



**STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF  
SEARCH AND RESCUE  
IN THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND  
NORTHERN IRELAND  
JANUARY 2017**

## **FOREWORD**

Search and rescue is variously defined across organisations and authorities but in essence it is an activity, normally co-ordinated by a rescue co-ordination authority, where available personnel and facilities are used to locate persons in distress, potential distress or missing and recover them to a place of safety providing for their initial medical care or other needs as necessary.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) provides a comprehensive search and rescue service for persons reported to be in trouble or missing on land, on the sea or in the air. The integrated organisation of search and rescue co-ordinators and search and rescue units using a comprehensive communications infrastructure provides a well-developed search and rescue model which also supports the UK's wider civil contingency arrangements.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The organisation for search and rescue (SAR) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) is an amalgam of separate Government Departments, the Emergency Services and a number of search and rescue charities and voluntary organisations.

These authorities and organisations are committed to a cohesive and co-operative partnership, the aim of which is the continued provision of an effective, cost-efficient national SAR capability.

The purpose of this Strategic Overview is to provide a framework for the strategic and operational oversight of UK SAR and to describe the background, scope and responsibilities of UK Search and Rescue.

Occasionally a SAR incident may be so large, lengthy or extensive that UK SAR authorities and organisations may find themselves involved in a fully integrated emergency response under the guidelines provided in the Cabinet Office publication *Emergency Response and Recovery* and this includes arrangements in Wales (chap.11).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-response-and-recovery>

and the Scottish Government publication *Preparing Scotland – Scottish Guidance on Resilience*

<http://www.readyscotland.org/media/1166/preparing-scotland-philosophy-principles-structures-and-regulatory-duties-20-july-2016.pdf>

and the Northern Ireland Assembly document *A Guide to Emergency Planning in Northern Ireland*:<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness>

## **OBLIGATIONS**

The UK organisation for civil maritime and civil aeronautical search and rescue is derived from the UK Government's adherence to the following international Conventions:

Convention on the High Seas (1958):

[http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8\\_1\\_1958\\_high\\_seas.pdf](http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8_1_1958_high_seas.pdf)

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (1982):

[http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm)

Convention on Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) (1974):

[http://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/ListOfConventions/Pages/International-Convention-for-the-Safety-of-Life-at-Sea-\(SOLAS\),-1974.aspx](http://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/ListOfConventions/Pages/International-Convention-for-the-Safety-of-Life-at-Sea-(SOLAS),-1974.aspx)

International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (1979):

<http://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/08/8-03/search-rescue.xml>

Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago 1944) (Annex 12):

[http://www.icao.int/safety/airnavigation/nationalitymarks/annexes\\_booklet\\_en.pdf](http://www.icao.int/safety/airnavigation/nationalitymarks/annexes_booklet_en.pdf)

There are no international Conventions governing land search and rescue. However legislation (see below) governing Police activity places an obligation on Police Services to protect life and property and the provision of land SAR services derives from this requirement.

## **LEGISLATION**

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2012/8/contents>

Police Act 1996 (Section 29)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/16>

Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/32/contents>

## **SCOPE OF UK SAR**

The UK responsibility for maritime, aeronautical and land SAR lies within the UK SAR Region which covers approximately 2 million square miles ([Annex A](#)).

The key function for UK SAR is to ensure a co-ordinated response to SAR emergencies in order to search for, rescue and recover those missing or in distress or potential distress on land, sea and shore line areas including tidal and inland waters and to co-ordinate those actions. This includes supporting, monitoring and advising those aircraft, vessels or persons, who may be in difficulty but not distress, until they reach a place of safety often unaided.

This function is undertaken through the ability of the various authorities and organisations to:

- a) receive details of persons, vessels and aircraft in distress or potential distress or requiring assistance or monitoring
- b) investigate and evaluate information
- c) task appropriate SAR units
- d) communicate between SAR units and the co-ordinating authority
- e) communicate between SAR units
- f) communicate between co-ordinating authorities
- g) maintain SAR units capable of search, rescue and recovery and the delivery of those rescued to a place of safety.

## **UK SAR RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Department of Transport**

Responsibility for the overall provision of national civil aeronautical and maritime SAR and its policies rests with the Department for Transport (DfT) through its Aviation Airspace Division (AAD) and Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The tasking of adequate resources to respond to civil aeronautical and maritime SAR, and the co-ordination of that response, is the responsibility of the MCA through HM Coastguard.

The UK SAR Strategic Committee is responsible for assessing the adequacy of the UK's SAR response, co-ordination and resources and is currently chaired by the DfT.

## **Cabinet Office/Home Office, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly**

These administrations have a role in ensuring the quality of preparedness for civil emergencies at the local government level and across central government. Within these administrations the Police Services are responsible for ensuring the response and co-ordination of land SAR. The Cabinet Office is also responsible for the framework for UK Civil Protection in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This Act and accompanying non-legislative measures delivers a single framework for civil protection in the UK. The Act is separated into two distinct parts: Part 1 – local arrangements for civil protection, and Part 2 – emergency powers.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness) and  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents>

## **AUTHORITIES WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RESPONSE AND CO-ORDINATION OF NATIONAL SAR**

### **HM Coastguard**

Through its fully integrated and flexible network of nine Operations Centres (and London Coastguard) around the UK with the National Maritime Operations Centre at its hub, HM Coastguard fulfils its responsibility for the initiation and co-ordination of civil maritime and aeronautical SAR. This includes the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons in distress in the air, at sea, in tidal waters or at risk of injury or death on the sea cliffs and shoreline of the UK.

