

Appendix 1:C – Rationale and Background to the National Police Air Service

Proposal for a National Police Air Service (NPAS)

In the current demanding economic climate, every police force is under pressure to reduce costs whilst maintaining a high quality service to the public.

Chief Officers recognise that air support is an essential tool in maintaining this service, however, under the current structure, it is both inefficient and costly.

The creation of a national model will enable the police service to address these issues, achieve greater savings and, in many cases, a better service.

This paper aims to assist police authorities in their decision making by providing a more detailed rationale for the creation of NPAS. It also sets out the options presented to Chief Constables in October 2010.

1. Background Information

In 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) undertook a review of the 1993 National Air Operations Strategy and assessed the existing provisions within police aviation. The review concluded that, overall, the service was highly fragmented and did not provide value for money. More specifically, it found that:

- The majority of the 31 Air Support Units (ASU) operated in silo.
- There was a lack of coordination in the delivery of the service.
- There was no standard or consolidated procurement approach.

The review made a number of recommendations for the future delivery of the service, including:

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- The development of a national user requirement to inform the procurement of all future police aircraft and equipment.
- A stand-alone executive agency to organise and run police aviation on a national basis.
- A national basing structure to deliver a more efficient aviation service.
- 'Borderless' tasking of aircraft to achieve local delivery by a national agency.
- Air Support budgets should be pooled together for allocation to a national police aviation organisation.

By moving to this approach for police aviation, the following benefits can be achieved:

- Greater potential for collaboration/consortium arrangements between forces that will achieve further operational improvements and financial savings.
- Delivery of an efficient and effective air support response by co-ordinating and dispatching police air assets from a central dispatch facility.
- Savings, through:
 - Direct employment or central contracting of pilots;
 - National fuel, insurance & maintenance agreements;
 - National procurement agreements;
 - Reduction in staffing levels;
 - Reduction in the number of operating bases;
 - Extending the operational life of the aircraft;
 - Borderless tasking.

Chief Constable Alex Marshall (Hampshire) as Aviation Portfolio Holder for the ACPO, commissioned a project team, support by NPIA, to scope the work required to deliver a National Police Air Service.

2. Models for Change

Recognising the need to deliver a more efficient and cost effective air support capability, the following 3 options for change have been considered and subsequently rejected by the NPAS Project Board:

1) No Change

The 2009 review highlighted the operational benefits of a national model in terms of response times, a rotary / fixed-wing aircraft mix across the country and greater fleet resilience. The current structure is unable to achieve this or make any savings.

2) Commercial Partner

It was identified at an early stage that keeping air support within the police and restructuring and improving its efficiency through collaboration, could result in greater savings for the service than handing the function over to a commercial organisation.

3) New Technologies/Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

New technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, could enhance capability. However, some of this technology requires significant public consultation and acceptance by regulatory bodies. It may also need a large injection of capital funding. Longer term, this option may deliver further improvements and savings and will remain under review.

Proposed Models

In October 2010, Chief Constables were presented with three potential models for delivery. The indicated savings in each model are based on figures collated in April 2010.

Model 1 - Minimum Change Model (£8.4m / 12.6% savings)

The Minimum Change Model is based on providing the same level of service that currently exists. Under the model, air support will be delivered by establishing national and regional management structures that will enable savings to be made through economies of scale. For example, a small number of voluntary base amalgamations, a reduction in fleet size from 31 rotary aircraft to 28 and the withdrawal of Hampshire's fixed wing asset.

The minimum change model will result in anticipated savings of £8.4m or 12.6% compared to current provision.

However, this model does not improve resilience by providing spare aircraft (to continue coverage when other aircraft are undergoing maintenance, refurbishment or repair) or make best use of the resources available through revised base locations. It is therefore not the recommended model in terms of achieving a more efficient, cost effective and resilient air support service.

Model 2 - Recommended Model (£15.27m / 22.8% savings)

The recommended model is based on providing a national service that will deliver air support from 23 aircraft across 20 bases – supported by establishing a national/regional management structure. Resilience will also be improved by the provision of 3 spare aircraft. This measure alone will increase aircraft availability by 8%.

The recommended model will provide a better balance between local delivery and the need for a more cost effective air support function and will result in anticipated savings of £15.27m or 22.8% compared to current provision.

Model 3 - Urban Only Model (£36.6m / 54.5% savings)

The urban only model is based on providing a national service that will deliver air support from 12 aircraft (plus 2 spare) across 11 bases. This model will only provide air support to the areas with the highest density of population.

The urban only model will result in anticipated savings of £36.6m or 54.5% compared to current provision. However, this model does not meet the demand for air support in rural areas.

The recommended model was endorsed by the majority of Chief Constables. However, a small number of forces sought further clarification before they were able to present these proposals to their police authorities.

Since October, the project team have been working closely with this small number of forces to find solutions that ensure NPAS will be able to deliver a more cost effective and efficient service whilst meeting the needs of the police service and the public.