



<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Policing Performance Committee</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>11 June 2024</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>Video Conference</b>
<b>Title of Paper</b>	<b>Police Scotland Air Support Strategic Plan</b>
<b>Presented By</b>	<b>ACC Gary Ritchie, Operational Support</b>
<b>Recommendation to Members</b>	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Appendix Attached</b>	<b>Appendix A – Draft Police Scotland Air Support Strategy 2024-34</b>

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this paper is to provide a briefing regarding the proposed Air Support Strategic Plan for 2024 - 2025.

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this paper.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Police Scotland air support capability has expanded with the introduction of drones in 2019 alongside the existing helicopter. As technology continues to evolve, it is important that Police Scotland remains at the forefront of technological development both in terms of best value and sustainability. To support future development of the air support capability and to understand implications in relation to procurement, finance and ICT business areas, Operational Support Division was tasked to develop an Air Support Strategic Plan for the next 10 years.
- 1.2 The Air Support Strategic Plan, attached at Appendix A, outlines proposals to develop the air support capability further through a mixed air asset model of one helicopter and drone hubs, providing focused and localised air support. This capability will be sustainable, ensuring that our environmental impact is reduced using the right aircraft and equipment, whilst continuing to enhance and improve service delivery.
- 1.3 It is appreciated that the final version of the plan may be re-designed and that it may well be prudent to have an internal strategy and an external-facing version which has had any sensitive material removed.
- 1.4 The previous draft of the Strategic Plan was presented at COMB and SLB in Autumn 2023. Following engagement with SPA colleagues it has been amended.

## **2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1 Finance have been involved in the development of the plan. The current provision for the helicopter service contract costs £3M per annum. £2.24m of this relates to monthly standing charges with the remainder (£0.84m) relating to fuel, landing charges and other associated costs with the operation. Standing Charges are expected to increase to £2.44m in financial year 2024/25. This, along with inflationary increases in fuel, mean a reduced budget available for flying hours in 2024/25. Charges are expected to remain relatively unchanged (subject to inflation) should the contract be extended for a further 3 years.
- 2.2 Bespoke training will be delivered in house with no external costs for training. This training programme has been developed by OSD Specialist Services and has now been approved by Civil Aviation Authority.

**3. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no personnel implications in this report.

**4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

**5. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are positive\_reputational implications in this report.

**6. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no social implications in this report.

**7. COMMUNITY IMPACT**

7.1 There are no community implications in this report.

**8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no equality implications in this report.

**9. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS**

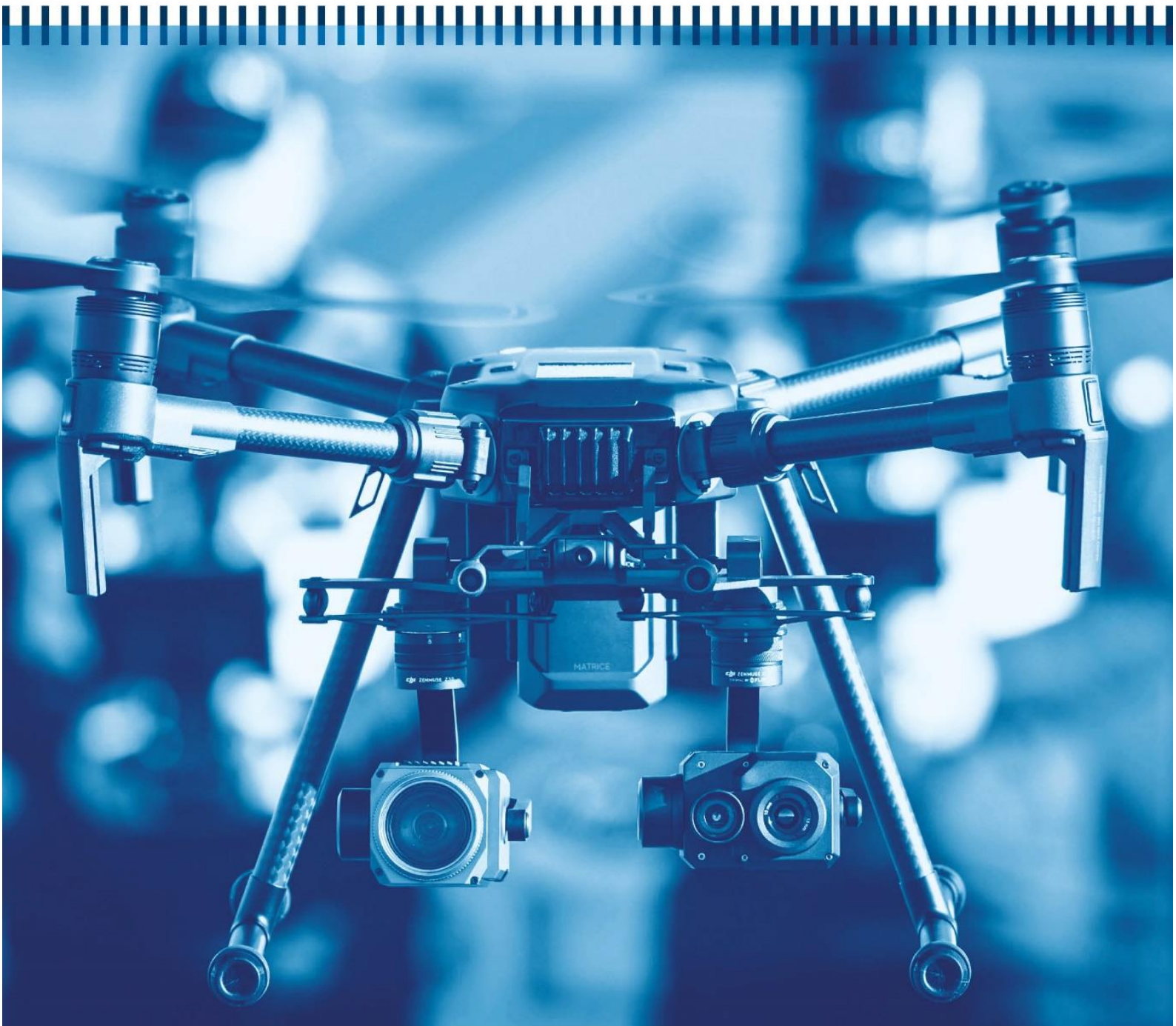
9.1 There are environmental benefits associated with this report which are detailed within the strategic plan.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this paper.