In port and harbour areas, the overall responsibility for maritime SAR response and coordination rests with HM Coastguard. When alerted or notified by a Harbour Authority, or in the event of being the first recipient of an alert or notification, HM Coastguard will liaise closely with and support the Harbour Authority by co-ordinating the SAR phase of any Distress incident within the harbour limits and will work with the Harbour Authority to ensure the safe operation of the harbour/port is maintained throughout the Response phase, as described within the Port Marine Safety Code. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/port-marine-safety-code>

Additionally, HM Coastguard has the delegated responsibility from the Police Services for the coordination of maritime SAR in specific inland areas which include Lochs Ness, Oich and Lochy; Loughs Neagh and Erne; Lakes Windermere, Ullswater, Coniston and Derwent Water; Norfolk and Suffolk Broads; River Thames to Teddington Lock; Upper River Clyde; and River Severn to Gloucester.

The Coastguard Rescue Service (CRS) is part of HM Coastguard but its Coastguard Rescue Team (CRT) members are volunteers. These teams are strategically located around the coast of the UK and are equipped to deal with incidents that are likely to occur in their area, given the coastal terrain, shoreline activities and conditions. These incidents can include cliff, water and mud rescue and coastal searches. CRTs can operate alone or jointly with other CRTs. In some locations small teams, known as Initial Response Teams (IRTs), observe and report so they can contribute vital SAR information to an incident response. Further information may be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency>

## **Police Services**

Policing in the United Kingdom is divided into three geographically defined areas, each with its own strategic governance namely England and Wales; Scotland; and Northern Ireland. Each of these areas has to ensure that adequate provision is made to manage land based SAR operations. The Police Services in these areas utilise their command and control infrastructure to co-ordinate such operations, enabling specialist, mainly voluntary organisations to respond to incidents and emergencies. In all areas the Police retain primacy for the investigation of deaths, be they civilian or military together with any incidents where there is believed to be culpability. In relation to this aspect, the Police may be acting on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive, the Coroner, Procurator Fiscal, or appropriate Accident Investigation Branch. Importantly, Police in each of the three areas of governance manage and co-ordinate their SAR obligations slightly differently. Further information may be found at: <http://www.npcc.police.uk/>. <http://www.scotland.police.uk/> and <http://www.psni.police.uk/>

### England and Wales

The Police Service in England and Wales is responsible for land based SAR operations where specialist, mainly civilian voluntary teams from Mountain Rescue England and Wales, the Association of Lowland Search and Rescue and British Cave Rescue Council provide the actual response. The activation and tasking of these teams is managed by individual Police Services who will co-ordinate the response and retain ownership of the incident. The Police Service can also request assistance from full time rescue units eg SAR Helicopters or military assets.

### Scotland

Police Scotland is responsible for the activation and co-ordination of search and rescue operations for missing, lost or injured persons in the mountains, uplands and lowlands across Scotland. This is delivered through partnership working with mainly voluntary civilian mountain rescue teams (but includes two civilian/Police teams and one standalone Police team). Police Scotland will co-ordinate the response to land SAR emergencies and retain ownership of such incidents. Police Scotland can also request assistance from full time rescue units e.g. SAR Helicopters or military assets.

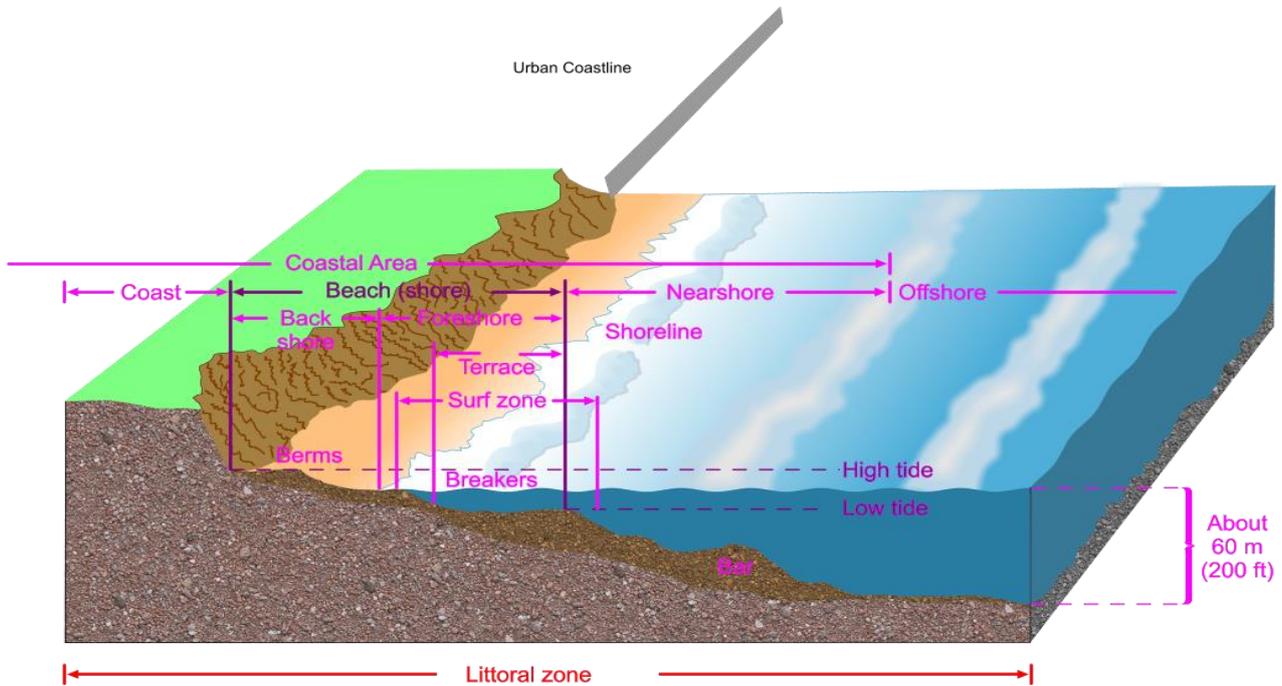
### Northern Ireland

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has statutory responsibility (s32 Police Northern Ireland Act 2000) for the activation and co-ordination of land based search and rescue operations including those on inland waters. This includes the alerting and tasking of voluntary SAR units though PSNI can also request assistance from full time rescue units e.g. SAR Helicopters or military assets.

