

Meeting	SPA Policing Performance Committee
Date	11 October 2022
Location	Video Conference
Title of Paper	Police Scotland Aviation Safety and Security Unit – Update
Presented By	ACC Mark Williams, Operational Support Division Supt Darren Faulds, Emergency, Event & Resilience Planning
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	No

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide the SPA Police Performance Committee with an update in relation to Police Scotland Aviation Safety and Security Unit.

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this report.

1. BACKGROUND

Police Scotland has a legislative duty to provide a proportionate policing response to incidents which occur within the airspace above its land jurisdiction. In general this legal framework provides that police, while not always the lead agency, have a role to play in enforcement, prevention and public safety aspects of airspace management. This includes General Aviation (crewed), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (commonly referred to as UAVs or Drones), air accident investigations, airspace restrictions, event planning and legislation enforcement.

The responsibilities detailed above are managed day to day within the Aviation Safety and Security Unit. This unit is based within the Operational Support Division. The unit is currently supported by one full time Inspector post, although it should be noted a review of this establishment is currently ongoing with a view to increasing full time posts. There are other non-dedicated trained officers based across the Divisions able to respond to incidents.

The below timetable provides a statistical overview on the reactive incident demand placed on the unit over the past 5 years.

Year	General Aviation	Unmanned Aviation
2018	221	504
2019	156	1069
2020	138	1883
2021	138	2562
2022 to July	65	1177

As can be seen above, the use of UAVs both in the private and commercial sectors has risen significantly in the past 3 years. In 2019 there were approximately 10,000 registered users, this figure has now risen to almost a quarter of a million.

Low sophisticated drones can be obtained for as little as £20-£30 from a number of retailers. These require limited or no knowledge to fly and be used 'off the shelf' by the vast majority of people. With this comes the risk to public safety from collision and criminality associated with either reckless or deliberate behaviour.

Trends across the UK show an increase in the use of UAVs across a broad range of crime types.

This includes public nuisance, drugs and other contraband being dropped into prisons, illegal betting at sporting events, voyeurism and recognisance for acquisitive crime. While we have seen incidents in Scotland they are currently sporadic isolated incidents.

It remains unlikely that a UAV would be used as a method of physically conducting any type of attack within the UK in the next 3 years. This is due to current capability, cost and available technologies.

This briefing paper will focus primarily on the units increasing demand from the public and commercial use of unmanned aircraft.

2. FURTHER DETAIL

2.1 Legislation

The primary legislation for dealing with aviation incidents out with the airport environment are:

- Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act 2021.
- Air Navigation Orders 2016.
- Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 – Part 5 (Aviation Alcohol & drugs).

These Acts provide police officers with fairly wide ranging powers. These include the power to require a pilot to ground an unmanned aircraft, to search persons and vehicles, to enter and search premises under warrant and a power of seizure. It is important to stress that while these powers are available, the use of these powers and policing response must be proportionate to the circumstances.

While the legislation places obligations on a number of partner agencies in terms of aviation safety, the implications on policing have led to an increase in demand both in general and for the requirement of specialist advice. This demand includes:

- A requirement to upskill specialist officers.
- Requirement to acquire specialist equipment.
- Briefing materials to front line officers to enable them to identify offences, understand and utilise their powers.
- Briefings to CTSecCos and event police leads around the country.

- Threats from aviation to events and operations.
- Forming and maintaining partnership links with other key responder agencies, providing specialist advice when required.

2.2 Benchmarking

Police Scotland is currently seen as a UK leader in the policing of aviation incidents. This is in part due to the work undertaken by PI Graeme Rankin over a number of years. PI Rankin, who has now retired from policing, carried out a significant amount of work in the lead up to the COP26 climate conference in November 2021, to ensure Police Scotland was in a positive position to respond to any aviation threat to the conference. This included the significant investment to acquire specialist equipment and additional training of a non dedicated cadre of specialist officers in Airspace management and counter UAV tactics.

There are a total of 56 officers across Police Scotland trained in either airspace management, counter UAV tactics or both.

The Police Scotland Aviation Unit, through its positive reputation, was not only at the forefront in providing airspace security at COP26 and other Scottish events but was actively sought after as part of mutual aid requests to help other UK forces deliver safe and secure events. This includes the 2021 G7 conference in Devon and Cornwall and the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

The command structures and officer deployments are now seen as best practice when planning for an event or operation seeking to mitigate against an aviation threat. The structures are scalable to consider such things as the intelligence picture, size, scale and type of event or operation.

2.3 Specialist Equipment

In response to the increasing use of UAVs and the COP26 Conference a significant amount of investment was made in acquiring specialist equipment.

2.4 Future Risks and Challenges

It is highly likely that the public and commercial use of UAVs will continue to rise sharply over the forthcoming years. Enhancements in technology and capability will also increase the threat and risk from UAVs from a policing perspective.

- **Increased criminality** - Crime trends, while sporadic, are already showing the use of drones in the commission of traditional crime. Similar to the use of the internet as a new way to commit traditional crimes, we will likely see the enabling of drones for this purpose.
- **Increased CT threat** – While the risk remains low and unlikely at this time, it is arguable that terrorists may seek to exploit technologies for this purpose in future years.
- **Increased commercial use** – several well developed projects have begun testing the use of drones for delivery of products and longer term the carriage of passengers across the country. These successful tests are working towards the use of drone technology to create “skyway” routes in our airspace. Busier airspace will increase the risk of aviation accidents and, along with our partners, Police Scotland will undoubtedly have a key part to play in contingency plans around this.
- **Maintaining training and capability** – In order to continue to meet current and future threats there is an ongoing relicensing requirement for both personnel and equipment. This includes the UAV Tactical advisors, Airspace Commanders, Airspace security officers.

2.5. Summary

As evidenced the number of UAVs and UAV operators continues to increase on a yearly basis. While currently all operators of a drone above 250g require a licence from the CAA the reality is these licences are fairly easy to obtain. The use of UAVs will arguably continue to increase as the technology advances.

With this increase comes not only an inherent public safety risk through collisions but also a wider use of drones by criminals.

While the current security and criminal threat from UAVs is low, the increased use continues to place additional demands on the aviation unit. The unit continues to evolve to meet these challenges, taking on more of a co-ordination role. The role of the unit is likely to develop into one where it co-ordinates training, upskilling of front line officers, specialist equipment and deployments from across the force rather than directly responding.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no immediate financial implications. Police Scotland have the necessary equipment and officers trained to meet local and national demand.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no immediate personnel implications.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Police Scotland has a legislative duty to provide a proportionate policing response to incidents which occur within the airspace above its land jurisdiction. In general this legal framework provides that police, while not always the lead agency, have a role to play in enforcement, prevention and public safety aspects of airspace management. This includes General Aviation (crewed), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (commonly referred to as UAVs or Drones), air accident investigations, airspace restrictions, event planning and legislation enforcement.

The primary legislation for dealing with aviation incidents out with the airport environment are:

- Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act 2021.
- Air Navigation Orders 2016.
- Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 – Part 5 (Aviation Alcohol & drugs).

These Acts provide police officers with fairly wide ranging powers. These include the power to require a pilot to ground an unmanned aircraft, to search persons and vehicles, to enter and search premises under warrant and a power of seizure. It is important to stress that while these powers are available, the use of these powers and policing response must be proportionate to the circumstances.

6. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no immediate reputational implications.

7. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no immediate social implications.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

8.1 There is no immediate community impact.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Not applicable.

10. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to discuss the contents of this report.