



**NATIONAL POLICE  
AIR SERVICE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **2023/24**



# Introduction



**Thank you for your interest in the National Police Air Service (NPAS) and for taking time to read our Annual Report 2023/24.**

This report tells the story of NPAS throughout the year and how it is supporting police forces across England and Wales.

With an average of 100 calls for service every day, and over 90% of attended taskings resulting in a positive outcome, the continued need for air support, and the value it brings to policing, is clear to see.

But it doesn't come without its challenges.

NPAS operates one of the oldest helicopter fleets in the UK. Maintaining a national fleet and delivering an efficient and effective service that complies with strict safety and regulatory requirements, whilst meeting the dynamic needs of today's policing, is no easy task.

It is testament to the hard work, experience, skill and passion of all those who work in NPAS, and our partners and suppliers who support the service, that we see such positive results.

It is also pleasing to see that work on a fleet replacement programme has gathered pace and, with thanks to BlueLight Commercial, we are closer to procuring new aircraft.

This will deliver the most significant investment in police aircraft and equipment since NPAS was formed in 2012.

Police aviation is facing a period of transformation as those within the air service, and those who benefit from it, work together to define the future of police air support.

The advances in drone technology offer new and exciting opportunities for policing. As a service we need to embrace these opportunities to maximise our capabilities in preventing and detecting crime, and keeping the public safe.

The National Police Chiefs' Council is leading the way in the development of an updated national Aviation Strategy which will set out a new vision for air support.

We look forward to helping shape that future, whilst maintaining our focus on delivering excellence in police air support.

John Robins, QPM DL  
Police Air Operator Certificate (PAOC) Holder  
Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police

## About NPAS

**NPAS has provided air support to police forces in England and Wales since 2012.**

It was established through a collaboration agreement, which brought forces together to deliver a cost-effective and efficient national service, hosted by West Yorkshire Police.

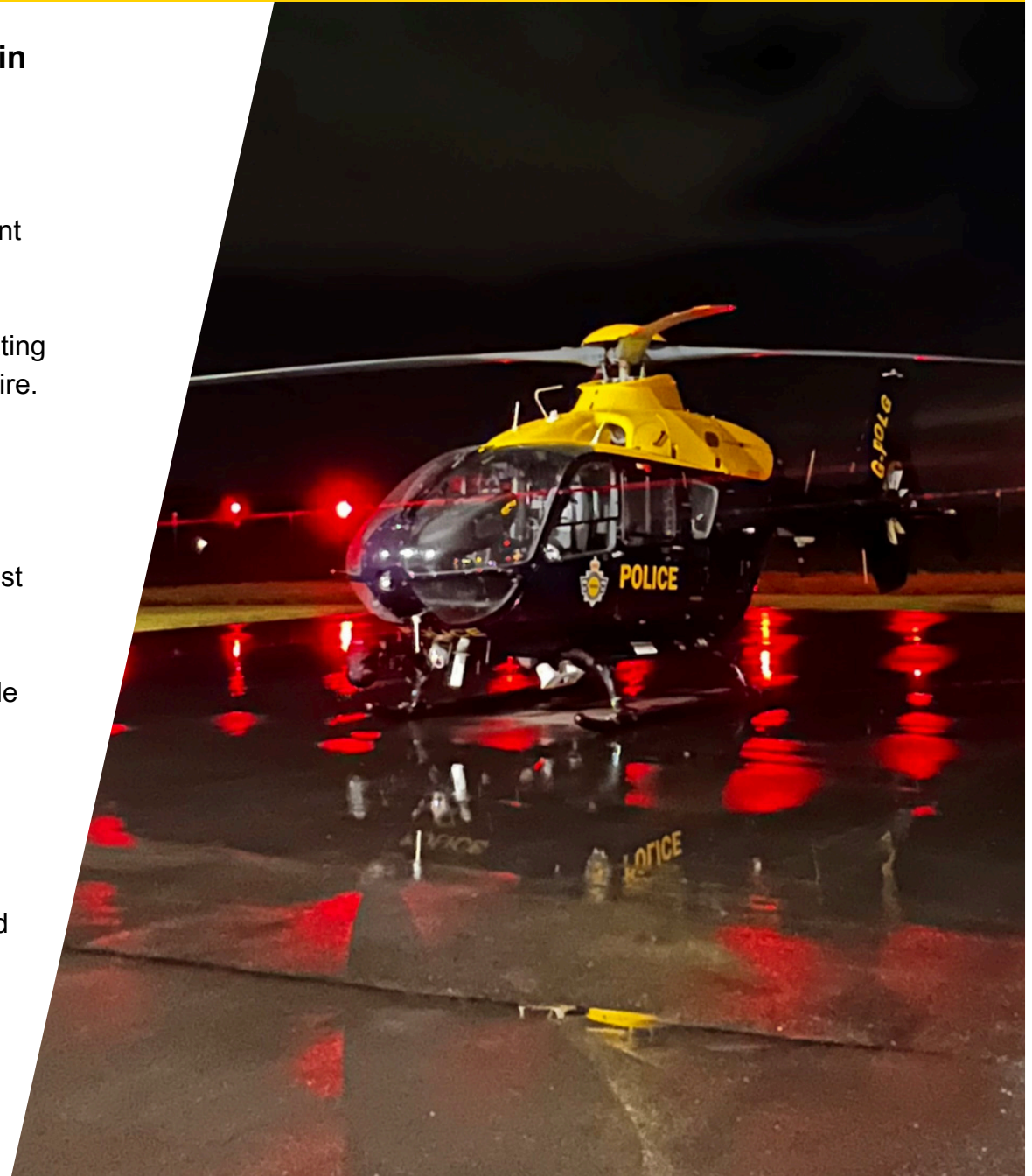
The fleet includes 20 helicopters and four aeroplanes, operating from 15 regional bases, plus a headquarters in West Yorkshire.