## Coastal Area

To avoid duplication of effort between HM Coastguard and the Police Services, which are the two civilian SAR co-ordinating authorities in the UK, it has been agreed that a coastal incident is defined as an incident which develops on the seaward side of the coastline below the level of Mean High Water Spring tides (MHWS) but including sea cliffs, shoreline and other littoral areas. Such incidents will be coordinated by HM Coastguard and those above MHWS will be coordinated by the Police Services. Incidents which develop inland and progress towards the shoreline will be the responsibility of the Police Services and, if requested, HM Coastguard will provide resources to assist. Where appropriate, the coordination of an incident can be handed over from one coordinating authority to the other.

Diagram of Coastal Area



## **OTHER AUTHORITIES THAT MAY BE TASKED TO SAR INCIDENTS**

### **Fire and Rescue Services**

Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; Fire (Scotland) Act 2005; the Fire and Rescue Service Northern Ireland Order 2006; the Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (Wales) Order 2007; and the Fire and Rescue Services Emergencies (England) Order 2007, Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in the UK have a statutory responsibility to respond to fires, road traffic accidents, CBRN and Urban SAR emergencies. Each Fire and Rescue Authority has the power to use resources primarily provided for firefighting for non-fire incidents and these may include maritime, aeronautical and land based incidents. It is for each Fire and Rescue Authority to set its own policy regarding FRS response to SAR operations and these will vary around the UK. Further information may be found at: <http://www.cfoa.org.uk/> and <http://www.nifrs.org/> In Wales the Fire and Rescue Service is also fully devolved.

Scotland also have a legislative responsibility to respond to flooding. Further information may be found at: <http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/>

### **Flood Rescue and Urban SAR**

The Fire and Rescue Services across the UK have discretionary powers to respond where there is a risk of illness, death or injury to persons or harm to the environment. Some areas have specialist flood rescue teams that are declared assets in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Flood Rescue Concept of Operations. These assets are listed in the National Flood Asset Register which is maintained by the National Resilience Assurance Team on behalf of the Home Office.

There is also significant capability within 17 Fire and Rescue Services in England and 2 in Wales with regards to locating and rescuing people trapped in collapsed structures and more generally in urban environments. It should be remembered, however, that the capabilities are not replicated across all Fire and Rescue Services and differ across the devolved administrations. Nevertheless a co-operative approach will be taken to ensure that the most effective assets and personnel are deployed to the range of rescue related scenarios.

### **Ambulance Services**

The Ambulance Services in the UK have a statutory responsibility to respond to traumatic and medical emergencies. Land based Ambulance Service response may be complemented by Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) assets. HEMS assets may, if tasked to do so, assist in a SAR incident should the circumstances of that incident be compatible with the type and operating limit of the aircraft and in accordance with the de-confliction restrictions agreed with the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC).

Ambulance Hazardous Area Response Teams (HART) or in Scotland, Special Operations Response Teams (SORT), may be called upon to provide the medical response function within the inner cordon of major incidents or disasters and at urban SAR, flooding, and swift water rescue incidents. HART and SORT provide advanced pre-hospital care at the point of rescue as part of a multi-agency response.

Further information may be found at: <http://aace.org.uk/>, <http://www.scottishambulance.com/>, <http://www.niamb.co.uk/> and <http://www.ambulance.wales.nhs.uk/>

## **Ministry of Defence**

Under the principles of Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA), the Ministry of Defence may assist with SAR operations and / or training in response to formal MACA requests from other Government Departments. Such requests are likely to be for capabilities not readily available to other Government Departments, or to make use of high-readiness capabilities such as the RAF Mountain Rescue Teams (who are not geographically constrained). Requests will be considered on a case by case basis and costs may be incurred in line with MACA policy. The Ministry of Defence will respond with its own assets and personnel for military post-crash management, under the primacy of the appropriate agency.

The Ministry of Defence also operates the Distress and Diversion Cell which is responsible for providing 24 hour assistance to aircraft with an emergency on the aeronautical emergency frequencies and for acting as a conduit for the establishment of temporary airspace restrictions associated with SAR Operations. The Distress and Diversion Cell works closely with the civil SAR co-ordination authorities and in particular, with the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre.

## **Channel Islands**

Search and rescue operations within the sub-region of the Channel Islands are coordinated by Jersey MRCC, Guernsey MRCC and Alderney MRSC. The sub-region exists where the United Kingdom search and rescue region and the search and rescue region of France (Jobourg MRCC) overlap and is established around the Channel Islands, extending up to 12 miles from the coastline of the islands with the exception of the East and South, where it follows the median line with the French coast. Further information about arrangements in the Channel Islands may be found at <http://www.guernseyharbours.gov.gg/article/4634/Guernsey-Coastguard>, [http://www.ports.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/ID\\_Business\\_Overview\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ports.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/ID_Business_Overview_2009.pdf) and is referenced in the Anglo-French ManchePlan (for major incidents in the English Channel).

## **VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS WITH A SIGNIFICANT INVOLVEMENT IN SAR**

The UK SAR effort relies heavily on volunteers and voluntary organisations to save lives at sea and on land. Such volunteers willingly dedicate significant time and often put their own lives at risk to assist others in need, without remuneration. The majority of these voluntary UK SAR organisations are registered charities, who rely heavily on donations and fundraising. Assistance from these voluntary SAR organisations is requested, and tasked, through one of the civilian coordinating authorities i.e. Police Service or HM Coastguard who will retain primacy for the overall incident. During working hours effective SAR response also relies heavily on the willingness of employers to release those employees who may be SAR volunteers.

