSOs in Avon and Somerset.

"I will take this opportunity to also review the equipment provided to PCSOs."

Ms Mountstevens said she was still considering her view on the matter.

But she said: "I think it's a very powerful message to get out there that PCSOs could have arrest powers."

Most members of the police and crime panel which scrutinises her actions said they favoured more powers for PCSOs.

Chairman Nigel Ashton said: "What the panel said was that PCSOs need to be more effective... and perhaps in order to do that they need to have greater powers.

"Across the country different commanders have given PCSOs different powers, including that of arrest, and I think a number of people... think our PCSOs should also have the power of arrest."

'Power to detain'

But Kevin Phillips, chairman of the Avon and Somerset Police Federation, said the distinction between police officers and PCSOs should remain.

"I think you've got to clarify exactly what [the power of arrest] means for PCSOs," he said.

"The power to arrest is actually the power to detain. It's not necessarily a power to arrest and transport them to custody.

"If you give somebody the power to detain, are you going to start supplying them with CS spray, cuffs, batons? That comes at a cost and that's what you've got to be looking at.

"We need to make sure police officers are given the support and the equipment they need to do their job. PCSOs are an additional layer."

Councillor Pete Levy, who sits on the police and crime panel, said: "We don't want to see the role of the PCSOs undermine that of the warranted police officers. We do want to see PCSOs given their rightful place in the community."

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