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# Police Scotland Air Support Strategy 2024-34



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## **Foreword**

Since the creation of Police Scotland in 2013, our Air Support Unit has enabled the organisation to better protect the public, support our people and tackle crime across Scotland – locally and nationally.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to improve our air support response in line with evolving technology to meet the needs of all local policing divisions and the communities we serve.

We will build upon and expand our existing capability and capacity, with the aim of embedding our air support service into our business as usual approach to policing.

We will develop our existing operating model, ensuring the delivery of an accessible and agile service across Scotland. This will involve improving our understanding of the demand facing our Air Support Unit and allocating resources to the most appropriate areas in order to meet local needs.

Depending on the type of incident, operation or event, we will ensure the most suitable air asset is deployed, whether that be the police helicopter or our remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS).

By continuing to design and develop the right services and procure new equipment, we will fulfil existing requests and better understand unmet demand

Our Air Support Unit provide assistance and protection to our officers and staff on the ground during various incidents, operations and events. We will explore and trial new capabilities with our air assets and simultaneously, build the knowledge and skills of our air support workforce. All officers and staff will be equipped with the necessary training, resources and skills to provide an efficient and effective service.

Building an ethical and sustainable model to support the future operation of our Air Support Unit will be of priority. Our use of existing and future aviation technology will follow a robust ethical framework, ensure best value for the service and minimise our impact on the environment.

We will continue to develop new and existing partnerships with other emergency and public sector bodies to explore opportunities for joint working and collaboration. This will involve exploring shared locations, procurement, training and learning.

As aviation technology and regulations continue to evolve, it is vital that we keep pace and provide a progressive air support service. In this strategy, we outline some of the



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future considerations surrounding our air support capabilities. We will monitor these future trends and consider how they will impact and enhance the service we provide going forward.

This strategy is the basis of a long-term transformation of our Air Support Unit. We will continue to progress and develop our policing air service, striving towards the implementation of best practice and an optimal delivery model. We recognise the invaluable service that our air support team provide and we will continue to upgrade, upskill and enhance our air support equipment and workforce to ensure the provision of a high quality service that keeps people safe.

**Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors LVO QPM**  
**Crime & Operations**

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## Air Support – Current Position

- Helicopter resource based at Clyde Heliport, Glasgow.
- Primary fuelling location is at the Clyde Heliport however fuel is available at various locations around Scotland allowing national deployment.
- 79% of helicopter tasks are undertaken in the West of Scotland.
- 43% of helicopter deployments related to missing persons / concern for persons.
- Flight time to Edinburgh approximately 20mins - Aberdeen 50mins.
- Remotely Piloted Aircraft systems (RPAS) and 8 trained operators / pilots available.
- RPAS used for specific deployments e.g. protracted missing persons enquiries and events.
- M300 and M30 DJI RPAS models currently in use.



## **Engagement**

In 2021, Police Scotland commissioned a small-scale qualitative research study to explore the public's views on the use of emerging technologies in policing. The aim of this research was to better understand public opinion to help inform the communication strategy for future implementation of technologies.

Research was conducted in December 2021 and involved four online focus groups, delivered via Zoom video-conferencing software. Due to the scale of the project, it does not provide a full picture of the public's views on emerging technologies in policing. However, these conversations enable Police Scotland to get an initial sense of:

- How the public feel about the use of technology
- What concerns they may have
- How positively they will respond to the implementation of policies that may involve emerging technologies

Some of the key findings and insights of this research include:

- All groups feel positively about technology and recognise the benefits to policing.
- People recognise the value of technology and are likely to respond positively to its use in Police Scotland.
- People are familiar with RPAS being used by other frontline emergency services, suggesting that they would be amenable to Police Scotland's use of RPAS.
- Use of technology is recognised as a potential way to free up officer time. However, people also expect reassurance that technology will not be used as a means of absorbing further cuts to frontline policing services.

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- Information should be published on the level of data security training provided to police officers and staff.
- Providing evidence of how technology has supported better outcomes and giving reassurance that it is a complementary tool will foster greater acceptance.

Focus group participants shared their perspectives on the use of RPAS within policing, recognising the benefits of this technology and how RPAS can support officers on the ground, enable more efficient use of resources and improve environmental sustainability. Participants also emphasised the need for transparency around the use of RPAS and the need for highly trained operators when utilising such technologies.

## **Case for Change**

### **Introduction**

As the demand being placed on police officers and staff continues to rise and the issues facing policing become increasingly complex, it is vital that Police Scotland is adaptable and progressive in our approach to addressing these challenges and serving the public effectively.

Police Scotland must be innovative in the ways we meet demand and provide officers and staff with the necessary skills and resources to do so effectively and efficiently.

Our Air Support Strategy will provide our people with the right resources, tools and support to deliver the best service to communities across Scotland, aid the public and help Police Scotland to achieve its strategic outcomes.

