

National Police Air Service (NPAS)

Briefing – March 2011

Welcome to the second NPAS briefing

In this briefing we give an update on the progress made by the project team since the proposals for a new National Police Air Service (NPAS) were presented to Chief Constables in October. We also provide further information on how the service will be managed and identify the work that the team will be focusing their efforts on over the coming months.

Since October, support from the police service and police authorities for the proposals has been overwhelmingly positive and the team are now moving into the implementation phase. We will continue to work closely with chief officer teams, individual air support units and other key stakeholders to ensure that the rationale behind NPAS is fully understood, the operational and funding models are properly explained and its impact on frontline policing recognised. Further details on how we will do this are explained below. Our priority however, is to ensure that we deliver a national police air service that is fit for purpose and balances the demands of operational policing against the need to save money in a challenging economic environment.

NPAS funding model

The project team has continued to work closely with the individual police forces to develop the funding model. Workshops have been held with Chief Financial Officers and Police Authority Treasurers to explain the model and the mechanism that underpins it. The team have also had the model and datasets validated by a team of

accountants and economists within the NPIA.

In the next two months, additional workshops will take place to further refine how the model will work in practice. A pack is being produced for use by Police Authorities to support this which will show the level of coverage for each police force area and predicted savings. This information will be sent out during March.

The team are also working closely with the Home Office to ensure that the NPAS funding model is consistent with other national services and the workshops are helping to inform this discussion.

Hosting

The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) was chosen in April 2010 by ACPO to host NPAS. However, in light of the decision to phase out the agency by 31 March 2012, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about who will host the service beyond this date. The team are currently working with ACPO and the Home Office to examine options and will provide an update on POLKA later this month. Fundamental to the decision around hosting is the application of VAT and it is essential that we fully understand the impact of recent changes in Europe on taxation. It is hoped that these changes will simplify the existing arrangements in the UK.

In the meantime, the focus within the NPAS project team is to continue supporting forces in implementing the proposals that were agreed by Chief Constables in October.

Airborne data link

Under the latest Comprehensive Spending Review the MOD are required to make available spectrum for potential sale to the private sector. At present, Police and other users occupy two bands of spectrum, analogue and digital. As aircraft have been replaced they have been fitted with digital equipment, which has a much greater range and is visually superior. At present there is an approximate 50/50 split between digital and analogue systems.

Under the airborne datalink project, which some UEOs and observers attend, a proposal has been put forward to MOD to speed up the vacation of the analogue spectrum so it can be released. The MOD have allocated funds for this and the Project has been set up to manage three issues:

- Development of an operationally proven channel plan within the digital spectrum;
- Retuning of all digital devices for the new channel plan; and;
- The replacement of all 'old' analogue airborne equipment with digital technology

The Airborne Datalink Project had its first Project Board Meeting to implement the changes proposed in spectrum use. The project is at a very early stage and will enable better use and interoperability of our downlink equipment as we see the requirement for cross border operations increase.

General updates

The project team have continued with visits to existing Air Support Units in order to understand concerns and to communicate developments.

The vast majority of police forces in England & Wales are now fully supportive of the NPAS model. The remaining forces with individual concerns are working with the NPAS project team in order to find a solution that meets everybody's needs and

a paper will be presented to Chief Constables Council in April updating forces on progress that has been made.

At the NPAS Symposium meeting held in Ryton last October, practitioner volunteers were sought to attend Regional and Task Specific Workstream Workshops where detail could be discussed and issues raised, in order to help shape the new air service.

The Workstreams and Chairs' are;

HR - Simon Newman

Training - Neil Terrill

National Data Set - DUEO Martin Knowles

Observers - T/Supt Richard Watson

Procurement - Neil Terrill

Pilots - Captain Steve Isacke

Command & Control - Andy Mahoney

Maintenance - Neil Terrill

Some of these workstreams have already met for the first time, and the key points from them are now being summarised. Once this work is finished, the outputs will be shared in the Air Support forums on POLKA.

A meeting was held with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to discuss how the proposed structure will meet with CAA guidelines. It was an early meeting, but the feedback gained is already helping to shape an organisational structure that will meet the current and future requirements of the CAA. As this develops further, more information will be communicated via this briefing.

Next steps

There are a number of important milestones in the next month. These include:

- Continuing to engage with the Home Office to identify where NPAS will be hosted after the NPJA is phased out
- Hold workshops with Police Force and Police Authority Chief Financial Officers

- Continue work on the timeline and transition plan for the move to the final NPAS structure

Background to the project

Air support is a vital tool in the delivery of policing services, particularly where use of an aircraft mitigates serious risk or gives police the capability to undertake roles that cannot be achieved by any other means.

Chief officers across the country are unanimous in their support for the police service to retain an air support function, but recognise that the current structure for delivery is inefficient. There are currently 31 police helicopters in England and Wales located across 29 bases. Most of these helicopters work within individual force boundaries and rarely undertaking tasks outside the force despite often being the nearest available asset.

In 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) undertook a fundamental review of the National Air Operations Strategy, concluding that the overall national picture was highly fragmented, more costly than it needs to be, and its impact less than it could be for the resources that are spent on it. For example, the cost of providing police air support across England and Wales is currently £63.5 million. If the same level of service was to be provided in 2012, this cost would rise to £66.8 million.

A joint ACPO and National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) project team has been set up to implement the recommendations identified in the review. The team is headed by Hampshire Chief Constable Alex Marshall as the aviation portfolio holder for ACPO and supported by a project board with representatives from ACPO, the Association of Police Authorities and the Home Office.

Contacting us

Your feedback and ideas on the National Police Air Service are essential in ensuring it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of its customers. Although there will be more formal opportunities to engage with the project team, please feel free to contact individual members of the team, whose contact details are provided below.

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The team will also be using the Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA) to provide a further opportunity to express views, concerns or ideas in a more informal environment.

You need to have a .pnn e-mail address to join POLKA - <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/> - and follow the online joining instructions.

Then request to join the relevant air operations communities:

- Air Operations – General
- Air Operations - Air Observers Trainers Forum
- Air Operations – Management.