

Have you got what it takes?

**Working with the National Police Air Service
(NPAS) and air support collaboration**



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Important facts

The National Police Air Service (NPAS) was launched on 1 October 2012 and is underpinned by a single national collaboration agreement between all police forces in England and Wales, made under Section 23 of the Police Act 1996. It is the first national collaboration of an operational policing function and is delivered through West Yorkshire Police as the lead force.

All 43 police areas of England and Wales have agreed to join NPAS; only one force is yet to become operational within the service, this is Humberside which is set to go live in Autumn 2016. The full potential of the national service depends on all forces being part of the collaboration agreement.

Under the new operating model, agreed by the NPAS Strategic Board in February 2015, there will be 15 air bases across England and Wales and the fleet will comprise 19 helicopters and four fixed-wing aircraft. The service will operate 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, making use of borderless tasking and nearest available aircraft attends models to ensure best possible cover and resilience for all forces.

Background

Police air support plays a key role in tackling crime and protecting the public:

- Searching – for suspects or missing persons.
- Reconnaissance ahead of planned operations.
- Assisting command and control for incidents or events including the facility to feed live video footage to commanders or officers on the ground.

In June 2009, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, then national lead on police air support, commissioned a review of the National Police Air Operations Strategy. The subsequent report recommended a national approach that could deliver substantial savings through the reduction in the number of aircraft and provide better air support coverage of England and Wales.

NPAS is a national, borderless police air service in England and Wales making use of the nearest available aircraft to tackle crime and protect the public. NPAS is designed to ensure that essential air support is delivered where it is required. As well as bringing improvements in operational efficiencies, it allows for the introduction of innovative contracts for maintenance, fuel and insurance that offer better value for money for the service and the taxpayer.

NPAS estimates that in 2014/15, it delivered savings of up to £13 million a year compared to arrangements in place prior to the establishment of the service.

Management and funding

West Yorkshire Police has agreed to act as the lead force for NPAS and as such is the employer of all NPAS staff and the owner of the NPAS assets. It manages NPAS on behalf of the police and receives payments from the rest of the service to cover the full revenue costs, in accordance with the funding model. As the revenue budget for NPAS is provided by forces themselves, savings in running costs and flying hours go back to forces. Any reduction in costs is entirely a decision for forces.

Capital costs of NPAS for the remainder of the Spending Review period are being met from the police capital grant by the Home Office.

Governance

The collaboration agreement provides for NPAS to be governed by an overarching Strategic Board which consists of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and chief officer representatives from each of the six current air support regions. The Strategic Board is also attended by the PCC and Chief Constable of the lead force (West Yorkshire Police), the Policing Business Lead for Aviation and a representative

of the Home Secretary as a provider of capital grant funding to the service.

The Strategic Board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of NPAS and performs an oversight function on behalf of the local policing bodies. It demonstrates accountability, value for money, effectiveness and efficiency and that suitable arrangements are in place for performance management and holds the lead local policing body to account.

The Strategic Board is also responsible for approving proposals for any significant alterations to the financial or operating models of the service including fleet composition, base locations and role equipment.

More information

The Police (Collaboration: Specified Function) Order 2012

The Home Secretary used her powers under the Police Act 1996 to make the Police (Collaboration: Specified Function) Order 2012, which specified air support as an operational function that must be delivered through a collaboration agreement for all the police areas in England and Wales.

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Collaboration Order, which has been agreed by Parliament, states that the detailed terms of the national collaboration agreement are a matter for policing bodies and forces to agree.

NPAS is, therefore, a police-led, operational initiative, with all strategic decisions, including budgets and operating model, taken by the Strategic Board which comprises Police and Crime Commissioners and chief constables.

Overall changes to air support

In February 2015, the NPAS Strategic Board made the decision to further rationalise the service. The agreed new operating model is intended to save 14% in revenue costs over 3 years while maintaining current flying hours of the fleet, which will be comprised of 19 rotary and four fixed wing aircraft.

The model will reduce the number of air bases from 23 to 15 by the end of 2016/17. All remaining bases will be operational 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, so forces will have access to air support when they need it, not just when a local base is open, thus improving operational resilience.

NPAS has agreed to review the implementation of the new operating model from April 2016 to ensure that the needs of all forces are being met.

How will service to the public be affected?

The new operating model agreed by the NPAS Strategic Board was based on an analysis of potential threat, risk and harm to the public, and from forces' own user requirements. Response times for the Priority 1 most urgent calls for air support where there is immediate threat to life, terrorist action or national incident will remain under the 20-minute Service Level Agreement for nearly all force areas. NPAS leads are confident that the new model, with all bases open 24-hours a day, will give greater resilience for forces.

Is the government using this Collaboration Order as a step to centralise the police or merge forces?

No. Some policing functions can most sensibly be organised nationally. NPAS is a police-led, operational initiative stemming from a review of air operations strategy led by the police themselves. The review recommended a national approach to deliver a more cohesive, resilient service while achieving substantial savings of up to £15m per annum once all forces had joined up. This is about value for money and helping the police to work more effectively and efficiently maintaining and in some cases improving police air service.