### **Background information**

Following the creation of Police Scotland in 2013, the police helicopter became a national resource, allowing officers and staff across the country to access this specialist capability.

The police helicopter remains the primary air asset with unique capabilities which benefit a wide variety of policing incidents, operations and events. The helicopter can deploy to incidents more quickly than Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) but has limited endurance for protracted tasking.

The helicopter offers operational commanders a tactical option to provide proportionate responses to a wide variety of incidents. The asset provides a means to serve the unique geographical spread of Scotland's communities and is pivotal in managing high risk incidents through rapid deployment, involving some of our most vulnerable people, as well as supporting the safe delivery of major events.

The objective, as set out in this strategy is to make use of aviation technology to optimise our response to incidents. This is projected to be largely achieved through extending our use of RPAS and maintaining the police helicopter capability.

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RPAS technologies continue to develop at significant pace, however it is recognised that these devices cannot offer the full functionality of the police helicopter at this time. That said, as RPAS and other related technologies develop over the coming years, and in keeping with Police Scotland's commitment to identifying and exploiting opportunities to work more collaboratively with other emergency services and partner agencies, the requirement to retain a full-time police helicopter will be kept under review.

Since 2018, the Air Support Unit have acquired RPAS to support policing operations in a more agile and environmentally friendly manner.

RPAS enhance our air support capability but have constraints particularly in terms of covering very large areas or deploying to an incident which is on the move, such as a vehicle pursuit. RPAS can currently only be operated from a static location and the operator must maintain line of sight at all times.

RPAS are now used more frequently for protracted missing person investigations, post incident investigation and crime scene imagery. This reduces the carbon footprint of air support and is more cost effective. However, there is a need to increase the availability of RPAS operators in the North and East Command areas to address continued service delivery challenges.

RPAS have assisted with the safe delivery of large-scale operations such as football matches and protests across Scotland and have provided aerial footage to assist with court cases. There are opportunities to further develop our air support coverage. However, due to existing regulations and limited resources, our air support service is restricted in terms of the types of incidents they can support and the availability of our air assets.

### **Strategic context**

Police Scotland's refreshed Joint Strategy for Policing (2023), builds on the progress of its predecessor published in 2020. We remain committed to policing for a safe, resilient and protected Scotland.

Our evidence-based, outcomes focused approach aligns all of our operational and organisational activity to deliver the right resources, towards the right priorities at the right time. Our outcomes encompass the totality of our responsibilities, including our

role to protect the public from harm and contribute to efforts to improve wellbeing in our communities.

The Air Support Strategy has relevance across the outcomes listed within the Joint Strategy. However, particular attention has been paid to its role in supporting the following strategic outcomes:

<b>Strategic Priorities</b>		
<b>Outcome 1</b> <b>Threats to public safety and wellbeing are resolved by a proactive and responsive police service</b>	<b>Outcome 3</b> <b>The needs of local communities are addressed through effective service delivery</b>	<b>Outcome 5</b> <b>Police Scotland is sustainable, adaptable and prepared for future challenges</b>

As well as the Joint Strategy, we have also considered the relevance and ability of Police Scotland’s Air Support Unit to support many of the organisation’s enabling strategies as we seek to improve the agility and accessibility of our air support function across policing.

As with the introduction and expansion of any new technology, there is the potential that its use and purpose is misunderstood. Police Scotland will be proactive in outlining the way in which RPAS technology will be used, seeking internal and external views where required. Providing a clear and transparent account of RPAS usage across Scotland will be paramount in building trust among the public and demonstrating that Police Scotland are using any new drone technology in line with our values of integrity, fairness, respect and a commitment to upholding human rights.

### **Operating environment**

With increased resources, we will improve the accessibility, agility, and capability of our Air Support Unit. By investing in our air support workforce and assets, including a new helicopter operating contract and additional RPAS, Police Scotland can reduce the demand on officers during incidents, decrease the physical risks faced by officers

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in operational environments, and enhance the effectiveness of our response to ongoing incidents to better meet the needs of the communities we serve.

We are governed by the regulations set out by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and continue to comply with these. This includes producing a comprehensive safety case in which we set out our intentions for using RPAS safely.

Currently, aviation legislation does not permit for charitable or voluntary organisations / individuals to provide air support on behalf of the police. This clearly demonstrates the requirement for an effective Air Support Unit within Police Scotland. Our RPAS use is also currently limited to visual line of sight (VLOS).

The CAA is continuing to review its regulations and associated legislation. The CAA has recently published its Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2023-2040. This outlines its intentions and provides the possibility of utilising RPAS beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS). By working closely with the CAA, we will place ourselves in a strong position to realise the benefits of any changes to regulations.

## **Air Support and Law Enforcement**

Air support provided by helicopters has been tried and tested by law enforcement agencies across the world. Each has developed a model to suit their financial, geographical and operational environments. This ranges from agencies having a single helicopter to large fleets which utilise several different models of aircraft, each capable of different tasks.

As technology has advanced, several organisations are now changing and adapting their models to include RPAS. This has seen a variety of operating models emerge from dedicated full time units to on-call specialists. Some forces underestimated the demand for RPAS and have had to accelerate their expansion timelines.

By engaging with other law enforcement agencies across the UK and further afield, we can ensure that our chosen model best supports policing across Scotland. This engagement activity has also improved our understanding of the challenges and

opportunities facing policing as it increasingly incorporates this technology into its routine activities.