The delivery of a safe, compliant aviation service is the responsibility of our Accountable Manager.

This post is held by Chief Superintendent Vicki White, of West Yorkshire Police, with Head of Business Services Glenn Shelley temporarily being appointed to the role between January and August 2024. Chief Supt White resumed the role from August 2024.

The service has evolved over the years but its purpose has remained the same - to deliver public safety from the air.

NPAS continues to adapt and evolve to meet the current and future needs of policing.





# The National Strategic Board

## NPAS is governed by a National Strategic Board (NSB) which meets quarterly.

Sitting on the Board are Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables, representing each of the nine NPAS regions, plus the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, John Robins QPM DL, and the Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime for West Yorkshire, Alison Lowe OBE, as representatives of the current lead policing body and force for NPAS.

## Changes to Board membership in 2023/24

Police and Crime Commissioner Marc Jones, representing the East Midlands region, stood down in February 2024. The position remains vacant.

Chief Constable Rachel Swann, also of the East Midlands region, stood down at the year end and Chief Constable Paul Gibson took over from April 2024.

Chief Constable Jo Farrell, of the North East region, stood down at the end of 2023 and Chief Constable Rachel Bacon took on the role.

Former members are thanked for their contribution.

## Board members sitting at 1 April 2024

### North East region

PCC Jonathan Evison  
(Humberside)

Chief Con Rachel Bacon  
(Durham)

### North West region

PCC Peter McCall  
(Cheshire)

Chief Con Mark Roberts  
(Cheshire)

### West Midlands region

PCC Ben Adams  
(Staffordshire)

Chief Con Debbie Tedds  
(Warwickshire)

### East Midlands region

PCC *Vacant*

Chief Con Paul Gibson  
(Lincolnshire)

### Eastern region

PCC Festus Akinbusoye  
(Bedfordshire)

Chief Con BJ Harrington QPM  
(Essex)

### South East region

PCC Lisa Townsend (chair)  
(Surrey)

Chief Con Jason Hogg  
(Thames Valley)

### South West region

PCC Philip Wilkinson OBE  
(Wiltshire)

Chief Con Catherine Roper  
(Wiltshire)

### Wales region

PCC Dafydd Llywelyn  
(Dyfed-Powys)

Chief Con Pam Kelly  
(Gwent)

### London region

Head of Operational  
Oversight for Mayor's  
Office for Policing and  
Crime Robin Merrett  
(London)

Dep Asst Commissioner  
Laurence Taylor  
(The Metropolitan Police Service)



## Air operations

**Located in Wakefield, four dedicated teams of skilled NPAS Flight Despatchers provide 24/7 support to police forces across England and Wales.**

Regularly handling over 100 calls for service each day, the teams make dynamic decisions, prioritising simultaneous requests for support when there's a 'threat to life'.

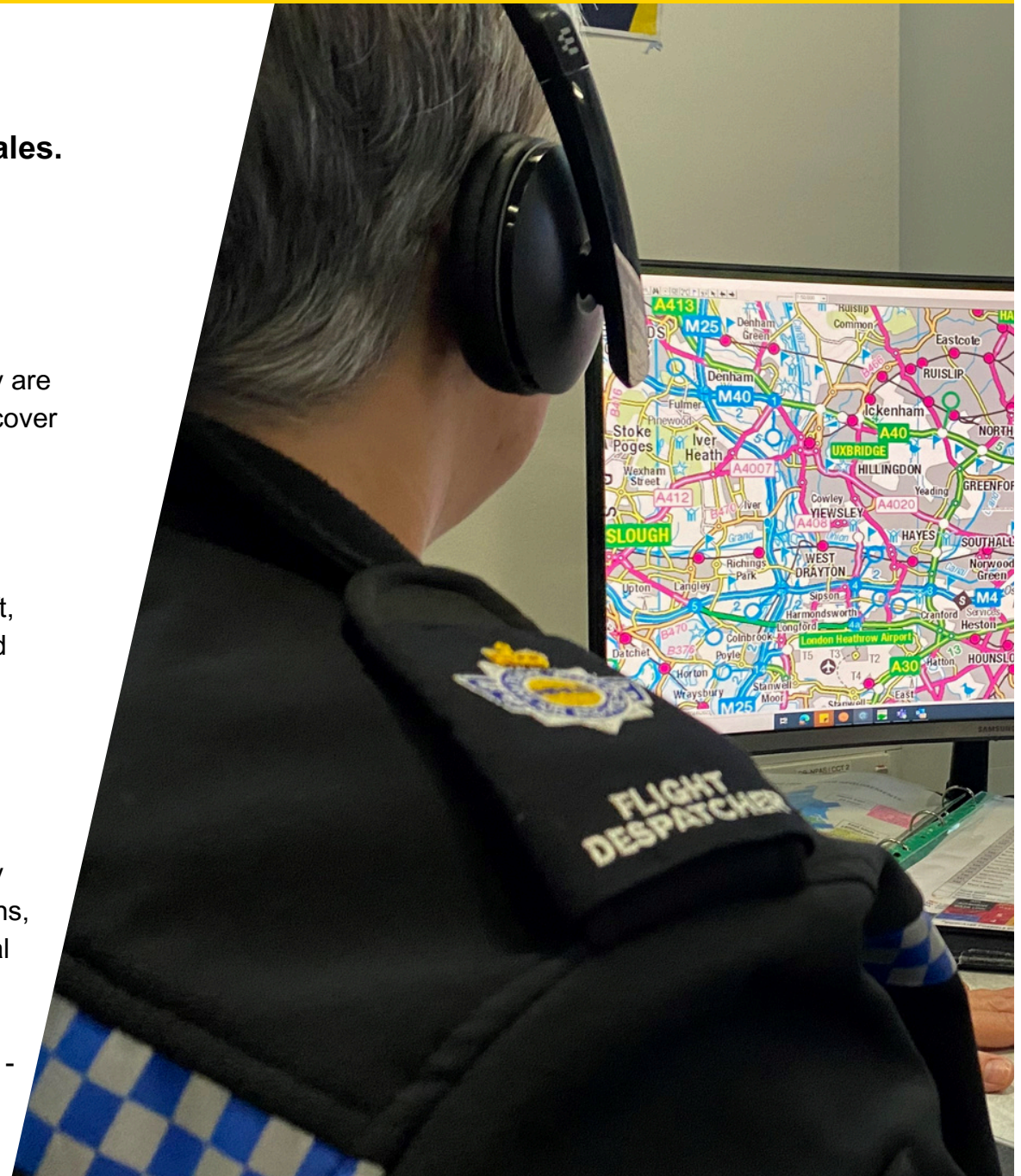
Our Operations Centre staff track our aircraft whenever they are airborne and individually monitor six radio channels, which cover the whole of England and Wales, plus telephone lines and computer systems which are digitally linked to forces.