## **Royal National Lifeboat Institution**

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) is a charity incorporated by Royal Charter for the purpose of saving lives, promoting safety and providing relief from disaster, primarily at sea and on specific inland waters with a fleet of Lifeboats and other RNLI units located in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Republic of Ireland. This fleet of All Weather and Inshore Lifeboats, Inshore Rescue Hovercraft, Beach Lifeguard Units and Type B Flood Rescue Teams are strategically located as determined by the Institution and declared for SAR purposes to the appropriate national authorities in the UK, Channel Islands and Republic of Ireland. The RNLI

reserves the right, if necessary, to direct its own assets when co-ordinated by the responsible authority. Further information about performance standards and services provided by the RNLI in support of SAR can be found at: <http://rnli.org>

## **Independent Lifeboats**

In addition to the RNLI, a number of voluntary organisations provide independent Lifeboats for the purpose of saving lives in some coastal areas of the UK. These independent Lifeboats are equipped, maintained and operated in accordance with the Rescue Boat Code. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rescue-boat-code>

## **Mountain Rescue England and Wales**

Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MREW) is the representative, management body for mountain rescue in England and Wales. The volunteer mountain rescue teams (MRTs), which are grouped into nine Regional organisations, are equipped to deal with incidents that are likely to occur in their area given the mountainous, remote and often wild terrain and conditions encountered. These incidents will include searches, which can be supported by SAR Dog Associations (SARDA), rope rescue and recovery, and water and flood rescue. MRTs are also equipped and trained to provide initial medical care and the administering of appropriate medication when necessary. MRTs can operate as a single team or jointly with other MRTs. Further information may be found at [www.mountain.rescue.org.uk](http://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk)

## **Scottish Mountain Rescue**

Scottish Mountain Rescue (SMR) is the representative body for the majority of MRTs in Scotland, including those provided by Police Scotland (some previously SMR affiliated teams are now independent of SMR). Search and Rescue Dog Associations are also represented by SMR in Scotland. The MRTs usually operate within defined geographical boundaries and are trained and equipped to deal with incidents that are likely to occur within those defined boundaries given the mountainous, remote and often wild terrain and conditions encountered. These incidents will include searches, rope rescue, avalanche rescue and recovery and in some cases water rescue. MRTs are also equipped and trained to provide initial medical care and the administering of appropriate medication when necessary. MRTs can operate as a single team or jointly with other MRTs. Further information may be found at [www.scottishmountainrescue.org](http://www.scottishmountainrescue.org)

## **Mountain Rescue Ireland**

Mountain Rescue Ireland is the representative body for all MRTs in Ireland. The MRTs are trained and equipped to deal with incidents that are likely to occur within their area given the mountainous, remote and often wild terrain and conditions encountered. These incidents will include searches, rope rescue and recovery. MRTs are also equipped and trained to provide initial medical care and the administering of appropriate medication when necessary. MRTs can operate as a single team or jointly with other MRTs. Further information may be found at <http://www.mountainrescue.ie/>

## **Lowland Rescue**

Lowland Rescue (ALSAR) is the governing body for all Lowland SAR Teams, in England, Northern Ireland and Jersey. These teams are highly trained to national standards and fully equipped to assist the Police in SAR operations for missing and vulnerable persons in lowland

areas (including inland water rescue and also civil contingency operations) and are able to operate as a single team or jointly with other teams and across Force boundaries. The teams are also equipped and trained to provide initial advanced medical care and the administering of appropriate medication when necessary. Further information may be found at [www.lowlandrescue.org](http://www.lowlandrescue.org)

### **British Cave Rescue Council**

The British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC) is the representative body for volunteer underground rescue organisations in the UK. Underground search and rescue is a very specialised operation and volunteer rescue teams are trained and specially equipped to carry out and coordinate underground SAR operations in their geographic areas of responsibility. In searching, rescuing and recovering missing, trapped or injured persons underground, these teams can work as a single team or jointly with other teams and can provide an underground underwater diving capability and administer initial casualty care. Further information may be found at <http://www.caverescue.org.uk>

The Irish Cave Rescue Organisation (ICRO) is a member of BCRC and provides an underground SAR service to the authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Further information may be found at <http://www.caverescue.org.uk/rescue-teams/icro/>

### **Lifeguarding and Surf Life Saving**

Beach Lifeguards are provided by a number of organisations within the UK. Lifeguards are qualified in lifesaving and casualty care. They provide a vigil and patrols to protect beach users particularly in high risk areas in certain weather conditions. Lifeguarding is primarily a preventative operation utilising supervision of safe swimming areas and patrols to supervise and advise water users and intervening before problems arise. Lifeguards employ a variety of resources to perform patrols and rescues including rescue swimmers, rescue paddle boards, inshore rescue boats (IRB), rescue water craft (RWC), vehicles (ATVs and 4x4) and in some areas independent units operate lifeboats. Additional information may be found through <https://rnli.org/what-we-do/lifeguards-and-beaches>, <http://www.slsqb.org.uk/> and <http://www.rlss.org.uk/>

## **OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

### **Search and Rescue Helicopters**

The UK SAR Helicopter Service provides 22 SAR helicopters from 10 strategically located bases in the UK ([Annex B](#)). The Service responds to land, maritime and aeronautical incidents and the sole tasking authority for these dedicated state-operated civilian SAR helicopters is the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC) located at the National Maritime Operations Centre. A Paramedic level of care is provided as standard by this Service.

Two aircraft are positioned at each base, a duty aircraft and a spare in the event that the duty aircraft is unserviceable. In the event of a large scale incident requiring multiple aircraft, the ARCC will scramble additional SAR aircraft from other bases where it is appropriate to do so.

### **Additional Facilities**

During the course of a SAR incident and information gathering pertaining to that incident, the civil SAR coordinating authorities may make use of a number of other organisations and

authorities who are able to help either because of their proximity to the incident, or the information they may be able to provide which could lead to a successful outcome of the SAR operation.

There are also a number of other national or locally based volunteer organisations that might offer additional capabilities to those organisations described above. It is at the discretion of the civilian SAR coordinating authority as to whether these other organisations are used but these organisations may not offer the higher levels of assurance as to training, common operating procedures, regularity of deployment, communications and interoperability as provided by other volunteer organisations already described in this document.

