SCOTTISH POLICE
AUTHORITY

Agenda Item 2.1

Meeting	SPA Policing Performance Committee
Date	11 October 2022
Location	MS Teams
Title of Paper	RPAS (Drones) Update on usage & performance
Presented By	ACC Mark Williams
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	Appendix 1 – RPAS Activity

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on Police Scotland usage and performance of drones.

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 report.

1.   BACKGROUND

1.1   Police Scotland utilises remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), referred to as drones, from Aberdeen, Inverness and Glasgow providing air support to local policing, specialist departments and partners.

1.2   In March 2022 Police Scotland presented a paper to the SPA Policing Performance Committee – RPAS (Drones) Fleet & Wind 8 Replacement.

1.3   This report will highlight the work ongoing in relation to the drone fleet replacement and the usage and performance of drones since the last report in March 2022.

2.   Update

2.1   No cost replacement

2.1.1 Police Scotland took delivery of a DJI M300 drone in May 2022 as a no cost replacement for a previous DJI Wind 8 which was returned to the supplier due to non-suitability.

2.1.2 The M300 has been extensively utilised around Scotland at a variety of air support taskings, performing without issue or incident. Its improved flight endurance and ability to fly in the rain has proved operationally beneficial.

2.1.3 Details of air support taskings will be covered later in this report. This M300 will continue to be utilised operationally and for training, research and development.

2.1.4 The M300 and its camera sensor are NOT capable of facial recognition.

2.1.5 The M300 will be considered as a suitable replacement for the current DJI M210 drone.

2.2   Fleet replacement

2.2.1 Police Scotland currently uses 3 x M210 platforms as the main operational drone. The M210 is soon to become obsolete due to its

age, lack of spare parts and cessation of firmware updates from the manufacturer.

2.2.2 Police Scotland has conducted market research and engagement with industry and partners to identify a suitable replacement. Ensuring the most up to date drone technology is realised, is sustainable and efficient and continues to enable delivery of police air support to local policing and specialist departments.

2.2.3 The RPAS (Drones) Code of Practice, Data Protection and Equalities & Human Rights impact assessments have been reviewed during this research phase to ensure continued compliance in terms of privacy, ethics and human rights. These too will be updated accordingly following procurement of newer drone models.

2.2.4 A procurement strategy has been developed and Police Scotland will publish an invitation to tender in August 2022 for the purchase of suitable replacement drones for the M210 model.

2.3 **Usage**

2.3.1 Since the last report in March 2022, the Police Scotland Air Support Unit (ASU) have undertaken 618 tasking incurring at total of 381 flying hours. During this period of activity drones were used for 48 of those tasks completing 46 flying hours. The table below provides a breakdown of flying hours per air asset:-

Air Support Unit incidents 1 April to 31 July 2022

	Tasks	Flying Hours
ASU Total	618	381
Helicopter	570	335
Drones	**48**	**46**

2.3.2 The police helicopter remains the primary air asset with the ability to respond quickly to immediate threat to life incidents anywhere in Scotland. At every opportunity and where appropriate, police drones are deployed to slower time and pre-planned taskings such as obtaining evidential crime scene imagery or searches in relation long term missing person investigations.

2.3.3 Police Scotland has deployed drones to a variety of taskings. Appendix 1 provides further detail of tasking carried out for the period. The following deployments are worthy of note in terms of the operational benefit to police commanders and in particular the enhanced situational awareness via the drone downlink capability.

2.3.4 Lanarkshire Division, July 2022, public safety deployment for an annual parade. Air support was requested by the silver Commander at an early stage in the planning phase of the policing operation. This enabled early discussion and better understanding of the drone capability and its benefits at such an event, both internally and with key partners including the local authority. A safe area was identified to operate the drone, which minimised disruption to the local community and the parade itself. A community impact assessment for the event included use of a police drone and relevant considerations associated with this. On the day, relevant commanders were issued with police tablet devices which provided live downlink from the drone. Downlink feed was also provided to a large screen within the local area control room and viewed by the silver commander. This allowed police Commanders to monitor the build-up and numbers of those participating in the parade in terms of public safety. The drone monitored the parade until its conclusion.

2.3.5 Sudden Death Enquiry, Northern Division, July 2022. Air support was requested to obtain detailed imagery of a locus after a member of the public had fallen from a cliff. Due to the inaccessibility of the cliff area, images couldn't be obtained from the shoreline. A police drone was used to obtain high resolution video and still images of the cliff face in order that the locus could be properly examined by the enquiry team including forensic specialists. During the deployment a police tablet device was issued to the team who were able to view live downlink feed from the drone and direct the drone camera operator accordingly. This ensured precise imagery was obtained to meet the needs of the enquiry.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Continued use of police drones, for tasking traditionally carried out by the helicopter, will provide cost savings. Drones have limitations specifically in terms of mandatory restrictions of operation. They also cannot undertake tasking such as vehicle pursuits or transport of personnel and equipment.

4.   PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

4.1   Exploiting opportunities to utilise drones is often challenging due to lack of availability of trained drone operators. Operators in the North are embedded within the Operational Support Unit and carry out other specialist roles. They are not dedicated/ full-time air support.

4.2   As part of the air support strategy development, Police Scotland will consider alternative operating models and options.

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   There is no community impact associated with this update paper.

9.   EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1   There are no equalities implications associated with this paper.

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 report.

Appendix 1

RPAS Activity 1 April - 31 July 2022													
Division	A	C	D	E	G	K	L	N	P	Q	U	V	Total
Task													
Searches													
Missing Person	1				1		2	4					8
Suspect Person													
Evidential													
Property													
Critical Incident Response													
Firearms					1		4						5
Public Order													
Major Incident													
Post Incident Investigation													
Scene Overview/ Partners	2		1										3
Aerial Imagery	1		1					1	3				6
Crime Scene Imagery													
Evidential	3		1			1	1						6
Road Traffic Collisions													
Serious Crime							5	1					6
Support to Local Policing													
Aerial images - event planning													
Public Safety													
Event	1								2		2		5
Football					2								2
Parade			1							1			2
Protest					2								2
Officer Safety													
Public Confidence											3		3
													48

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