At the start of each 12-hour shift, the Flight Duty Officer is updated on safety issues, the location of all available aircraft, weather conditions, engineering requirements plus crew and aircraft availability. This enables them to make the best decisions for deployment.

The job of the NPAS Operations Centre is unique and vital.

As well as communicating with police forces, staff frequently liaise with search and rescue teams plus officers from prisons, military bases, nuclear power stations and other key national organisations and service providers.

The team also plays an ever-important role in 'deconfliction' - instructing crews of other air space users, particularly drones, to avoid an airborne conflict.



# The transition and transformation of NPAS

**Throughout 2023/24, an independent programme of work, commissioned by the National Strategic Board and delivered through BlueLight Commercial, continued to explore options for the future hosting arrangements and delivery model of national police air support.**

Overseen by a Transition and Transformation Programme Board, the work is in direct response to a decision taken by West Yorkshire Combined Authority in 2021 to withdraw as the lead policing body for NPAS.

NPAS was established in 2012 as part of a National Police Collaboration Agreement.

The agreement is signed by all police forces in England and Wales, and they contribute to the operational costs associated with running the national service.

Since its formation, NPAS has operated from West Yorkshire Police's headquarters in Wakefield, with the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police holding the Police Air Operator's Certificate and West Yorkshire Combined Authority adopting the responsibilities of a Lead Policing Body, having had the authority transferred to it from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner of West Yorkshire, on the appointment of the Mayor of West Yorkshire and creation of WYCA in 2021.

The work of the Transition Programme Team is to identify and present future options for the hosting of NPAS. All options are being explored and a Business Case is due to be considered by the National Strategic Board in September 2024.

Running parallel to the Transition Programme is a Transformation Programme.

Whilst 'transition' focuses solely on potential future hosting and governance arrangements for NPAS, 'transformation' is a major piece of work which seeks to determine the future requirements of police air support and present options for the most cost-effective and efficient model for delivering a value for money service that meets the demand for police air support.

In consultation with Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales, the aim of the programme is to understand the current and future requirements of air support, identify the challenges, risks and opportunities in the operating environment and present a model which delivers the best outcomes for public safety and operational policing.

This work runs in parallel to the development of a new Police Aviation Strategy by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC).

A Business Case is anticipated in September 2024.

# Our 2023/24 performance dashboard

## Flying hours per region

In 2023/24, our aircraft flew a total of 11,619 hours on behalf of police forces. This is 442 more hours than in 2022/23.

A further 1,373 hours were flown for training, transit and maintenance purposes.

NPAS base <small>(operating hours)</small>	Number of deployments
Husbands Bosworth (12hr)	664
Benson (12hr)	788
North Weald (24hr)	1,949
London (24hr)	3,438
Redhill (20hr)	1,081
Newcastle (20hr)	1,202
Carr Gate (24hr)	1,573
Barton (24hr)	2,424
Hawarden (12hr)	422
Bournemouth (12hr)	445
Exeter (12hr)	701
Almondsbury (20hr)	1,233
St Athan (20hr)	1,484
Birmingham (24hr)	1,708
Fixed wing (12hr)	578
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,690</b>

Our aircraft were deployed 19,690 times.

This compares to 18,566 deployments the previous year.

Of all deployments in 2023/24, 29.2% were made in-flight.

Region	Total flying hours <small>(rotary and fixed wing aircraft)</small>	Fixed wing flying hours	Number of deployments <small>(rotary and fixed wing aircraft)</small>	Number of deployments of fixed wing
British Transport Police	85:37	0:34	153	1
East Midlands	418:31	61:42	576	82
East	1,207:37	22:26	2,031	22
London	1,475:28	1:01	3,414	1
North East	1,866:41	217:55	3,018	273
North West	1,495:25	117:00	2,890	120
South East	1,428:36	10:30	1,997	11
South West	1,484:59	10:07	2,061	12
Wales	1,063:39	19:16	1,655	17
West Midlands	1,092:30	46:04	1,895	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,619:07</b>	<b>506:39</b>	<b>19,690</b>	<b>578</b>

**An aircraft is deemed available when all its mission systems and crew are ready and able to be deployed.**

In 2023/24, the average aircraft availability rate was 71.4% - which is slightly higher than in 2022/23, when the rate was 70.4%.