## **Advancements in Technology**

Across society there are many recognised uses for current RPAS technology to improve everyday life. There are also areas where the use of RPAS is still to be explored. As such, there is a massive amount of investment in this technology. From improving current systems and making them more efficient to designing brand new platforms capable of more advanced flying.

Although helicopter design has remained largely unchanged, there are constant advances in this area of technology, allowing helicopters to be more environmentally friendly, capable of flying in different conditions and carrying out an increasing variety of operations.

As technology evolves, it is vital that we continue to adapt and modernise our equipment. Expanding our use of aviation technology will improve our ability to provide assistance in all weather conditions, for longer periods of time and across larger areas.



## **Working in Partnership**

Across the public sector, every organisation is experiencing a tough financial future. There is an expectation to achieve best value and make efficiencies where possible. Police Scotland will develop new and existing partnerships to explore opportunities for co-location, sharing of resources, and joint working building on our proven track record of efficiency savings in other areas of our operations.

We will continue to seek best practice from other public and law enforcement organisations, both nationally and internationally. By doing so, we will ensure that there is an appropriate level of service across Scotland and that we remain at the forefront of RPAS usage.

Ongoing technological developments in the RPAS industry mean there are opportunities for Police Scotland to engage early with specialist companies in an effort to design bespoke technology that meets the operational demands.

## Plan on a page

Vision	Meeting the needs of policing: Sustainable, Efficient and Innovative		
<b>Strategic Outcomes</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Enabling Policing</b></p> <p>We will deliver an accessible and agile air support service which meets the needs of the organisation, serves communities across Scotland and keeps people safe.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Supporting Our People</b></p> <p>We will meet the needs of local divisions and effectively support our people during incidents and events. Officers and staff will be equipped with the skills and knowledge to ensure our air support service is efficient and effective.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A Sustainable Model</b></p> <p>We will build a sustainable model to support the future operation of our Air Support Unit, a service which embraces technology within a robust ethical framework and reduces our environmental impact.</p>
<b>Strategic Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding demand</li> <li>• Developing our future model</li> <li>• Embedding air support across policing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping our people safe</li> <li>• Upskilling our people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical use</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Enhancing partnerships</li> </ul>

## **Outcome 1: Enabling Policing**

### **Introduction**

Police Scotland's Air Support Unit plays a key role across the organisation. Their unique supporting abilities enable us to better protect the public and tackle crime whilst ensuring an effective and efficient response to policing incidents, operations and events.

At present, Police Scotland has one helicopter based at the Clyde Heliport in Glasgow with a flight endurance of two hours. The helicopter has one pilot, two police observers and can accommodate one passenger. Police Scotland's helicopter can cover all operational requirements throughout the country.

That said, given the current helicopter's limited flight endurance, and central operating base location, mean technical improvements, advancements in technology and an increased number of helicopters geographically spread across the country would allow Police Scotland to provide an enhanced service to the public moving forward.

The organisation also has six active remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS). The expansion of our Air Support Unit to include RPAS, has increased the accessibility and agility of our air assets and services to all communities across Scotland, whilst keeping pace with advancing technology.

### **Understanding Demand**

The Joint Strategy for Policing (2023) sets out the future direction of policing in Scotland, aligning with the policing principles outlined in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. This plan highlights the purpose of Police Scotland which is to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places, and communities in Scotland. Our Air Support Unit has a vital role to play in supporting this goal and helping to create a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. Utilising our air assets efficiently and effectively helps the organisation to tackle criminality and keep people safe.

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Police Scotland is the largest force in the United Kingdom by geographical area. We are responsible for policing across the whole of Scotland, some 30,000 square miles. This represents a third of the United Kingdom's landmass with a unique range of urban, rural, remote and island communities.

At present, 79% of our helicopter deployments take place in the West of Scotland. Our Clyde Heliport operating base sees a 40 minute return flight time to Edinburgh and 100 minute return time to Aberdeen, with limited deployment times on arrival at these locations due to refuelling requirements.

Our existing air support capability benefits a wide variety of policing incidents, operations and events. The police helicopter is currently used during searches, responding to critical incidents. The helicopter can be deployed to incidents more quickly than RPAS but has limited endurance for protracted tasking.

During engagement with internal stakeholders and departments, it was clear that additional air support resources could provide better national coverage, attend a wider range of incidents or assist with more policing activities, as well as mitigate against the limitations adverse weather conditions currently bring.

Going forward, it is vital we improve the geographical reach and accessibility of our air support resources, as well as deliver enhanced resilience in response to current barriers to deployment such as adverse weather conditions. This will involve a wider dispersal of our air assets, ensuring resources are allocated appropriately to meet demand.

Adopting this more localised approach will reduce distance and time constraints during ongoing incidents, and as a result of deploying across smaller geographical areas, will limit the probability of facing adverse weather conditions. We will also explore technological developments to improve the resilience of our air support service and allow operators to fly in various weather conditions.

We will in the first year of this strategy commit to developing our current approach to address all appropriate demand and meet the needs of the public and communities. This will include a better understanding of our hidden demand to ensure a comprehensive and detailed mapping of the demand facing our Air Support Unit. The hidden demand not only encompasses incidents which are responded to by partner agencies, but incidents where air support could have supported frontline officers but

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was not requested due to the knowledge that the incident was happening out of normal flight hours, or that they were, geographically, too far away for air support to be an effective resource.

As our Air Support service develops and becomes more widely recognised, the demand facing our colleagues is likely to increase. Our Air Support Unit are currently facing increasing demand to support major events, using RPAS downlink to view footage in real-time. The team are also meeting new types of requests, such as supporting the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) during trials.

