

Proposal for a National Police Air Service (NPAS)

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to outline the need for a National Police Air Service (NPAS), describe the benefits for each police force and seek endorsement from police authorities on the proposal for NPAS.

2. Timescales

- 2.1 To enable delivery of NPAS by 1 April 2012, a decision in support of the proposal is sought by 30 September 2011.

3. Overview

- 3.1 Air support gives the police the capability to undertake roles that cannot be achieved by any other means and is an essential tool in maximising the safety of the public. Examples of high risk policing activity where air support provides a significant advantage are searches for vulnerable missing people, policing public order events and catching dangerous criminals.
- 3.2 Chief Officers across the country are unanimous in their support for the police service to retain an air support function. However, they recognise that the current structure is inefficient. For example, most of the existing aircraft work within individual force or consortium boundaries and, even when they are the nearest available asset, are rarely deployed to an incident outside of these boundaries.
- 3.3 Under the current structure, many forces do not have access to 24 hour air support.
- 3.4 Air support currently costs police forces across England and Wales £63.5 million a year. Based on the current structure, the cost (with inflation) will rise to £66.8 million in 2012.
- 3.5 Therefore, in the current economic climate, a more efficient and cost effective way of delivering air support needs to be found. The

proposed NPAS will deliver this and ensure that each force continues to have access to a rapid response air capability to tackle crime and protect the public. NPAS has firm support from Ministers and is being widely recognised as a model that could be applied to other protective services.

3.6 It is important to note that the full benefits and savings that have been identified under NPAS can only be achieved if all police forces and police authorities sign up to the proposal.

4. Why a National Police Air Service?

4.1 In 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) undertook a review of the 1993 National Air Operations Strategy. The review concluded that the overall service was highly fragmented and did not provide value for money.

4.2 To address this, Chief Constable Alex Marshall (Hampshire), in his capacity as ACPO Aviation Portfolio Holder, presented a paper at Chief Constables' Council in October 2010 that set out three options for the future delivery of air support across England and Wales. The three options recommended that, by moving to a national model of delivery and by making changes to the size and organisation of the fleet, savings of 12%, 22% or 54% were achievable nationally.

4.3 Chief Constables agreed that the second option (22% saving achieved by moving to a 20 base model) was operationally viable and offered a better balance between local delivery and the need for a more cost effective air support function.

4.4 The 20 base model will result in the reorganisation of the current helicopter fleet, reducing its size from 31 aircraft to 23 (plus 3 spare). The 3 spare aircraft will ensure continued coverage when other aircraft are undergoing maintenance, refurbishment or repair. This measure alone will increase aircraft availability by 8%.

- 4.5 The creation of NPAS under this model has the potential to save the service £15m per year. In addition to the reorganisation of the fleet, NPAS will significantly reduce the amount of bureaucracy and duplication involved in running independent air support units. A national service will also enable the negotiation of competitive contracts, ensuring better value for money for the taxpayer. For example, a national aircraft insurance framework has already been developed by the project team.
- 4.6 The creation of NPAS will not only achieve potential savings, it will also ensure that all forces have access to air support 24 hours per day.
- 4.7 Over time, it is anticipated that further savings may be achieved through improved technology, a move to a single-type helicopter fleet (reducing maintenance and training costs) and by supporting the service with lower cost fixed-wing assets.
- 4.8 Further savings may be possible in the future through collaboration with publicly funded partners that already operate air assets at a national level.
- 4.9 Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Home Office has agreed to continue to provide capital funding of £4m a year, for the next 4 years, to support a national air service. In support of the move towards NPAS, the Project Board has already committed approximately £4m of capital funding to be used for a small number of base moves, upgrades in technology and the refurbishment of older aircraft.

5. Organisation and Governance Arrangements

- 5.1 NPAS will consist of 6 regional air support units that are coordinated by a central team to ensure national consistency and efficient deployment of air support across England and Wales.

5.2 Since 2009, the Association of Police Authorities (APA) has had both member and officer representation on the NPAS Project Board.

5.3 When NPAS is launched, the Project Board will be replaced by the NPAS Strategy Board which will provide strategic direction and ensure delivery of a high quality, cost effective air support to forces across England and Wales. The Strategy Board will comprise:

- Air Operations Portfolio Holder – Chair;
- Regional ACPO representatives;
- Home Office;
- Host organisation;
- APA;
- Management Board representation.

5.4 The NPAS Management Board will report to the Strategy Board and advise on operational matters and decisions needed from the Strategy Board. It will be chaired by the host organisation and will comprise senior members of NPAS, representatives from each of the regions and relevant partners.

6. How will NPAS deliver air support?

6.1 A national user requirement has been developed to provide national consistency on the role, remit and purpose of air support and is available from the Project Team.

6.2 Analysis shows that the largest demand for air support is in highly populated areas. However, although demand is lower in rural areas, the challenges of rural policing need to be recognised. To meet these demands, a small number of base moves have been identified. These are:

- Western Counties (serving Avon and Somerset and Gloucestershire) and Wiltshire (a consortium arrangement with Great Western Air Ambulance) will relocate to a new base at RAF Colerne and reduce by one aircraft;
- Sussex and Surrey will combine, relocate to a new base at Dunsfold and reduce by one aircraft;
- Norfolk and Suffolk will combine with Cambridgeshire, relocate to a new base at RAF Honington and reduce by one aircraft;
- The Essex aircraft will relocate to Southend airport;
- The Dorset aircraft will relocate to Bournemouth airport.