It is important to note that annual maintenance requirements of around 10 weeks per aircraft, per year, make it impossible to achieve 100% availability.

Engineering (12%) and pilot issues (6.8%) were the main reasons for unavailability.

**Of 36,487 calls for service, 35.7% were cancelled and, of these, 78.4% were before an aircraft lifted.**

When an NPAS crew is cancelled, it is often because a person or vehicle has been found prior to our arrival.

43.0% of all cancellations were for this reason.



## A case study: Working together for continual air support

**NPAS Exeter and Bournemouth crews worked together to provide a series of seamless handovers, ensuring Devon and Cornwall Police could be confident of the continual aerial containment of a high-risk firearms scene.**

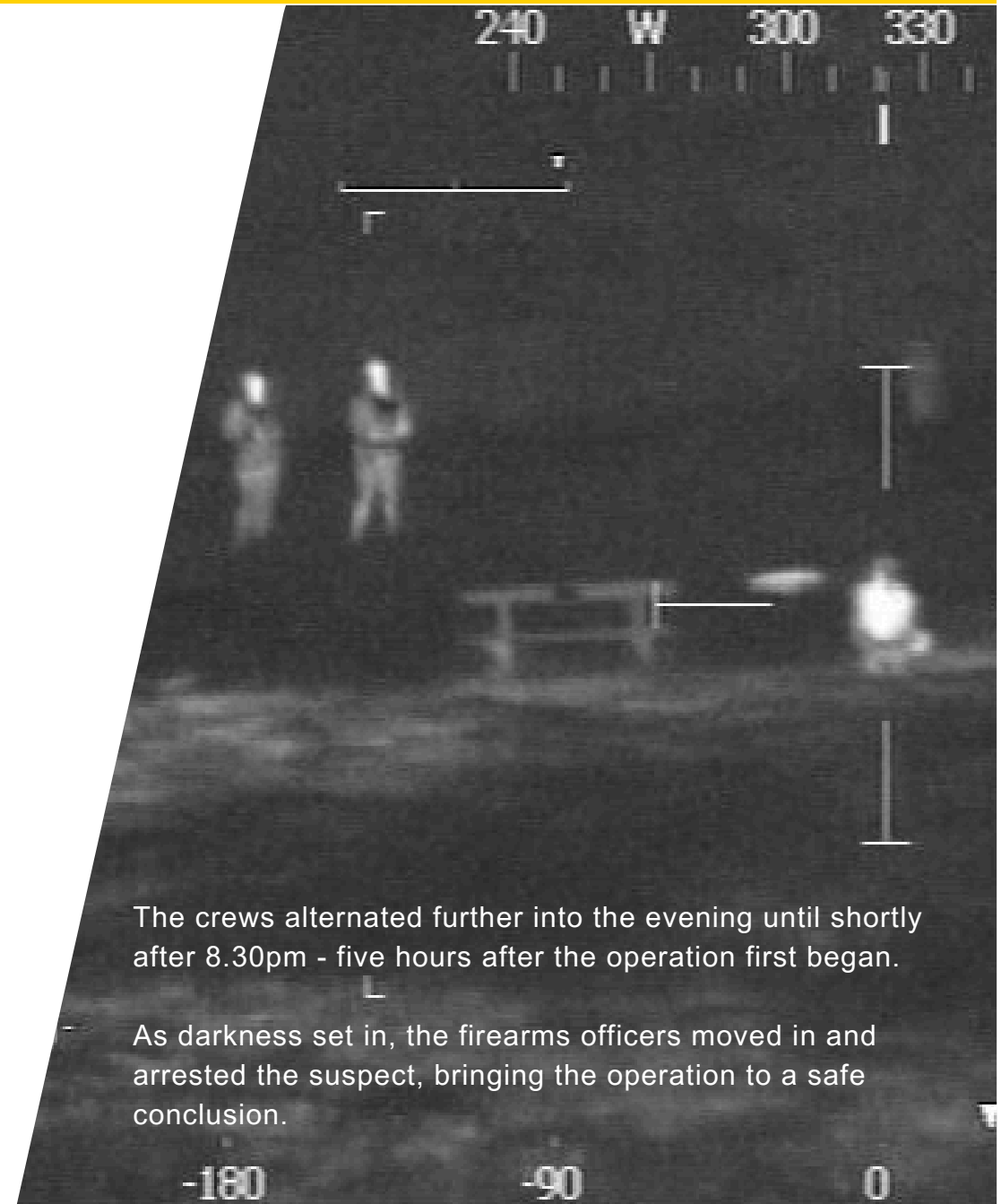
Exeter's duty crew was monitoring local incidents on the afternoon of Friday 11 August 2023 when they heard reports of an agitated man in Brixham, Devon, armed with a 'machete and spear' and making threats to kill.

They deployed and quickly located the suspect on a coastal path, close to a cliff edge. A spear was seen nearby.

Firearms officers were directed to the scene to begin negotiations. There was a risk he may have intended to end his life, either by police action or falling from the cliff, so lifeboat crews were also alerted.

After one-and-a-half hours in flight, NPAS 44 returned to refuel and the Bournemouth crew of NPAS 45 was tasked to take over, in what was described as a 'seamless handover'.

The Bournemouth crew continued to provide downlink footage to ground operations, flying for an hour and 47 minutes, before NPAS 44 returned and took over again.



The crews alternated further into the evening until shortly after 8.30pm - five hours after the operation first began.