At present, Police Scotland's Air Support Monitoring Group produce a demand analysis report every three months, with the aim of highlighting both current and future patterns in demand. The report provides data on incidents that the Air Support Unit were both able and unable to attend. With regards to the refusal of air support, the document provides information on the type of incidents and the reasons why service was refused.

While this report provides valuable data, we will focus on providing greater detail on the refusal of service and better identify and address the hidden demand that exists across the organisation. In doing so, we will build a more accurate picture of both the locations and type of incidents we are currently able and unable to attend, identifying where air support could provide additional value to business as usual policing activity.

### **Developing our Future Model**

Thorough demand analysis will also contribute to the development of our future air support operating model where we will be able to understand, explore and identify the right options available for immediate, medium and long term delivery. The introduction of a new service delivery model will allow for the enhancement of our operating capacity whilst also ensuring our services are accessible to all local divisions. This new service delivery model will involve increased and enhanced resources, better enabling us to meet the needs of the service, as well as the communities we serve.

Our ambition for air support is to provide an accessible and agile service across the whole of Scotland. We are committed to using the right air asset for the right type of task, be it RPAS or helicopter, in order to provide the best value for the organisation, whilst still delivering an effective outcome.

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Our current helicopter contract was extended in 2023 by an additional three years to 2026. This extension affords Police Scotland the time to better understand our demand and develop an appropriate future model for this resource. This will involve the joint working of our Air Support Unit and Procurement departments to develop a model that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the service.

Our procurement service promotes transparency, best practice and continuous development whilst delivering in a sustainable, accountable and equitable way to the benefit of our suppliers, customers, stakeholders and the public purse. Therefore, our approach will be guided by these principles to ensure this resource effectively supports policing and the communities we serve in a sustainable and ethical manner. We will research and consider options including technological developments and opportunities for collaboration where appropriate.

We want all communities in Scotland to benefit from this technology, and will look to develop a model whereby more of our officers and staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and experience to safely deploy RPAS to support routine policing activity.

Our ambition is to establish additional, fully resourced regional RPAS hubs located in appropriate areas, identified through the results of the demand analysis work. From here we will explore how best to embed RPAS capability and capacity within all local policing divisions into the longer term.

### **Embedding Air Support Across Policing**

To improve connectivity with the rest of the organisation, we will explore how best to oversee the effective and enhanced deployment of our air assets. Working with colleagues in SPA Forensic Services, C3, local policing and other specialist departments, we will review our existing tasking and coordination model, explore new approaches and work collaboratively to continuously improve our approach to ongoing incidents.

Improved tasking and coordination will better support pre-planned operations, crime prevention efforts and spontaneous deployments. We will explore how we develop and deliver an integrated model which will consist of different platforms, including small time-critical deployments, large-scale events, and the rapid deployment of our people.

Internal education and awareness will be delivered to provide our people with a better understanding of our air support capabilities. This will result in more effective deployments and use across the organisation, supporting a wider range of policing requirements.

## **Our Commitments**

- Develop and expand our Air Support Services to meet the needs of the public, communities and policing across Scotland.
- Undertake analysis to identify and address hidden / unmet demand.
- Review current helicopter contract.
- Establish divisional RPAS hubs across Scotland.
- Improve tasking and coordination process of appropriate air asset.



## Outcome 2: Supporting Our People

### Introduction

Police Scotland's Air Support Unit provide vital support to officers and staff on the ground, helping to reduce the demand and risk faced by our people during incidents, operations and events.

Our current resources and equipment support the organisation's ability to efficiently search large areas quickly, respond to critical and non-critical incidents, investigate post-incident, provide aerial imagery and support local initiatives.

This reduces the demand on resources, enhances the safety of both officers and the public, assists with evidence gathering and deters crime.

However, in order to better support and protect our people and ensure the continued provision of a high quality service, we must expand, enhance and upskill our Air Support Unit, as well as explore opportunities to build the knowledge and skill sets of colleagues across policing.

### Keeping Our People Safe

At present, both the police helicopter and RPAS are deployed to assist and protect officers and staff during both spontaneous and pre-planned operations and events. We recognise that as technology and legislation evolve, there are opportunities to expand our capabilities and the role of the Air Support Unit in order to better protect our people and the public.

With increased resources, we will develop our existing capabilities and improve the accessibility of our air assets. This will involve dispersing our equipment and air support operators and staff across the country to meet local demand.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2023-2040 considers the latest developments in aviation technology and innovation and acts as a roadmap to guide the CAA's approach to policy development. [CAA Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2023-2040](#).

As aviation technology and legislation evolve, we will continue to work closely with and be guided by the CAA. In line with their policy, we will adapt and update our equipment

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and processes to ensure our air support is progressive and continues to meet the needs of our people and the communities we serve.

Currently, the CAA instruct that RPAS are only operated from a static location and the operator must maintain visual line of sight at all times. In line with these existing regulations, we will expand our use of RPAS to further support and protect our people. This will involve deploying RPAS during searches for suspects in hard-to-reach areas and increasing our use of RPAS during emergency incidents.

We recognise that current regulations are likely to change as technology continues to evolve. The CAA has acknowledged that “it is not sustainable to operate on exemptions alone, and that a business-as-usual approach to operating BVLOS in non-segregated airspace is required” [Non-Segregated BVLOS \(caa.co.uk\)](https://www.caa.co.uk). With guidance from the CAA, we will explore opportunities to test and trial BVLOS RPAS usage. This will follow a similar format to the RPAS pilot being conducted by forces in England including Norfolk, the Met, West Midlands and Thames Valley [Police RPAS offering eye-in-sky 20 miles away to be piloted in Norfolk](#).