## MAJOR INCIDENTS

### Joint Operations

The majority of SAR incidents are dealt with by the appropriate coordinating authority utilising available SAR assets and do not necessitate the involvement of other authorities. However some incidents by their nature require a multi-agency response involving all the statutory authorities and specialist volunteer providers and for these occasions the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) has developed the Joint Decision Model to enable on scene commanders to work together co-operatively to manage the incident response.

### Joint Decision Model

When commanders from the emergency services arrive at the scene of a major incident, it is essential they can quickly establish what is happening around them and jointly agree a plan of action.

A wide range of decision-making models exist, including specific models used by individual emergency services. These models help support staff as they have to make the key decisions when they are working under extreme, difficult and time-critical conditions.

As a fundamental part of the JESIP Joint Doctrine, (see <http://www.jesip.org.uk/joint-doctrine/>) the Joint Decision Model below provides a common and consistent model that allows operational and tactical commanders to bring together the available information, reconcile objectives and make effective decisions together.



## **UK Crisis Response**

In the event of an incident occurring in the UK requiring central government support or direction (defined as a Level 2 or 3 emergency by the UK Central Government Response Concept of Operations) where the matter is reserved (eg a terrorist incident), the Central response framework would be initiated and would involve the activation of central government's crisis management facilities – the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR). COBR would be activated in order to facilitate rapid coordination of the central government response and effective decision making. If the incident occurs in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, the relevant devolved administration would have lead responsibility for the management of the consequences as far as it affects their area of responsibility.

### **Resilience Forums and Partnerships**

Local Resilience Forums in England and Wales, Regional Resilience Partnerships in Scotland and their equivalent in Northern Ireland have been established to plan, prepare for and recover from localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies e.g. severe weather. They work to identify potential risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident or emergency in their local communities. The geographical area they cover is normally based on Police areas.

See: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness)

These resilience forums and partnerships are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency, and others. These agencies are known as Category 1 Responders as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

These resilience forums and partnerships are also supported by organisations known as Category 2 Responders such as Highways England and public utility companies. They have a responsibility to co-operate with Category 1 organisations and to share relevant information with the appropriate resilience forum or partnership.

These resilience forums and partnerships also work with other partners in the military and voluntary sectors who provide a valuable contribution to emergency preparedness.

## **SAR COMMUNICATIONS**

As the UK SAR service is provided by a co-operative of statutory authorities and volunteer organisations and responds to emergencies at sea, in the air and on land, a comprehensive communications plan has been developed to enable the efficient and effective coordination of those SAR assets tasked to respond to these emergencies. The national communications band plan has been developed to reduce interference and provide appropriate working channels for the different SAR providers.

Civil aviation and shipping also use satellite systems for commercial communications and distress alerting purposes and HM Coastguard will also use satellite communications for SAR response and coordination particularly in long range SAR scenarios.

## **UK SAR COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

The organisation of UK SAR is defined by the UK SAR Strategic Committee as supported by the UK SAR Operators Group. The structure is shown at [Annex C](#).

### **UK SAR Strategic Committee**

#### **Aim**

The UK SAR Strategic Committee (UKSARSC) is an inter-Agency national forum which aims to develop the capacity and capability of civilian search and rescue in the UK.

#### **Objectives**

The Committee's objectives are:

- a) To develop criteria to improve the coverage, responsiveness and availability of SAR resources, consulting the UK SAR Operators Group as required;
- b) To develop search and rescue in the line with emerging needs;
- c) To offer reviews to Ministers on improving SAR capability, effectiveness and co-operation;
- d) To promote effective and efficient co-operation between the various Government Departments, the emergency services and other organisations including voluntary agencies for the provision of an effective SAR service at national and, where appropriate, international levels;
- e) To establish the framework for UKSAR as described in the Strategic Overview;
- f) To provide Terms of Reference for the UK SAR Operators Group;
- g) The Committee shall meet at least twice a year.

#### **Membership**

Membership of the Committee shall be confined to those with strategic and policy responsibilities within those organisations which contribute significantly to UK SAR. The Committee shall consist of members from the following organisations:

- a) DfT – Chair and Secretariat
- b) National Police Lead for SAR England and Wales – Vice Chair
- c) Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE)
- d) Cabinet Office
- e) Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)
- f) Communities and Local Government (CLG)
- g) Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- h) Department of Health (DoH)
- i) Department of Justice Northern Ireland
- j) Home Office
- k) Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
- l) Ministry of Defence

- m) Police Scotland
- n) Police Services Northern Ireland
- o) Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)
- p) Scottish Government
- q) Welsh Government

### **UK SAR Operators Group**

Acting under the aegis of the UK SAR Strategic Committee, the objectives of the Operators Group are:

1. To develop a programme of work to implement the tasks set by the UKSAR Strategic Committee;
2. To consider reports and recommendations from associated SAR Working Groups;
3. To consider the views of the UK Maritime and Aviation SAR, and Inland SAR Consultative Committees;
4. To advise and make recommendations to the UK SAR Strategic Committee on the National Strategic SAR Framework to ensure efficient and effective co-operation between SAR agencies;
5. To advise and make recommendations to the UK SAR Strategic Committee to ensure the continued effectiveness of SAR response and co-ordination;
6. To determine the terms of reference and issue other guidance as appropriate to SAR Working Groups, and Consultative Committees.