As darkness set in, the firearms officers moved in and arrested the suspect, bringing the operation to a safe conclusion.

## Our 2023/24 performance dashboard

**Of all the incidents attended by an NPAS crew in 2023/24, 90.3% resulted in a positive outcome.**

This equates to 1,050 missing or vulnerable people found, and 2,881 suspects apprehended, as a direct result of air support.

Our skilled team of despatchers, based in our dedicated Operations Centre at West Yorkshire Police headquarters, assesses each call for the appropriate response.

In 2023/24, our aircraft crews attended 3,084 priority one incidents.

These are when there is an immediate threat to a life, a crime is in progress or there is a nationally significant event or terrorism incident.

The average time to reach a scene from receiving a call was 12 minutes and two seconds. This is slightly faster than the previous year's response rate of 12 minutes and 18 seconds.

A further 10,767 priority two incidents were attended, with the average time to reach the scene being 20 minutes. Again, this is an improvement on the response rate of 21 minutes and 54 seconds recorded in 2022/23 and meets the Service Level Agreements made with police forces.

Positive outcomes 2023/24	Direct result of air support	Assisted by air support
Vulnerable people located	403	248
Missing people located	647	393
Wanted suspects located	2,881	1,607
Target vehicles located	1,296	558

	Priority one incidents	Priority two incidents
Average response rate	12 minutes 2 seconds	20 minutes

## A case study: A multi-agency response

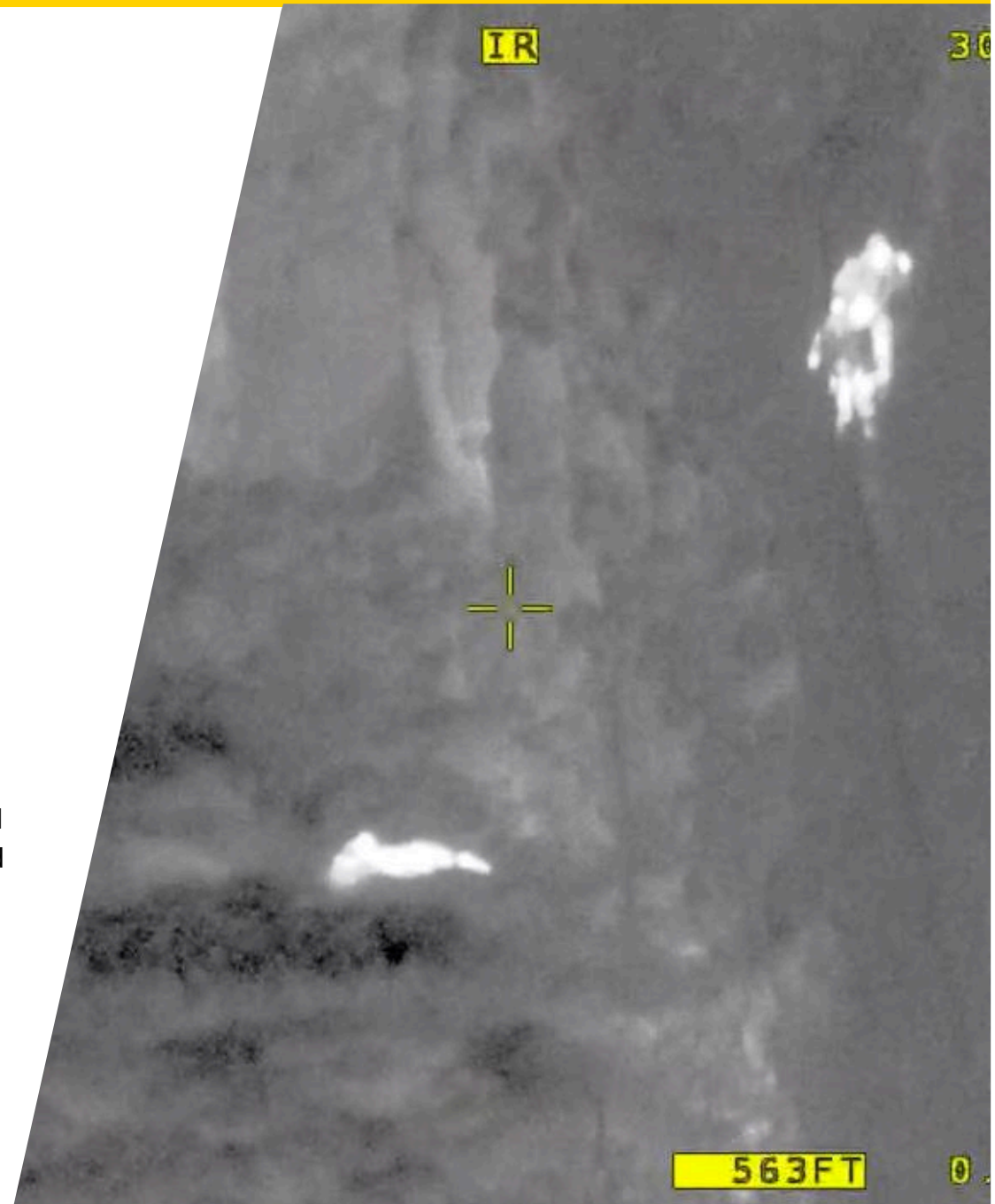
**NPAS, coastguard, mountain rescue and paramedic teams came together to rescue a 16-year-old boy who had fallen from the cliff edge into a disused quarry in North Wales.**

A police helicopter crew from NPAS Hawarden was deployed to search for the boy just after 11pm on Wednesday 3 January 2024.