This will involve trialling the deployment and operation of RPAS from a remote base up to 30km away. Conducting a pilot will allow us to better understand the capabilities associated with BVLOS and how it can benefit operational policing. We will also observe and learn from the practice of our partners and other law enforcement agencies both nationally and internationally who are currently trialling and deploying RPAS BVLOS. This will involve monitoring and learning from the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) BVLOS Pathway Programme which aims to achieve a safe, efficient and effective BVLOS capability for RPAS in policing.

As part of this programme, the NPCC is planning to introduce the Drone as First Responder (DFR) project to support the proactive deployment of RPAS to emergency incidents before responding officers arrive. This will allow remote operators to assess incidents and relay information to the responding officers. The drone can also provide a live stream of the incident to the control room and responding officers to ensure the most appropriate response is taken. We will monitor the development of this programme to learn from best practice and better understand the capabilities of BVLOS RPAS usage.

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A number of police forces across the UK have obtained additional privileges from the CAA to deploy RPAS just beyond visual line of sight using remote observers. We will review previous operations and incidents to consider whether extended visual line of sight (EVLOS) can enhance the assistance provided by air support during future operations.

We will explore new technologies which enhance the flying performance of our RPAS and would support our ability to fly BVLOS, including improved battery and sensor technology. Flying RPAS BVLOS would hugely increase our air capability and further support and protect our officers and staff. For example, our RPAS could be deployed during searches covering large areas, to provide imagery at large events or for vehicle and foot pursuits. We will also continue to assess new technology as it develops and determine its suitability for use within a widening range of policing purposes including, where appropriate to do so, its use within covert operations. We remain committed to ensuring any future use of RPAS technology remains grounded in our established rights based and ethical approach.

## **Enabling Our People**

As technology and legislation evolve, it is vital that we support and enable our people and departments appropriately. This will involve the aspiration to introduce police staff RPAS operators to support our current team of police officer RPAS pilots. We recognise the importance of prioritising aviation experience within our air support workforce. Therefore, we will seek to enhance our Air Support Unit with staff members who possess the necessary aviation knowledge, skills and experience.

We will develop a comprehensive police-orientated training programme for all new operators and staff. The training course will be fully accredited by the CAA and meet the academic standards of the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan. We will work closely with aviation partners and other police forces to develop our training programme, incorporating their knowledge and experience. To ensure continuous learning and the improvement of our training and services, we will develop our partnership with Police Scotland's International Unit to seek advice and guidance from international partners and police forces.

The training programme will be developed following the most commonly adopted General Visual Line of Sight Certificate (GVC) standard which usually consists of a 5-day training course involving both theoretical and practical aspects [Drone landscape review](#). The course will include a focus on aviation legislation, inputs from police search advisors, and the development of trainees' flying practice. We will support new operators to feel prepared in their role by incorporating practical exercises and scenarios based on real-life incidents and operations.

The majority of police forces recognise the benefits of additional and ongoing training for RPAS pilots following the completion of the GVC course. This can take different formats, with police forces using internal trainers and experienced pilots to review the learning of operators, working with other forces to hold training events and utilising external organisations to provide ongoing training [Drone landscape review](#). We will monitor and explore opportunities to implement best practice adopted by other forces to support the development and improvement of our Air Support Unit.

We will ensure our continuous professional development programme captures any changes to legislation, procedures and equipment. We will also review our operators' flying practice annually to uphold our high service delivery standards.

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We will ensure all new operators receive continuous support following their training. New operators will be shadowed by experienced members of the team to offer support and guidance during incidents. This is vital to ensure their learning is transferred into the operational environment and also provides an opportunity for experienced members of the team to identify and address any areas where new operators require further training. We will also develop an Air Support Mentor Scheme to ensure officers and staff are continuously supported. Mentors will guide and support their peers, demonstrate leadership, and enable high quality service provision.

### **Our Commitments**

- Enhance and enable our air support workforce, prioritising and promoting aviation knowledge and experience.
- Develop and explore future air capabilities.
- Work with the CAA and partners to explore and develop new technologies and approaches to support BVLOS RPAS usage
- Explore and develop a supportive and effective learning and development programme including comprehensive continuous professional development.
- Seek learning and best practice from international partners.
- Develop Air Support Mentor Scheme.

## **Outcome 3: A Sustainable Model**

### **Introduction**

As we expand our air support capability it is imperative we build a sustainable model to maintain the future operation of our Air Support Unit. We will deliver an ethical and transparent service, utilising current and future technology in a manner that respects privacy, has a robust ethical framework, delivers best value for the service and reduces our impact on the environment.

We will proactively engage with all regulatory bodies to maintain strong oversight of our practice and processes to ensure we uphold high professional standards.

We are committed to delivering best value for the service through the development of a robust yet flexible procurement process. Police Scotland needs the ability to react to changes in technology and an increase in demand for air support. Where operationally possible, the Air Support Unit will look to lower their impact on the environment by utilising the most appropriate asset required to complete the relevant task.

### **Rights Based and Ethical Use**

For over 30 years, the Air Support Unit has been capturing images and videos from both the Police Helicopter and RPAS during operations and using this evidence successfully in both an investigative and prosecutorial environment.

As the Air Support Unit expands, the processes for data collection will be reviewed to ensure our use remains ethical, fit for purpose and future proof. This will be in line with other advances in technology across the force. We are committed to working with bodies such as the Information Commissioner's Office and Scottish Biometrics Commissioner to ensure our use of any future capability is considered and introduced appropriately.

To increase the resilience of our Air Support Unit, we will look to diversify the manufacturers and suppliers of our air assets. By taking this important step, we will ensure the unit can continue to operate if any future design or operating issues occur. This should also protect Police Scotland from any supply chain issues that have been experienced due to circumstances beyond our control.