### Frequency of Meetings

7. The Group shall meet up to four times a year.

### Costs

8. Unless otherwise agreed by the DfT (MCA), costs for attending meetings shall be borne by representative bodies.

### Membership

9. Membership of the Operators Group shall be confined only to those organisations which provide a significant national search and rescue operational capability. The only exception is where an organisation is, by mutual consent, represented by another member organisation. The Operators Group shall comprise representatives from:

- a) DfT – Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) – Chair and Secretariat
- b) Police Scotland – Deputy Chair
- c) Association of Air Ambulances (AAA)
- d) Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE)
- e) British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC)
- f) Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)

- g) Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- h) Lowland Rescue (ALSAR)
- i) Ministry of Defence
- j) Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MR-EW)
- k) National Crime Agency (NCA) – Search Lead
- l) National Police Air Services (NAPS)
- m) National Police Chiefs Council - England and Wales
- n) Northern Ireland (NI) SAR Practitioners Group
- o) Police Services Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- p) Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS)
- q) Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)
- r) Scottish Ambulance Service
- s) Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- t) Scottish Mountain Rescue (SMR)
- u) Surf Life Saving GB <sup>1\*</sup>

10. The Group may co-opt other organisations onto the Group usually for specific or specialist work or agenda items.

#### Specialist Advisors

11. Specialist Technical Advisors may be co-opted on to the Group from time to time as determined by the agenda.

#### Review

12. The terms of reference and existence of the Operators Group may be reviewed by the UK SAR Strategy Committee as required by them.

#### Definition

13. Search and Rescue is defined as an activity, normally co-ordinated by a rescue co-ordination authority, where available personnel and facilities are used to locate persons in distress, potential distress or missing and recover them to a place of safety providing for their initial medical care or other needs as necessary.

#### **Working Groups**

The UK SAR Strategic Committee and Operators' Group has a number of specialist or expert Working Groups and can establish ad hoc Working Groups as required. These Working Groups/Committees carry out technical work and provide expert advice on a range of SAR issues. The following Working Groups/Committees are currently active:

UK Emergency Air Response Committee  
 UK SAR Communications Working Group  
 UK SAR Volunteers Working Group  
 UK SAR Medical Group

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<sup>1</sup> \* Probationary member

## **Consultative Committees**

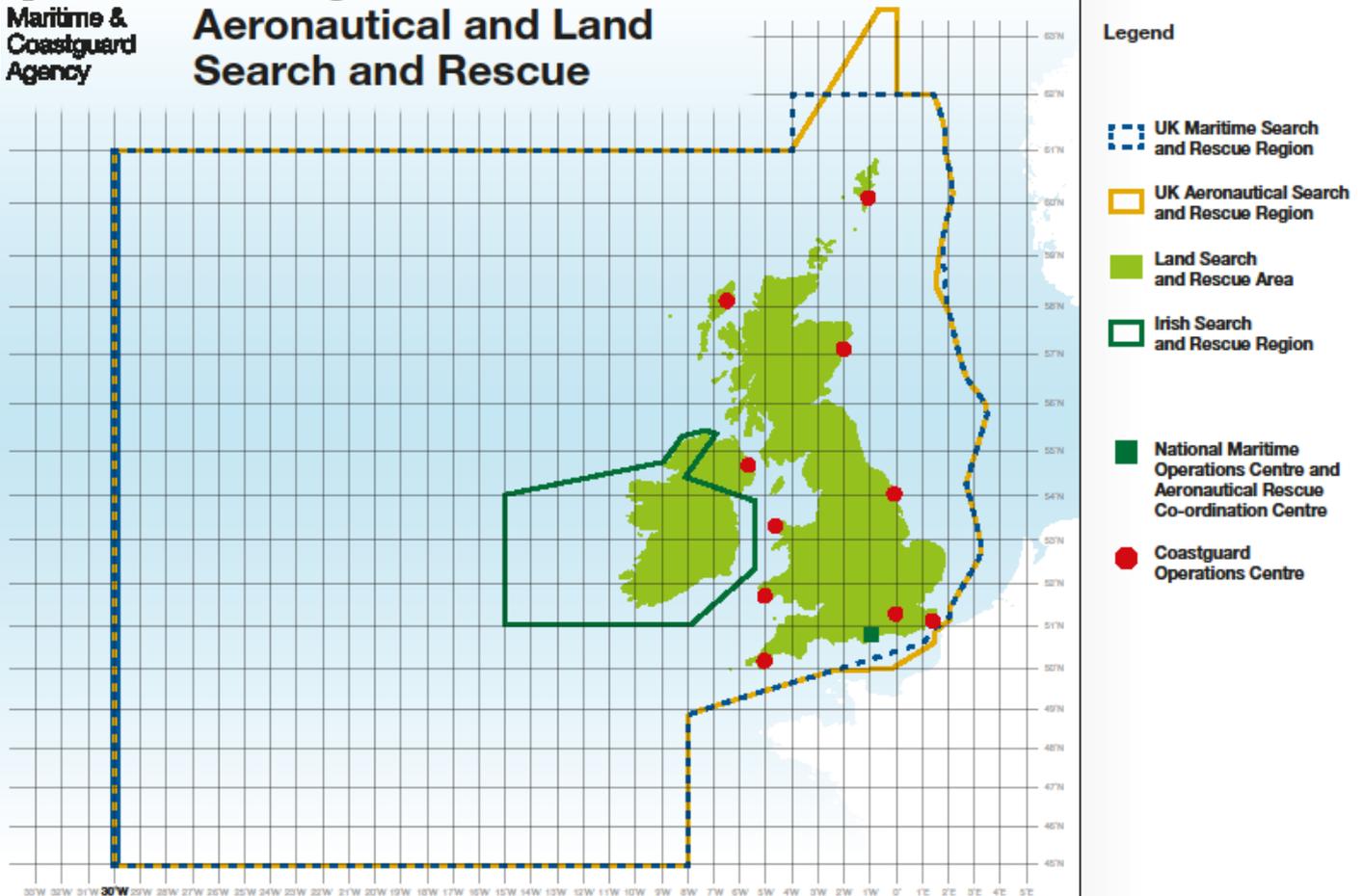
As part of the governance structure and ongoing commitment to ensure that an efficient and effective SAR service is maintained, two Consultative Committees representing maritime and aviation SAR, and inland SAR, also report to the UK SAR Operators Group. The membership of these committees is drawn from organisations that represent the views of potential users of the SAR services. In addition the Isle of Man, the Republic of Ireland and the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey are also represented on the Maritime and Aviation Consultative Committee as they too may request the use of UK SAR assets.