It was thought he might be somewhere within a large rural area, which included the disused quarry. The crew arrived in 11 minutes and quickly located the boy at the bottom of a 40ft cliffside, lying on his back with a serious leg injury.

Strong winds and heavy rain hampered the rescue further and increased the vulnerability of the boy.

The crew called for a HM Coastguard helicopter with a winch. Local mountain rescue and paramedic teams were also directed to the boy's location, while the NPAS helicopter crew illuminated the scene with the aircraft's powerful spotlight. Adverse weather created challenging flying conditions but the police crew continued to monitor the safety of emergency responders as they made their way to the scene, remaining on the task for an hour and 18 minutes, until the coastguard aircraft arrived and the boy was taken for urgent treatment to head, spinal and leg injuries.





## Our 2023/24 performance dashboard

Of all air support tasks in 2023/24, 85% involved searching for a suspect, vehicle or vulnerable person.

Type of tasking 2023/24	
Suspect search	4,150
Vehicle search	4,567
Missing person search	3,228
Injured person/concern for welfare	1,894
Containment of scene	624
Public order incident	132
Thermal imagery request	684
Vehicle follow	301
Other	706
Total	16,286

There were 737 pre-planned tasks supported by NPAS.

The majority of these were requests for aerial images.

NPAS has an important role to play in the management of large public events too.

Most notably, this includes high profile annual sporting fixtures, such as the Grand National at Aintree, large community gatherings and demonstrations, and planned policing operations.

### Declined calls for service

**There will always be times when, unavoidably, we have to decline a call for our assistance.**

The main reasons are unsafe weather conditions for flying, engineering requirements for the aircraft, crew abstractions for training or pilot flight time limitations.

On occasions a request simply isn't viable for air support.

Our experienced officers provide tactical advice to Force Incident Managers and Control Room staff, advising them of the capabilities of air support in any particular scenario, taking into consideration timings, the environment, the capabilities of the aircraft and weather limitations.

In 2023/24, we declined 18% of calls for service.

## A case study: Saving lives

**A crew from NPAS Newcastle landed to help save the life of a woman being dragged along in a fast-moving river.**

They had been deployed to Stocksfield, Northumbria, on 5 February 2024 following reports that a woman had entered the water from a bridge and disappeared from sight.

The crew quickly located the distressed woman along with a member of the public who had entered the water to try to rescue her.

With no immediate emergency services nearby, the pilot landed so the Tactical Flight Officer could help rescue the unconscious woman.

With the member of the public, he dragged her from the water.

Senior pilot Captain Adrian Hardwick said: “If the Tactical Flight Officer hadn’t instigated a landing in order to assist, it was highly likely that we could have ended up with two people in the water in distress.

“His quick-thinking and commitment saved a life and prevented an escalation of this already serious incident, which would have caused further issues for all emergency services in attendance.”



## Our fixed wing aircraft

**Between April 2023 and March 2024, our fixed wing crews were deployed 577 times and flew for 506 hours in support of 39 different police forces.**

They also patrolled for 202 hours.

The crews operated from a temporary base at Leeds Bradford Airport, before relocating to a new permanent home at East Midlands Airport in December 2023.

This was due to the announcement made by Peel Group in October 2022 that Doncaster Airport, from where the fixed wing fleet originally operated, was to close.

The new location brings a range of benefits.

It is geographically central and offers the opportunity for greater national coverage. It also allows for crew recruitment from a wider pool of police forces.

Although based in the Midlands, the fleet is a national asset. This means it is deployed wherever it best meets the demand from police forces for air support.

### Fixed wing aircraft deployments by region 2023/24

East Midlands region	82
Eastern region	22
London region	1
North Eastern region	273
North Western region	120
South Eastern region	11
South Western region	12
Wales region	17
West Midlands region	39
Total	577

The fixed wing aircraft's flexible national deployment capability, which includes forward operating from locations across the country, has meant it has been ideally suited to a number of taskings, including:

- Targeted motorcycle operations in South Wales, North Wales, Humberside, Staffordshire and West Midlands
- Large scale public disorder operations
- High profile football matches and events



## A case study: A perfect airborne resource for all-day events

**The endurance capabilities of the NPAS fixed wing aircraft make them the perfect airborne resource for all day events, such as major sporting fixtures.**