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We will proactively engage with relevant police Scotland departments and other regulatory organisations, to ensure any use for operations meet the guidelines in place. By being open and transparent about the increased use of RPAS, we will seek to build public and stakeholder confidence. This will be assisted by, where possible, pre-emptively publishing details of RPAS deployments across the communities of Scotland.

As RPAS technology develops there is likely to be a trend towards the use of Artificial Intelligence. We will use the existing data Ethics Framework and Rights Based Pathway that has been developed and adopted by Police Scotland and is endorsed by the SPA.

We will also engage with the public and partners to keep them informed of any proposals to use this technology and the safeguards that will be put in place including the use of Independent advisory groups and Police Scotland's new data ethics framework.

## **Sustainability**

Police Scotland has committed to supporting the Scottish Government's target of transitioning to net-zero by 2045. Our ambitions are articulated in our Environmental Strategy, published in 2021. We will subject this strategy to a sustainability assessment and ensure ongoing collaboration between the Air Support Unit and our Sustainability colleagues.

All operational and supporting functions within the Air Support Unit will strive to be as sustainable as possible and we will embed this into everyday practice. This will include the reduction of unnecessary travel, ensuring that the closest resource is being deployed and that our air assets are at the forefront of green technology. Through continual horizon scanning we will ensure our air support fleet is reflective of the most financially and environmentally sustainable assets.

The impact of increasing adverse weather conditions on policing cannot be underestimated and it is imperative that all air assets are equipped to fly in the severe conditions that we can experience in Scotland. Our helicopter requires the ability to fly in the cold and harsh conditions of our mountainous regions. Similarly, RPAS require to be able to withstand snow, rain and wind all of which are a common occurrence across the country.



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As with all technology, research and development of RPAS means that systems will constantly evolve. Working with colleagues we will develop and design a procurement process that allows us to meet the demands of the service and remain flexible enough to react to the evolving nature of technology.

We will also look to purchase systems that demonstrate best value for the public purse whilst providing the service with a platform that is capable of operating in the sometimes harsh environment of Scotland. By taking a whole market approach and engaging with other users of RPAS, we can ensure that the most appropriate resource is utilised.

### **Enhancing Partnerships**

Police Scotland has built a strong relationship with the Civil Aviation Authority over a number of years. This has allowed Police Scotland to develop the use of RPAS within the current legislative framework and in a way that minimises any risks to our people and the public. We will continue to nurture this partnership as regulations and technology change over the coming years. We will ensure that Police Scotland maintains its statutory obligations, as well as being at the forefront of innovation and opportunities to safely expand our use of this technology as new challenges emerge for policing.

We will report on progress being made with implementing change through Police Scotland governance with regular reporting to SPA.

The use of RPAS in policing has very specific criteria for operational deployment and not all commercial RPAS have this capability. As such, we will continue to engage with industry experts to influence future design to our advantage. We have also engaged in academic research projects and will look to develop these partnerships further. The research not only provides the opportunity for a bespoke platform for policing use, but will support the Scottish Technology sector. This home grown expertise will ensure that Police Scotland can be at the vanguard of RPAS technology and realise the benefits that this can bring.

We commit to working with our emergency partners, including British Transport Police and other public sector bodies to explore opportunities to establish an Air Support Cross-service Group. This group would be responsible for sharing learning, identifying opportunities for collaboration, delivering efficiencies and sharing resources

appropriately. By having this overarching group, we will remove the barriers to joint working and provide a space for different organisations to understand the requirements of each service and where savings could be made. It would also provide a mechanism through which new technologies and equipment could be monitored and tested.

Police Scotland will seek out new partnerships to engage with ongoing research into BVLOS RPAS flight and the use of pre-determined RPAS corridors taking place across Scotland and the UK.

## **Our Commitments**

- Open and transparent air support services with effective engagement with and oversight from SPA, internal and external regulators.
- Embed the data ethics framework and rights based pathway to support any future consideration regarding the adoption of new or emerging technology.
- Deliver best value to the public and support environmental sustainability.
- Work with emergency and public sector bodies to establish an Air Support cross-sector group with a focus on future services.

## **Future of Air Support**

As part of Police Scotland's ongoing strategic planning work, a Futures review of the organisation's air support capabilities has been conducted.

It is anticipated that the future of air support will see a continued need for helicopters but in a more limited capacity, with RPAS taking over as the predominant form of air support for law enforcement. RPAS are a more sustainable and cost effective air support asset, reducing organisations' carbon footprint. RPAS also allow police services to respond quickly to emergency incidents and search larger areas using less resources.

RPAS will be used in policing in the next 10 to 40 years to provide aerial support to a range of policing needs.

In Scotland, RPAS is currently used to support a wide variety of incidents, operations and events, including searching for missing people and pre-planned events. As technology evolves, Police Scotland will continue to develop our capabilities to enhance our policing response.

As discussed in this strategy, Police Scotland will prioritise a sustainable air support model. Therefore, it is expected that the organisation will contribute to environmental initiatives to reduce the impact of our air assets on the climate and invest in more environmentally friendly technology and equipment.

