SCOTTISH POLICE
AUTHORITY

Meeting	**SPA Policing Performance Committee**
Date	**17 March 2022**
Location	**Video Conference**
Title of Paper	**Drones Downlink System and Service Update**
Presented By	**Chief Superintendent Thom McLoughlin, Operational Support**
Recommendation to Members	**For Discussion**
Appendix Attached	**No**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the downlink capability for drones, a summary of the establishment of the Air Support Monitoring Group and development of the Air Support Strategy.

The paper is presented in line with

- Scottish Police Authority Committee Terms of Reference in relation to Police Scotland Use of Drones.

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this paper.

1.   BACKGROUND

1.1   Police Scotland currently operates remotely piloted aircraft systems colloquially known as drones as part of the Air Support Unit. This includes a number of drones used for training and operational deployments which complement the air support capability throughout Scotland.

1.2   Police Scotland has procured a downlink capability for drones which will enable live footage from the drone to be streamed simultaneously to an Area Control Room, police networked computer and/or mobile device via a secure 4G network. This has been approved by the Police Scotland Information Security Officer.

1.3   In October 2021, ACC Williams provided an update to the Chair of the SPA Policing Performance Committee of the intention to use drones and Downlink during Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26) in the event of a critical, operational requirement to do so. However, drones were not deployed as part of the policing operation for COP26 and there was no need to utilise the downlink technology as a result.

1.4   Police Scotland are now seeking to raise the awareness of the SPA Policing Performance Committee with regards to the longer term use of the downlink technology.

2.   DOWNLINK

2.1   **Capability**

2.1.1 Police Scotland has procured a downlink system. The downlink system is a small suitcase sized device which enables live video from the drone camera, to be streamed via a secure 4G network to a Police Area Control Room, a police networked computer or a Police mobile device. The downlink feed is accessed via a secure, password enabled link provided by the Air Support Unit. Access to the downlink is only granted to those officers directly involved in the incident or event and where it is deemed that the footage will provide operational benefit. The downlink cannot be widely accessed by any officer or control room and will be strictly controlled by the Air Support Unit. At this time live downlink will not be shared/streamed out with Police Scotland as it is only accessible via Police Scotland Network/Devices. Any evidential footage/images

obtained will continue to be shared as per current Air Support Unit procedures and as detailed in the Code of Practice.

2.1.2 Footage is not routinely recorded however, if required for evidential purposes, footage can be recorded via the downlink. Each individual downlink box has the facility to record footage from police drones. The recording facility is operated manually by Police Scotland drone officers. This data is captured on the downlink box and will be deleted if not required or will be burned onto disc for evidential purposes by the Police Scotland drone operator. Any data not required will be deleted on completion of a deployment in line with existing guidance and procedures. This footage *may* be shared with partners such as the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service depending on the context, circumstances and content. This process is covered within the Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and the RPAS Code of Practice.

2.1.3 The downlink equipment is **NOT** capable of facial recognition.

2.2 **Operational Benefits**

2.2.1 Police Scotland already has the ability to provide real time video of an incident or event to a police control room from the police helicopter. As Police Scotland continues to utilise drones more frequently to support Local Policing at a variety of different incidents, operational effectiveness will be enhanced through use of downlink from police drones.

2.2.2 Downlink provides enhanced situational awareness to officers directly involved in the incident or event e.g. Police Commanders, Police Incident Officers (PIO) and Police Tactical Advisors. Unlike the helicopter downlink, this newer system can provide video not only to Control Rooms, but also to police officers at the scene on their police issue mobile device. This will enable police officers to have live visual information, highlighting risks or threats to the safety of the public and officers, allowing informed decisions to be made for the safe and effective deployment of resources and ensuring a proportionate policing response to that incident.

2.3 **Use of RPAS downlink**

2.3.1 Downlink will only be activated when there is an operational need and strictly controlled by the Air Support Unit. Downlink will not be

routinely provided on every flight and any data obtained will be managed in accordance with Police Scotland General Data Protection Regulations, Air Support Unit National Guidance EqHRIA and Police Scotland Record Retention Standard Operating Procedure.

2.3.2 Examples of typical tasks where Downlink could be used to benefit an operational incident or event include:

a. Missing Person Search – Search area downlinked to PIO or Police Search Advisor on their mobile device to allow development of a search strategy and deployment of search resources on the ground.

b. Football Match or Outdoor Public Event – Downlink of live footage of crowd numbers, dynamics and traffic management outside a stadium/event to the Police Commander to assist in monitoring the safety of the public and also effective deployment of Police resources.

c. Firearms Operation – Downlink to Strategic/Tactical/Operational Firearms Commanders during an armed intervention or enquiry by Firearms officers to provide live situational awareness and ensure the safety of the public, police officers and partner agencies.

d. Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)/Disorder – Similar to use of mobile local authority CCTV, drones can provide live footage of persons involved and downlinked to PIO/local officers as part of a policing operation/initiative to tackle ASB to determine an appropriate and proportionate policing response to the ongoing incident or issue. All deployments are risk assessed and where deemed proportionate are conducted overtly by uniformed police officers. A Community Impact Assessment would be completed prior to this type of deployment using drones and downlink.