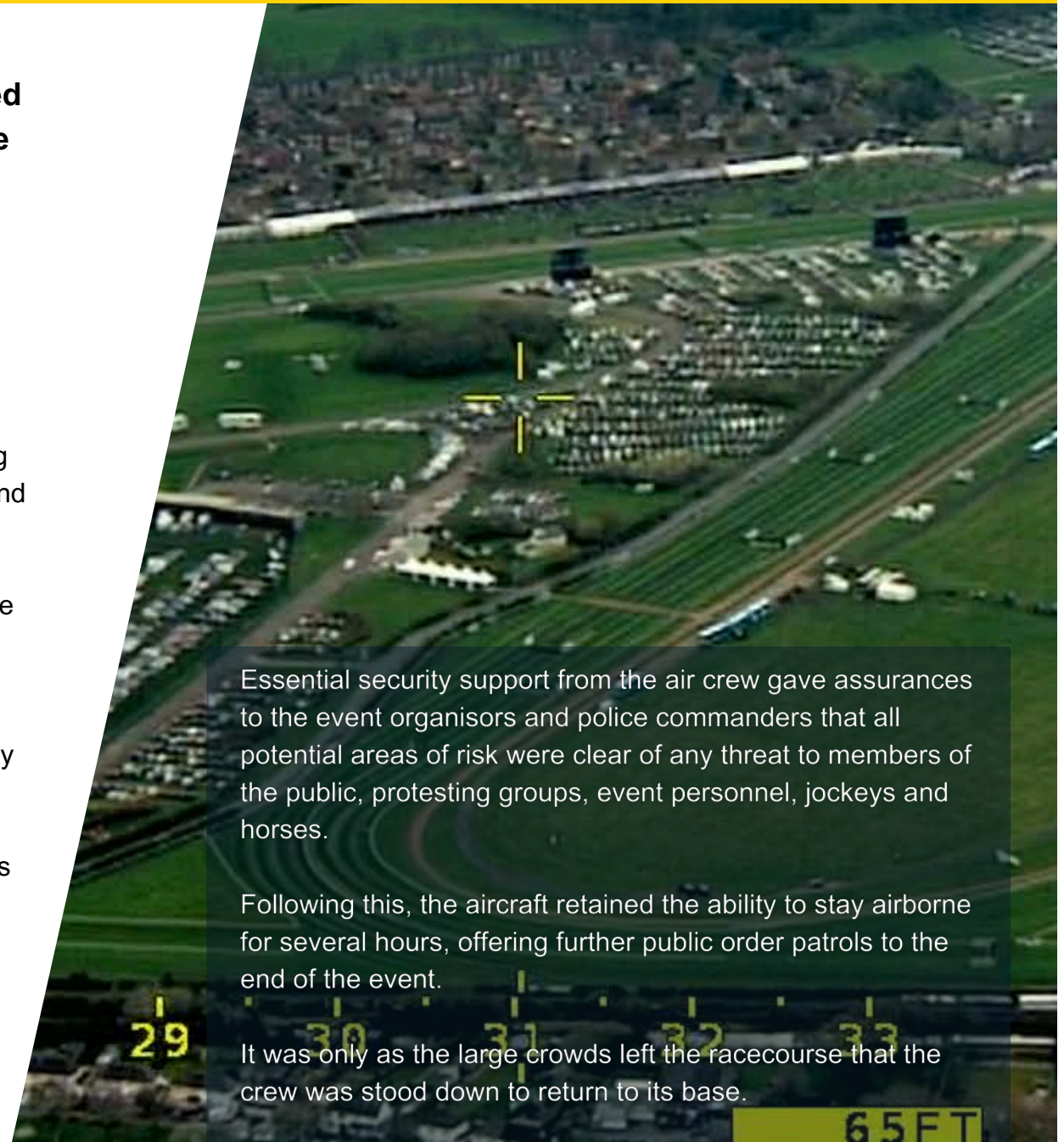
In April 2023, the fixed wing team was called upon to work with Merseyside Police in planning for the 175th Grand National festival at Aintree racecourse.

Over the three-day event, the crews gave over 19 flying hours to provide an aerial overview in the pre, during and post phases of the public safety operation.

On the day of the racing fixture, the crew spent over five hours flying over the course and surrounding roads, neighbourhoods and scrubland - identifying potential pockets of anti-social behaviour and planned protests which threatened to disrupt the event and risk the safety of race-goers.

In one incident, the crew provided vital downlink images to the incident commanders of a diversionary incident involving 60-plus protestors trying to scale a perimeter fence and glue themselves to railings.

Early advice and intelligence to the Silver Commander, combined with real-time images, enabled resources to be directed to the scene and led to multiple arrests.



Essential security support from the air crew gave assurances to the event organisers and police commanders that all potential areas of risk were clear of any threat to members of the public, protesting groups, event personnel, jockeys and horses.

Following this, the aircraft retained the ability to stay airborne for several hours, offering further public order patrols to the end of the event.

It was only as the large crowds left the racecourse that the crew was stood down to return to its base.

## Our people

On 31 March 2024, there were 254 people working for NPAS, which included 99 police officers who are seconded from various police forces across England and Wales.

There were 39.15 vacancies.

Recruitment and training are ongoing processes as people leave and join the service, so actual full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers versus established posts will always fluctuate.

### Employee numbers on 31 March 2024

Role or department	Established posts	Actual FTEs
Pilots	80	64
Base managers	16	14
Tactical Flight Officers	131	113.33
Headquarters	37	34
Operations Centre	25	24.52

### Managing absence

At NPAS, our sickness absence rates continue to be much lower than those of police forces in England and Wales.

	Absence: officers	Absence: Staff
All police forces (31/03/2023)	4.55%	4.99%
NPAS (31/03/2024)	1.83%	1.37%

## Diversity monitoring

Growing a diverse workforce continues to be a priority as it is recognised that 69.6% of our workforce are male, and people from minority ethnic groups are under-represented, at just 3%.

We recognise this is a challenge.

Maintaining a fully inclusive and accessible organisation, which attracts the very best employees, is our aim and we continue to be focused on improving the balance of our workforce.

This data was collected during 2023/24 and provides a snapshot of a given time.

Due to movements in staff, and the timeframe over which the data was collected, the total staff numbers will not necessarily equate with the total workforce numbers as recorded on 31 March 2024.

Role	Male employees			Female employees		
	White	Minority ethnic	Prefer not to say	White	Minority ethnic	Prefer not to say
Police officer	84	1	4	24	0	0
Police staff	109	3	3	25	1	0
Volunteer	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	194	4	7	49	1	0



## A case study: Outstanding performance

**NPAS pilot Captain John Roberts was awarded the highly prestigious national aviation award, The Johnston Memorial Trophy, for his ‘outstanding performance in the operation of air systems’.**

Capt Roberts received the 2023 award from The Honourable Company of Air Pilots. He was recognised for his coordination and planning role as part of UK Maritime Counter Terrorism (MCT) preparedness, with specialist responsibility for police air support provision.