In addition to the above base moves, the South Yorkshire and Merseyside aircraft will be withdrawn from service. The base at RAF Henlow will be closed during 2014.

6.3 Some forces have already made significant progress towards NPAS. For example, from July, the forces in the north-west region will be sharing their air support function to improve operational availability and achieve savings.

6.4 Under NPAS, the deployment of aircraft for spontaneous incidents will be managed through a central dispatch facility enabling aircraft to operate across force boundaries (borderless tasking) and follow the principle that the nearest aircraft attends.

6.5 British Transport Police (BTP) are one of the very few organisations that have national control rooms. Discussions are therefore ongoing with BTP to establish whether they are able to host the NPAS dispatch facility.

6.6 It is essential that deployments of aircraft are prioritised on risk and the value that air support can provide to the incident. The development of clear deployment criteria using the national user requirement will ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across the country.

- 6.7 Once dispatched, responsibility for tasking the aircraft will rest with the local force. Subject to demand, the aircraft may be re-deployed within the force area without returning to its home base.
- 6.8 Recent trials of borderless tasking across a number of forces have shown that there are significant benefits in terms of cost and the ability of an aircraft to respond quickly to an incident.
- 6.9 For planned events, air support requirements will be prioritised through a regional Tasking and Coordination Group process. NPAS will aim to support all large scale planned events.

7. Funding Model

- 7.1 The provision of air support differs significantly from force to force and it is therefore difficult to find a funding model that is fair and equitable to all. It is proposed that an initial funding model is used to enable the establishment of NPAS with a view to moving towards a more equitable model within 5 years.
- 7.2 The initial model will mean that every force will pay less for air support compared to what they would pay under the current structure. These costs have been adjusted for inflation and assume a capital contribution for the replacement of currently owned or consortium aircraft.
- For information on what your force will pay during the initial phase and potential savings, refer to Appendix A.
- 7.3 The Project Board is committed to implementing a more equitable funding model which will be based on population size, crime rate, proximity to an aircraft and projected flying hours. Under this model, forces that do not currently own or lease their own aircraft will be required to contribute capital to NPAS.

7.4 The Project Board has considered the concept of 'top slicing' police budgets to pay for NPAS. However, the current position of the Home Office is that, as this is a police service led collaborative programme, it would prefer police forces and police authorities to reach agreement on the funding of NPAS amongst themselves.

7.5 Many forces have suggested moving to a 'pay as you go' model and this option will be considered in consultation with police authority treasurers, force finance managers, ACPO Finance and the Home Office.

8. Hosting arrangements

8.1 The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) was originally chosen as host of the new service. However, in light of the agency being phased out, alternative hosting arrangements are being developed, including a single lead force model. A lead force model is an attractive option because it would:

- Be police service owned and led;
- Ensure national consistency;
- Reduce bureaucracy and duplication;
- Make use of existing structures;
- Be exempt from VAT.

8.2 The Project Board recognises the likely impact on staff. There are currently approximately 450 staff involved in air support across England and Wales. Under the proposal, there will be a reduction in the number of bases and changes to shift patterns in order to maximise the resources. Consequently, there will be an overall reduction in staff; however, the exact number of posts has yet to be agreed. This does not mean that all permanent staff currently employed in air support will be put 'at risk'. Instead, it is anticipated that only those staff from the bases scheduled to close will be given formal notification that they are 'at risk'. A formal consultation with staff and staff organisations will take place once the proposal has been approved by police authorities.

8.3 To support the transfer of staff into NPAS, a specialist HR advisor with significant experience of TUPE and change management is being recruited to the project team. This person will work with local implementation teams to manage change consistently so as to minimise the effect on staff and operational delivery.

9. Implementation

9.1 Subject to police authority approval, NPAS will be launched on 1 April 2012 and will be rolled out on a regional basis starting with the Central and South Eastern regions followed shortly after by the North West and North East. London will join in 2014 due to operational commitments around the Olympics. Negotiations are currently taking place with the South Western region as to their implementation date.

9.2 Therefore, whilst some of the savings are already being realised by forces and further savings will be achieved in 2012, the full savings profile will not be realised until all forces participate in the national model.

9.3 To create the new service, ownership of all assets will need to transfer from police authorities to NPAS. To compensate those forces that have purchased aircraft in the last 10 years (current lifespan of aircraft), an annual capital payment based on the value of the aircraft will be made to relevant police authorities until the aircraft is 10 years old. For example, if a police authority purchased a helicopter in 2005 at a cost of £3m (after the 40% Home Office contribution has been taken out), the police authority/ consortium would receive approximately £300,000 from NPAS per year until 2015.

10. Conclusion

10.1 In the current economic climate, it is clear that a more efficient and cost effective way of delivering air support needs to be found.

- 10.2 The innovative NPAS proposal will enable the police service to provide a consistent and cost effective air support function, whilst delivering a high quality service to the public 24 hours a day across England and Wales. ale
- 10.3 To deliver the operational improvements and realise the savings, a decision from Police Authorities in support of the proposal is sought by 30th September 2011.
- 10.4 The NPAS project team will be available to answer any questions that police authority members may have on the proposals. Please contact Peter Stacy, Project Support Officer on 020 3113 7979 / 07500 078243 or by e-mail: npas@npia.pnn.police.uk.