

Avon and Somerset 'blue light' merger discussed

A merger of "blue light" services is being explored by the Police and Crime Commissioner in Avon and Somerset.

Sue Mountstevens said it was "absolutely right" that talks were held about working together to save money.

The fire and rescue service said it recognised the "potential" for closer working, but the ambulance trust is unwilling to consider further sharing.

Avon and Somerset Police made £40m of cuts over the last three years but must still save £15m before 2016.

'Back-office savings'

"We are having talks. Looking at ways we can save money," said Ms Mountstevens.

The areas under discussion for potential mergers includes the sharing of estates, offices and training.

She added: "We're all going to have to work with less money so let's look at that and maybe we can see back-office savings, maybe we can task people to do similar jobs, but let's talk about it."

On a national level, both the policing minister Damien Green and Home Secretary Theresa May have voiced approval for closer working between "blue light services", plus the potential for the Police and Crime Commissioner to have a greater role.

'Unique care'

Avon Fire and Rescue's Chief Fire Officer, Kevin Pearson, said a conversation was held "with a view to working better together and generating further efficiencies for both of our organisations".

He said he had agreed to further explore the potential.

But the South Western Ambulance Service Trust said many aspects of its care delivery were unique and could not be delivered as a shared resource.

A trust spokesperson said it already enjoyed close working relationships with the other services to ensure the most appropriate service is provided and efficiency savings are made wherever possible.

Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, Nick Gargan, said it was a "political situation" and not something he would get involved with.

Ms Mountstevens has, however, acknowledged the reality of the merger would need a change in legislation and would not happen while she was PCC.

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