



**Lancashire**  
**Constabulary**  
police and communities together

**REPORT TO: STRATEGIC SCRUTINY MEETING**

**DATE: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015**

**AGENDA ITEM: 3**

**SUBJECT: NPAS**

The National Police Air Service was born from an ACPO review undertaken by Sir Bernard Hogan Howe, the then Chief Constable of Merseyside in 2009. This review found that there were 31 helicopters working out of 29 bases and rarely crossed over force boundaries. It concluded the service was highly fragmented, more costly than it needs to be, and its impact less than it could be for the amount spent on it which was estimated to be in the region of £63.5m (there was a great deal of discrepancy and non-specific cost in terms of maintenance budgets etc.)

As a result in 2010 a joint ACPO and National Police Improvement Agency project was set up to explore a national service under the leadership of the then Chief Constable of Hampshire, Alex Marshall.

This project concluded that a national air service could in fact be configured that would improve the service (across the whole of England and Wales) promising that 98% of the population would have police air support no more than 20 minutes away and in doing so would be able to save £15m. This proposal had support of Chief Constables (through Chief Constables Council) but met with some local resistance, attributed mostly but maybe not entirely fairly to Police Authorities.

In January 2012 the then Policing Minister Nick Herbert announced in a speech to the City Forum in London that “The time for talking about collaboration and the era of Police fiefdoms is over” and outlined to his audience that he intended to use new powers granted to him under the Police and Social Responsibility Act to mandate that all forces sign up to the National Police Air Service (ACC Jacques was present at this event). This had the desired effect and whilst there was still some resistance and reluctance, and the “powers” were not actually invoked, the National Police Air Service was created in April 2012 under the auspices of the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) going live operationally in October of that year. The financial savings identified were realised though the operating model envisaged was to operate out of 20 bases and 23 were actually used with the Home Office initially covering the resulting funding gap this created.

With the Home Office introduction of the College of Policing and the subsequent demise of the NPIA, West Yorkshire Police agreed to be the “host” organisation for this service and more latterly the NPAS Board was set up. This constituted the Chief Constable and PCC of West Yorkshire as well as a Chief Constable and PCC representative from each region to consult with their counter parts on operational matters (mainly for the Chiefs) and budgetary matters (mainly for the PCCs). NPAS inherited a disparate service that was built upon a very mixed picture of regional collaborations, service expectations and financial contributions. They set about building the infrastructure needed to run a national service including the creation of the Police Despatch & Flight Monitoring Centre (D&FMC) based at Dudley Hill, Bradford. One of their main challenges was agreeing a nationally consistent operating model and an equitable and fair funding formula for all forces. As the era of austerity began to increasingly affect all forces it was agreed via Chief Constables Council (CCC) that NPAS should play its part and seek to deliver further efficiency savings in line with local force requirements. As a consequence a paper was brought back to CCC outlining that NPAS would explore options and consult on operating models that could deliver savings of 14%, 21% or 28% of its current annual budget.

This consultation consisted of a series of spread-sheets based on 14%, 21% or 28% budget reductions that outlined the service impact on average time to arrive for grade 1 and grade 2 Lancashire incidents. No detail was initially provided about which operating bases would have to be closed to achieve the savings. When we considered the spread-sheet data it was evident to us that the plan would very likely involve the closure of the Warton base as the response times for Lancashire in all options were similarly and significantly negatively affected. We were in the top “quartile” of forces hit for service delivery though the resultant outcome was that the response times were in the main within the 20 minute window described by NPAS. When you considered the other similarly hit force areas in that “top quartile”, we believed their risk and threat profile did not match that of Lancashire in that they were smaller and more rural in nature. In terms of expressing an opinion to NPAS on these options we were clear with them that from an operational perspective there was no acceptable option for Lancashire, as the service degradation was similarly poor in all of them. The least worst option of those presented would therefore be the one that yielded the greatest savings back to the force.

At this stage we were aware that no staff consultation had taken place and indeed it never did take place prior to a decision being made. This was based on the approach taken by NPAS (and a number of other forces in the region and beyond) that as soon as you begin to discuss options with staff about changes and re-structures you are into a statutory consultation stage. This is a view and interpretation of the relevant legislation that in Lancashire we clearly do not share. All staff in the Warton base are now either employed directly by NPAS or seconded into it.

An update was provided to CCC to say that NPAS favoured a 14% overall budget reduction and an operating model based on “Threat Risk and Harm” was approved. Again no specific detail was given about what that meant for base closures. Throughout all of this there have been on-going discussions about the funding model to be used regarding individual force contributions within whatever savings package was chosen and we found it very difficult to make an informed view about operational impact and acceptability without viewing this “in the round” alongside the potential financial impact. We have made this point directly with NPAS on a number of occasions.

The NPAS board met in February 2015 and agreed the 14% reduction option and this was then communicated to all staff. Only a few days before this meeting did we actually receive confirmation of what we had suspected in that Warton would be one of the bases to be closed. This was shared with us “in confidence” and not to be released or discussed with staff. From the Constabulary

perspective, as this was our working assumption, it didn't alter the representations we had or sought to make and was clearly the reason the response times to Lancashire incidents were to increase.

Moving onto the funding model; NPAS have informed us that they have considered 61 different funding models and finally identified 3 based on recent usage data which required further consultation. Option one is based on "actioned" calls for service by each force area. Option 2 is based on a mix of up front "requested" flying hours and "actual" flying hours by each force area, and option 3 is based on a mix of "actual" hours and the number of "actioned" calls for service. The Lancashire view is that option one is our preferred option simply as it yields the most savings for us. Even with that option the funding formulas do not put us in the high end of financial benefit at around £93,000pa savings, equal to 7.4% of our current annual contribution (though there are 8 forces where it will actually cost them more). It is this relatively unique "double whammy" of high degradation in service and relatively low financial benefit that makes these changes particularly concerning for Lancashire.

NPAS are yet to decide which funding model they will choose, though very recent communication tells us option 1 is currently the most popular with the 18 forces that have so far responded to the consultation. Since Lancashire Constabulary became a signatory to NPAS we have made recurring annual revenue savings of around £640,000 and have also had financial benefit in terms of capital expenditure. If option one is the chosen funding model this would increase to annual savings of around £733,000pa. The operational impact of the Warton closure would in effect put us at the back end of what is considered nationally acceptable whereas we are accustomed to having air support on our doorstep and receiving what is very much a front end service at the moment. With Warton being a base that is close to a coastline and therefore not maximising coverage of population centres within its diameter of reach then the NPAS view is that it is one of their less effective bases. Given the nature and scale of financial savings that we are required to achieve in response to the national austerity agenda maintaining our own air support service is just not viable and there is little appetite across the region to re-consider a regional service then we are left with doing what we can to influence a national organisation to maximise the benefit to our communities from their service. We continue to actively engage with NPAS to that effect.