

**Report of the Chief Constable to the Chair and Members
of the Strategic Air Support Panel
26th July 2011**

**Executive & Presenting Officer: Mr Sean White, Assistant Chief Constable
(Crime and Operations)**

Status: For information

Air Operations Unit Performance Update

1. Purpose

1.1 This report is to provide Members with an update on the performance and finance of the Air Operations Unit.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

3. Reasons

3.1 During the period January to June 2011, the aircraft has 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 obviously a reduction in all areas but the percentage of arrests per flying hour has increased, which is believed to be due to the far improved technology.

3.2 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. This has led to the unit being more selective regarding the incidents to which they respond. A direct consequence of being airborne less is that there are reduced occasions when they are overhead and an incident occurs and when they can immediately respond. These types of incidents are usually very productive in respect of arrests, so although there

has been an increase in the percentage number of arrests, it is believed it could have been even higher without the planned reduction in resourcing.

3.3 A selection of highlighted incidents, from this period are shown below:

Hartlepool District

- On 19th January, the aircraft was targeted by a youth with a powerful laser which was shone repeatedly at the aircraft from an address in Gray Street. The crew identified the premises and officers were directed. The male was arrested.
- On 7th February, the aircraft deployed to a burglary at Corus in Hartlepool. The crew identified 3 suspects making off towards Greatham. Two suspects hid in a farm complex and the third ran up a track. Officers were directed to their locations and all 3 were arrested.
- On 3 April, the aircraft deployed to assist RPU officers and medical staff at the scene of a serious RTC on the A19 near Dalton back lane. The crew air lifted a seriously injured casualty and a doctor to the James Cook University Hospital.
- On 2 May, the aircraft was deployed to search for a missing suicidal male around Cemetery Road. The crew searched the area and the beach, and located the male who was walking out into the sea. Officers were directed and he was taken to safety.

Middlesbrough District

- On 22nd January, the aircraft was deployed to search for a male who had threatened to kill a female with a knife. The male was located, ARV officers were directed to his location and he was safely arrested.
- On 14th March, the aircraft deployed to a report of two males trying to steal a car in Oldbury Grove, Hemlington. Officers arrived and arrested one male as the aircraft was travelling; the second suspect went to ground. The crew found the second male hiding under a patio table in someone's back garden. Officers were directed to his location and he was arrested.
- On 24 May, the aircraft was deployed to try and locate a Ford Focus heading North on the A19. The driver was wanted for drugs and firearms offences. The crew located the vehicle, gave commentary and followed the vehicle to the driver's home address. The house was contained until ARV teams made an arrest.

Redcar and Cleveland District

- On 17th January, the aircraft was en-route back to the airfield when they self deployed to a pursuit at Newton under Roseberry towards Pinchinthorpe. The two occupants abandoned the vehicle and ran across fields, eventually hiding in a plantation near Flatts Lane. The aircraft contained them, and directed dog section and other officers onto their location and they were arrested.
- On 5th March, the aircraft crew provided digital downlink images for the control room supervision regarding a major fire at Old Hall Farm in

- On 16th May, the aircraft was deployed to search around Skelton village for a missing elderly lady suffering from Alzheimer's. The crew located the lady, landed and guided her to officers.

Stockton District

- On Sunday 13th February, the aircraft deployed to a major incident when an emergency was declared at Conocco Phillips. Staff had reported feeling unwell due to a suspected leak. The aircraft provided downlink for the command room as they managed the incident, assisting in an eventual safe resolution.
- On 25th March, the crew overheard a stolen van with a tracker activation travelling from the Darlington area into our force. The crew located the van, with trailer and ride-on-mower still attached in Eaglescliffe. Officers were directed and two suspects were arrested.
- On 18th May, the aircraft was engaged in intelligence gathering over Stockton when intruders were reported at Waterford Road. The crew identified them, talked officers on to the location and one male was arrested.

- 3.4 The above incidents have been chosen to highlight the work of the helicopter. These types of incidents are happening every day around the Force and the helicopter is having a significant positive impact on many areas of policing.
- 3.5 The new helicopter arrived in Force at the start of January 2011 and for the first two or three months, the staff on the unit were familiarising themselves with the new and more sophisticated role equipment on the helicopter. This training has predominantly taken place on the ground to save flying hours. Since that time, all staff are now very proficient with the equipment and are reporting that they are extremely pleased with the enhanced capability that it provides.
- 3.6 Following delivery of the aircraft there was a problem with the FLIR camera system, similar to the problems which originally delayed Cleveland accepting the helicopter in December. After several weeks of problems and testing, it was discovered that the problem was in a wiring loom fabricated by Eurocopter. As a result a complaint was raised, which has been successful and has resulted in Cleveland receiving an extra two months of free maintenance and also an extended warranty on the FLIR system. The saving for Cleveland Police is over £20,000.
- 3.7 Meeting the revenue budget for 2010/11 was challenging and the Air Support Unit came in slightly over budget (as expected). However, this will be covered by the carry over from the previous year which was specifically requested for this purpose. The revenue budget for 2011/12 has been examined closely and trimmed to a very tight level. There is some doubt whether we can remain

- 3.8 There are ongoing maintenance issues with the serviceability of our leased hanger facility at Durham Tees Valley airport which are hopefully going to be addressed by the airport. An issue may arise if these repairs are not completed satisfactorily and we may have to seek other hangarage solutions.
- 3.9 Appendix A details the performance statistics and flying hours. The use of the aircraft has resulted in the equivalent of 275,436 officer hours being saved across the Force during January to June 2011. This would equate to a cost saving of approximately £4,406,976 compared to officers on the ground being deployed to the same incidents. However, it should be noted that by using the aircraft we are able to undertake a greater number of searches, many of which we would be unable to undertake without the helicopter.
- 3.10 During the period we have received 7 letters of appreciation and no complaints.
- 3.11 On 12th April 2011 the Force and Authority launched 'Helicopter Watch' which provides information to the public regarding the work of the police helicopter. The site is updated daily to give details of operations the helicopter has been involved in and where in the Force area it has been. 'Helicopter Watch' can be accessed via both the Force and the Authority's websites.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.2 Diversity and Equal Opportunities

There are no diversity or equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

4.3 Human Rights Act

There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

4.4 Sustainability

There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

4.5 Risk

There are no risks arising from this report.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The new helicopter has been a big success story for the Force and we now operate one of the most advanced police helicopters in the world. The deployment of the aircraft to incidents across the force area continues to deliver significant results.

Sean Price
Chief Constable