## Demonstrating Progress

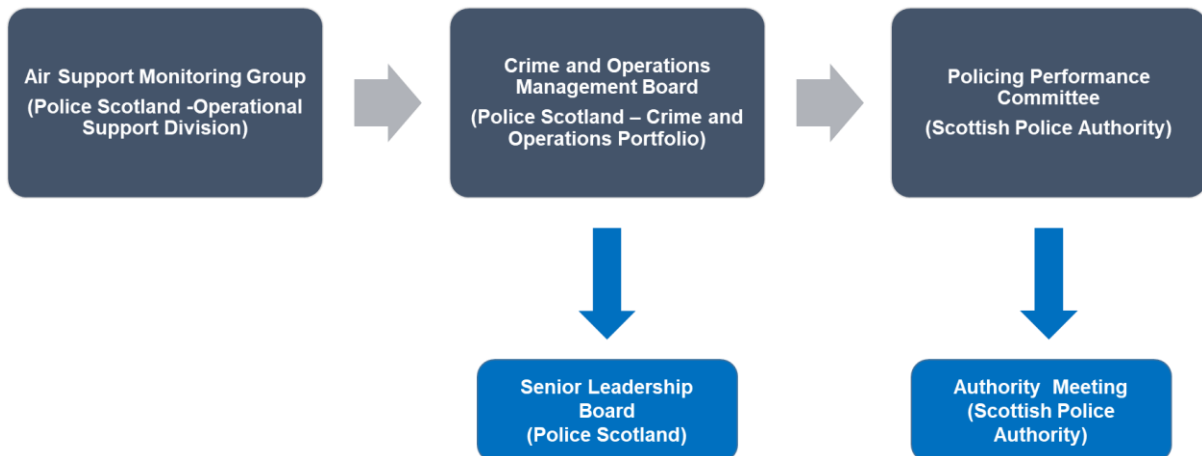
### Governance and Performance

The Vision for Justice in Scotland 2022 creates a focus on creating safer communities and shifting societal attitudes and circumstances that perpetuate crime and harm.

Our Air Support Strategy is a fundamental element of carrying out our obligations within the priorities that the Scottish Government has set out to ensure we live in safe, inclusive and thriving communities. With the design, development and implementation of this strategy, we make a clear commitment to proactively and supportively Scotland’s air capability.

Our activity here is supported by an Implementation Plan to coordinate activities, the progress of which will be monitored through a robust governance framework.

Proposed governance structure to monitor progress and strategy implementation.



We have developed an Implementation Plan in conjunction with this strategy which focuses on the actions, milestones and timelines for embedding each of our commitments. See appendix A for an overview.

Linked to our plans, our outcomes focused performance framework describes how we monitor and measure our progress on our priorities for policing, outcomes and objectives to evidence the impact of our policing approach for our people, partners and the public.

## **Future Options and Financial Considerations**

Some of the ambition set out within the strategy, such as the introduction of police staff drone operators and expanding our air support assets across local policing divisions, cannot be quantified at this time. Determining an appropriate future operating model is a key commitment within the strategy and this work will inform the future investment model for Air Support.

Whilst we are committed to delivering a cost efficient and sustainable Air Support service which better meets the needs of both the organisation and supports the needs of the people and communities we serve, for Police Scotland, the funding pressures currently impacting the public sector are well understood.

However, it is critical the organisation keeps pace with technological advancement, remaining at the vanguard where we can and incorporating this into our operating model. We anticipate investment in additional RPAS resources will bring about long term savings as our Air Support service continues to evolve in line with the various demands policing is required to meet.

To deliver the strategy continued investment and an enhancement to capital funding will likely be required however we will also explore other funding options where appropriate to do so with both government and our private and public sector partners.

Appendix A – Implementation Plan Overview

Commitment	Timeline	Measure for success
Expand our Air Support Unit	RPAS require to be updated imminently. Ongoing for duration of strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase in number of air support assets available</li> <li>- Increase in number of deployable personnel.</li> </ul>
Undertake extensive demand analysis to identify hidden / un-met demand	To be commenced April 2024	In depth analysis available to establish gaps in current service model
Review current helicopter contract	At outset of strategy to allow for a robust procurement period beginning mid 2024.	New contract requires to be in place by 2026.
Establish divisional RPAS hubs across Scotland	From 2024 onwards. Requires assets and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase in number of RPAS hubs.</li> </ul>
Improve tasking and coordination process of appropriate air asset	Scoping exercise to be undertaken from 2024	More streamlined tasking and coordination process which provides best service for front line policing.
Develop and explore future air capabilities	From outset of strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Future operating platforms and requirement identified.</li> </ul>

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<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measure for success</b>
Work with CAA and partners to explore and develop new technologies and approaches to support BVLOS RPAS usage	Scope pilot project from outset of strategy in tandem with changes to regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Successful pilot project completed.</li> <li>-Regulation permitting – embedded into everyday operating practice.</li> </ul>
Explore and develop a fit for purpose learning and development programme including comprehensive CPD.	Developed and implemented by mid-2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Develop a programme of blended learning for new operators</li> <li>-Implement comprehensive CPD for ongoing certification.</li> <li>-Shadowing system implemented for new operators</li> </ul>
Seek learning and best practice from international partners.	From outset of strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Critical friends group established and engaged with.</li> </ul>
Develop air support champions scheme	In line with uplift of personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Air support champions scheme in place.</li> </ul>
Be open to Scrutiny from internal and external regulators	Commence engagement Spring 2024	Information sessions with PSD and PIRC completed. Ongoing engagement with the CAA.
Embed the data ethics framework and rights based pathway to support any future consideration regarding the adoption of new or emerging technology'	Begin 2024	Ethical framework for emerging technologies created.

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<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measure for success</b>
Deliver best value to the public and support environmental sustainability	To be undertaken along with purchase of new air assets and helicopter contract	Assessment of procurement process and environmental sustainability
Work with emergency and public sector bodies to establish an Air Support cross-sector group	Begin 2024	Establishment of a Scottish Air Support Cross Sector group



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