

STRATEGIC AIR SUPPORT

A meeting of the Strategic Air Support Panel was held on Tuesday 26 July 2011 commencing at 10.00am in the Members Conference Room at Police Headquarters.

- PRESENT:** Mr Peter Race MBE (ex officio), Mr Ted Cox JP (Vice Chair), Councilor Ron Lowes, Mr Chris Coombs, Mr Geoff Fell and Mr Mike Mcgrory JP.
- ADDITIONAL MEMBERS** Councillor Carl Richardson, Mr Peter Hadfield, and Councillor Terry Laing.
- OFFICIALS:** Mr John Bage (CE)
Mr Sean White, Mr Simon Wilkinson and Miss Kate Rowntree (CC)

CHAIR OF MEETING

Mr Chris Coombs in the Chair

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mayor Stuart Drummond (ex officio) and Councillor Ray Goddard

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2011

The minutes were held as a true and accurate record.

OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair of the Police Authority gave Members a verbal update of a discussion with Mr Brian Greenslade who is the Leading Member from the APA on Air Support issues.

ORDERED that;

1. the Outstanding Recommendations were noted.

AIR OPERATIONS UNIT PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Members were informed that the report was to provide Members with an update on the performance and finances of the Air Operations Unit. The performance data was attached at Appendix A to the report.

Members were informed that during the period January to June 2011, the aircraft had flown for 375 hours, attended 1047 incidents and made 199 arrests. In the same period in 2010 the aircraft flew 467 hours, attended 1485 incidents and made 232 arrests. This is a

reduction but the percentage of arrests per flying hour had increased, which is believed to be due to the far improved technology and role equipment on the new helicopter.

The Assistant Chief Constable (Crime Ops) informed Members that towards the end of 2010 due to the financial constraints within the Force, the unit had a 20% cut in the flying hours imposed, and is now working within these reduced hours.

Members queried what tasks were not being carried out following the reduction of finances.

The UEO informed Members that due to the process it had given the Unit an opportunity to manage their processes better. Members were informed that there was now greater dialogue with Officers on the ground permitting less flying, plus the Unit was landing more so that greater availability to ground units and other tasking.

A Member queried whether the provision of a helicopter was luxury.

The ACC (Crime Ops) informed Members that the provision of a helicopter was an excellent piece of operational equipment, it saves many Officer hours and is exceptionally flexible. He gave a number of examples of how the Unit operates to combat serious and organised crime.

The Chair of the Professional Standards Panel reminded Members that the IPCC states that in pursuits the helicopter should be deployed.

Members were then shown a presentation on air support.

ORDERED that;

1. the report be noted.

NATIONAL AIR SUPPORT SERVICE UPDATE

Members were informed on the latest developments with the proposals for a National Air Support Service.

ACC White (Crime Ops) informed Members that since the last report to Members there had been several meetings in connection with the proposed NPAS and a number of developments.

The meetings included a finance meeting in Cleveland with representatives from NPAS; a North East regional finance meeting; two North East Regional Air Operations meetings chaired by ACC White; and an NPAS meeting with ACC White representing the North East region.

The Force Head of Finance expressed concern that the figures were based on data from two years ago and up to date figures would need to be presented before any final decisions could be considered.

At a regional finance meeting the same figures were presented again, but it was further explained that if South Yorkshire retained their helicopter, which had been identified as being cut, then this would lead to additional costs to all the Forces in the region. There was criticism in connection with how NPAS intended raising capital for the replacement of assets.

Members were informed that the plans for a National Police Air Service are still being progressed but it had the potential to offer savings for the Force. However the present financial proposals still show we would be paying additional costs for a reduced service.

Members were informed that the Force and the Authority are currently in no position to make any final decision about joining the NPAS until we have received the updated financial information and it had been indicated these figures will not be available until the end of October.

Members expressed concerns and sought assurances regarding the possibility of remote control rooms in other areas or actually a national control room.

ACC White (Crime Ops) informed Members that there had been some discussions on this subject and the consensus presently was that it would only add an additional layer to any communications and that this would lead to delays in deployment. However at present no decisions had been made.

Members queried what collaboration had taken place with other outside Forces.

The Chair of the Police Authority informed members that he would be speaking with ACC White (Crime Ops) and the Collaboration Group outside of this meeting.

Chair

ORDERED that;

1. the report be noted.