2.4 **Security**

2.4.1 The downlink feed will be streamed over a secure 4G network to a secure Police Scotland server. The downlink feed will be available within all Police Area Control Rooms in Scotland similar to the existing helicopter downlink.

2.4.2 Officers granted access to the downlink via a police networked computer, will be provided with a link which is password protected. This password is changed by the Air Support Unit at the conclusion of the incident/event and a new password generated for subsequent incidents.

2.4.3 Downlink to a police issue mobile device is accessed via a secure third party application (app). Access to the footage on the app is also password protected. The password is renewed by Air Support Unit after each incident.

2.4.4 Access to the downlink via police computer or mobile device will be strictly controlled by the Air Support Unit and only to those officers who are directly involved in the incident and require the downlink feed for operational purposes.

2.4.5 Implementation of the downlink system has been completed in conjunction with Police Scotland ICT, Information Assurance and Information Security Officers. The drone 'SyOps' document has been updated to reflect this implementation.

2.4.6 This new downlink capability (streaming to police computer/mobile devices and Police Area Control Rooms) will be included in the drone Code of Practice, the DPIA, and Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment. The IAs and Code of Practice already cover use of downlink to control rooms.

2.4.7 Following engagement with the SPA, a further Child Rights Impact Assessment will be considered during review in 6 months.

2.5 **Engagement**

2.5.1 By way of recent practical example, Police Scotland has deployed a police drone in the East Renfrewshire area on a number of occasions for missing person searches and in support of Local Policing. As such the technology is relatively well known in this council area. As part of the ongoing support to the 'Safe East Ren' initiative at Greater Glasgow Division, through partnership working to address youth disorder and anti-social behaviour, Police Scotland Air Support Unit delivered a presentation to Local Elected Members, MPs, MSPs and Youth Services Leaders within East Renfrewshire Council. The presentation covered use of police drones and the ability to downlink to police mobile devices. It was well received

with constructive discussion in relation to partnership working, human rights and privacy.

2.5.2 Positive feedback was received following this engagement with East Renfrewshire Council which also included members of the Police & Fire Scrutiny Board. They supported the use of this technology particularly towards Local Policing plans and initiatives to tackle youth disorder. They also welcomed the open and transparent approach by Police Scotland and the detail provided around the potential use of drones and downlink.

2.5.3 In conjunction with the Police Local Authority Liaison Officer and Youth Services at East Renfrewshire Council, further engagement was conducted at a local secondary school. Police Scotland Air Support Unit officers held a workshop with pupils from S4 (14–16 year olds). This was an interactive session displaying the drone equipment and explaining how the technology worked. It was an opportunity for the pupils to give their perspective as to how new technology could impact them and for them to understand why Police drones can be used to tackle ASB.

2.5.4 Further workshops have been planned over the coming months with East Renfrewshire Council Youth Services, SKATE Project (police/council) and Police Scotland Youth Volunteers. This type of engagement will be built into ongoing communications and consultation activity and as part of our wider communications strategy.

2.6 **Next Steps**

2.6.1 Police Scotland Air Support Unit will present the downlink concept to the Digitally Enabled Policing Programme - Mobile Working Group, to progress approval and installation of the downlink app for mobile devices.

2.6.2 An Air Support Strategy is being developed to ensure that Police Scotland Air Support capability, including both piloted aircraft and drone technology, continues to meet the requirements of policing and is sustainable, efficient and effective for the next ten years.

2.6.3 As drone technology evolves and becomes available, Police Scotland will explore the potential benefits and efficiencies. New technology or equipment in relation to drones will be discussed at the Air Support Monitoring Group, chaired by ACC Operational Support.

This group was established to provide a strategic forum through which all Air Support policy, practice and technology will be considered, developed and reviewed to ensure that the delivery of Air Support is consistent and cognisant of human rights considerations.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Downlink equipment was procured using capital funds. Four downlink boxes were obtained, each box has an annual licence fee cost of £250. The downlink is designed to evolve allowing conversion from 4G to 5G and there will be regular software updates which will increase downlink life span.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Police Scotland RPAS personnel will be trained in the use of downlink. Training will be delivered by Police Scotland Air Support Unit.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this paper.

6. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no reputational implications associated with this paper.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no social implications associated with this paper.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

8.1 Community Impact Assessments are routinely completed when Police Scotland intends to deploy a Police drone within a local area to support a policing initiative e.g. ASB/disorder.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 EqHRIA will be updated to reflect the additional downlink capability. The RPAS Code of Practice will also be updated accordingly.

10. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The continued increase in use of Police drones at incidents/events, as an alternative to the Police helicopter where appropriate, will support the Police Scotland Environmental Strategy and help reduce the organisations carbon footprint.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this paper.