## **Local Search and Rescue Committees (LSARC)**

To encourage liaison at the local level it is recommended that SAR Committees, such as those coastal Local SAR Committees already established, are convened to monitor local arrangements for search and rescue. The jurisdiction of local committees should align as far as possible with Police Force boundaries. Representatives from emergency services, appropriate statutory agencies and voluntary organisations should be invited to attend.



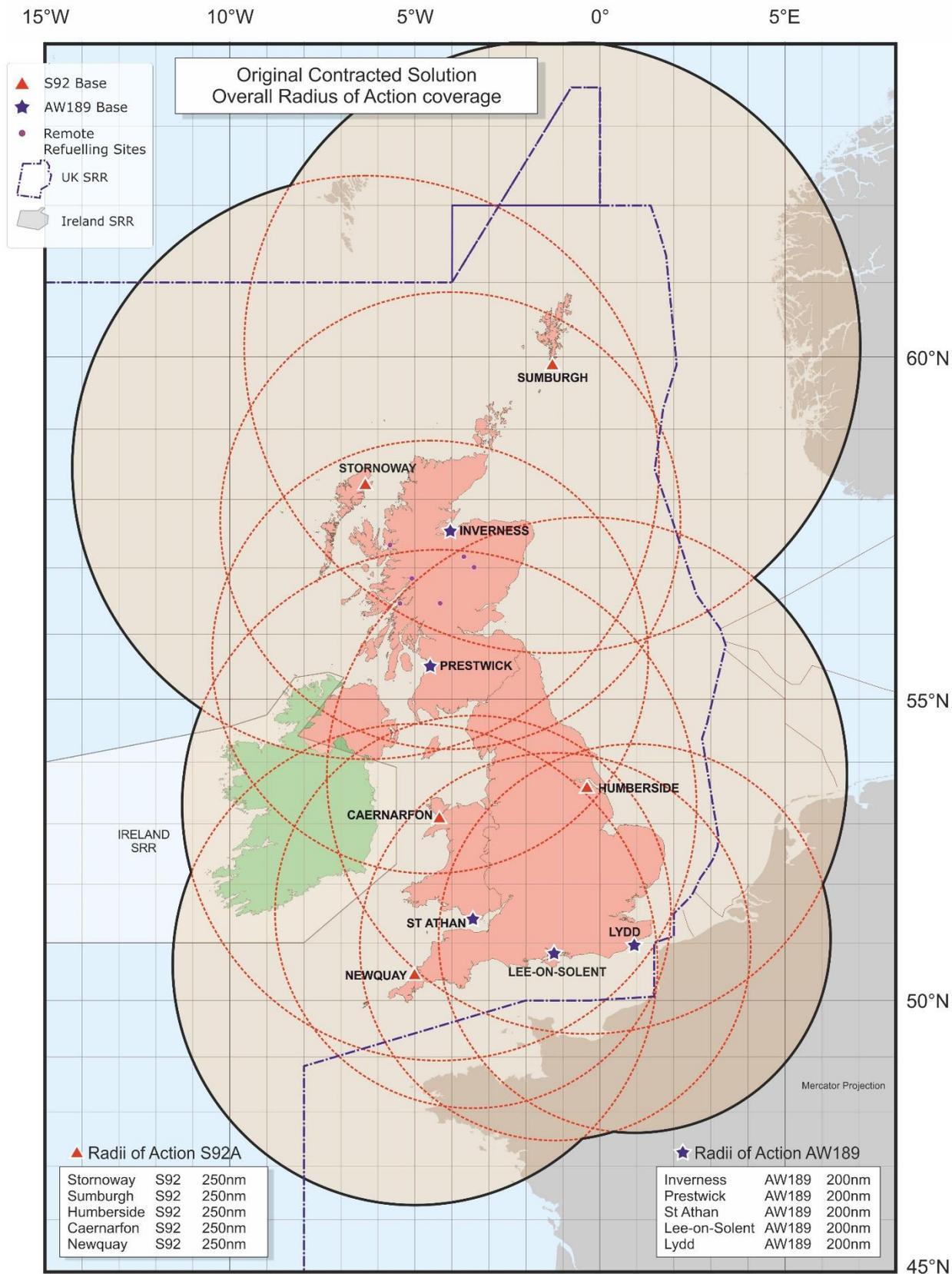
## UK Region for Maritime, Aeronautical and Land Search and Rescue



Information about the global provision of maritime search and rescue can be found through the following link:

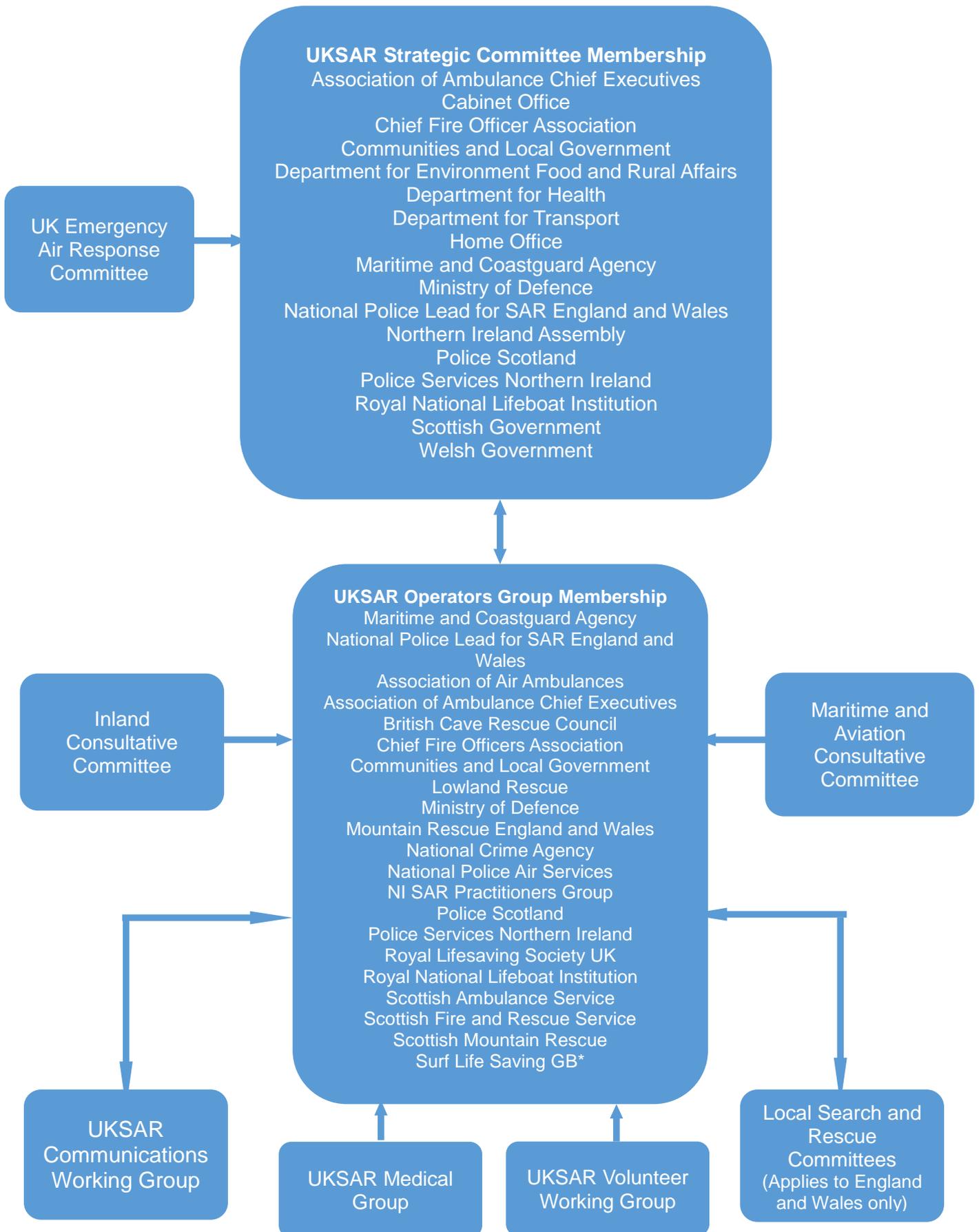
<http://sarcontacts.info/>

**UK SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER BASES**



# UK SAR COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

# ANNEX C



<b>GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	
<b>AACE</b>	Association of Ambulance Chief Executives
<b>AAD</b>	Aviation Aerospace Division
<b>ALSAR</b>	Lowland Rescue (Association of Lowland Search and Rescue)
<b>ARCC</b>	Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre
<b>ATV</b>	All-Terrain Vehicle
<b>BCRC</b>	British Cave Rescue Council
<b>CBRN</b>	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear
<b>CFOA</b>	Chief Fire Officers Association
<b>CGOC</b>	Coastguard Operations Centre
<b>CLG</b>	Communities and Local Government
<b>COBR</b>	Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms
<b>CRS</b>	Coastguard Rescue Service
<b>CRT</b>	Coastguard Rescue Team
<b>D&amp;DC</b>	Distress and Diversion Cell
<b>DEFRA</b>	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
<b>DfT</b>	Department for Transport
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>EAR</b>	Emergency Air Response
<b>FRS</b>	Fire and Rescue Service
<b>HART</b>	Hazardous Area Response Team
<b>HEMS</b>	Helicopter Medical Services
<b>HMCG</b>	Her Majesty's Coastguard
<b>ICAO</b>	International Civil Aviation Organization
<b>IRB</b>	Inshore Rescue Boat
<b>IRT</b>	Initial Response Team
<b>JESIP</b>	Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme
<b>KHz</b>	Kilohertz
<b>LRF</b>	Local Resilience Forum
<b>LSARC</b>	Local Search and Rescue Committee
<b>MACA</b>	Military Aid to the Civil Authorities
<b>MCA</b>	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
<b>MHWS</b>	Mean High Water Springs
<b>MHz</b>	Megahertz
<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>MRCC</b>	Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre
<b>MREW</b>	Mountain Rescue England and Wales
<b>MRSC</b>	Maritime Rescue Sub Centre
<b>MRT</b>	Mountain Rescue Team
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>NI</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>NMOC</b>	National Maritime Operations Centre
<b>NCA</b>	National Crime Agency
<b>NPAS</b>	National Police Air Service
<b>NPCC</b>	National Police Chiefs Council

<b>PSNI</b>	Police Services of Northern Ireland
<b>RLSS</b>	Royal Life Saving Society UK
<b>RNLI</b>	Royal National Lifeboat Institution
<b>RRP</b>	Regional Resilience Partnerships
<b>RWC</b>	Rescue Water Craft
<b>SAR</b>	Search and Rescue
<b>SARDA</b>	Search and Rescue Dogs Association
<b>SLSS GB</b>	Surf Life Saving Service GB
<b>SMR</b>	Scottish Mountain Rescue
<b>SOLAS</b>	Safety of Life at Sea
<b>SORT</b>	Special Operations Response Team
<b>UHF</b>	Ultra-High Frequency
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UKSAR</b>	United Kingdom Search and Rescue
<b>UKSAROG</b>	UK Search and Rescue Operators Group
<b>UKSARSC</b>	UK Search and Rescue Strategic Committee
<b>UKSRR</b>	United Kingdom Search and Rescue Region
<b>UNCLOS</b>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
<b>VHF</b>	Very High Frequency