In particular, he was instrumental in developing training for police crews involved in highly dynamic aviation situations, and assisted with the development of the communication infrastructure that allows images to be relayed, in real time, to operational command centres.

Head of NPAS Flight Operations Captain Paul Watts said: “John’s ability to plan and supervise complex operations has led to him coordinating aviation support during US Presidential visits. He has established effective working relationships with the US agencies and has been personally commended for his expertise and assistance in ensuring the successful movement, by helicopter, of POTUS during four visits. John’s ability to not only fly challenging missions, but to also coordinate with multiple agencies, is exemplary and an example of the excellence to be found with NPAS teams.”





## Training for excellence

**In 2023/24, the aircraft G-POLU was returned to service as a dedicated training helicopter.**

This follows a decision taken by the National Strategic Board in October 2022 to bring the spare aircraft back into the fleet following a period of loan in Norway.

The aircraft underwent major work to enable its use for EC135 pilot training and testing, and for the initial training course for Tactical Flight Officers (TFO).

The EC135 type rating courses have also been adjusted to include more synthetic training and all training records have now been fully adopted onto the Centrik digital platform, significantly improving our ability to record, monitor and report on each individual's competency and training schedule.

The appointment of two national Tactical Flight Training Officers (TFTO) has strengthened the central training team.

Three TFO courses were delivered in 2023/24.

Photo credit: Simon Edwards

### Training courses 2023/24

Number of new pilots successfully completing training	5
Number of new TFOs successfully completing training	17
Percentage of pilots passing initial training course	83%
Percentage of TFOs passing initial training course	89.47%



## A case study: Planned operations

**NPAS London and headquarters staff were awarded for their dedication and commitment in the policing of the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III in May 2023.**

Our Continuing Airworthiness Management Support Officer and NPAS London Base Managers received a Chief Operating Officer's Commendation for their role in the planning of air support for what was one of the highest profile public events in recent UK history.

The Coronation ceremony was a major policing operation, attracting an international audience, and demanding exacting requirements from the Metropolitan Police Service.

Through intense planning, against a challenging backdrop of staff and aircraft availability plus last-minute maintenance requirements, the team played a key role in ensuring NPAS met the demand placed upon it to deliver a streamlined and reliable service.

A total of 24 NPAS employees were rewarded with Chief Operating Officer Commendations during 2023/24 for their dedication and commitment to policing.





## Operating costs

**Most of our income comes from contributions made by every police force in England and Wales. In 2023/24, this amounted to £44.4 million.**

Under the current funding model, police forces determine the number of annual flying hours they require and are charged according to those hours.

This largely funds our operating costs.

In 2023/24, an additional £15 million was received from the Home Office, creating a surplus in the budget.

The National Strategic Board agreed to transfer the surplus to the fleet replacement reserve, creating a surplus in the budget.

In addition, £2.3 million was received from police force contributions, towards fleet replacement.

NPAS reserves, as at 31 March 2024, stood at £18.2 million.

Subjective area	Annual budget	Cumulative payments	Year end at 31/03/2024
Pay and overtime	19,789,063	18,984,383	804,680
Computers and communications	956,067	969,933	-13,866
Premises costs (rent and rates etc)	1,657,317	1,697,598	-40,281
Spare parts and labour (fixed wing and rotary)	2,484,025	2,458,410	25,615
Ground fleet	236,453	286,695	-50,242
Lead force costs	972,075	972,106	-31
Tools and domestic equipment	239,080	350,766	-111,686
Fixed wing and rotary (maintenance contracts, fuel, PBH and insurance)	17,215,401	16,212,878	1,002,523
Travel and training	560,046	613,055	-53,009
Professional/legal/insurance fees	700,194	1,877,507	-1,177,313
Direct revenue financing capital		158,256	-158,256
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>44,809,721</b>	<b>44,581,588</b>	<b>228,133</b>
Income from force contributions	-44,406,158	-44,406,158	0
Other income	-403,563	-16,114,937	15,711,374
<b>Total income</b>	<b>-44,809,721</b>	<b>-60,521,095</b>	<b>15,711,374</b>
<b>Operational total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-15,939,507</b>	<b>15,939,507</b>

Reserves statement	31 March '23	Transfer in	31 March '24
Fleet replacement reserve	12,770,000	18,033,594	30,803,594
Operational reserve	5,218,035	205,912	5,423,947
<b>Total reserve</b>	<b>17,988,035</b>	<b>18,239,506</b>	<b>36,227,541</b>

## Capital costs

**In 2023/24, our capital grant from the Home Office was £10,470,000.**

With a further £60k in funding from the British Transport Police and an Emergency Services Network Grant of £166,620, this formed our capital budget.

An overspend on aircraft parts meant that the capital programme was overspent against the budget. This overspend required a revenue contribution of £158,256 to ensure the capital programme was balanced.

There were a number of significant items that contributed to the overspend on parts, including two unscheduled gearbox overhauls for the EC145 helicopters, at a cost of £900k.

NPAS also worked with our mission kit providers to purchase remaining stocks of equipment before they became obsolete.

Work was also completed on the G-POLU helicopter to convert it into a dedicated training helicopter. This required more hours than anticipated.

Projects	Budget	Year end position
Project staff	£211,255	£237,845
Fleet replacement/commercial services	£1,049,000	£723,019
Existing fleet upgrades	£400,00	£136,306
Capital parts	£6,700,000	£8,226,043
NPAS drones	£1,160,584	£836,322
Estates – base upgrade and repair costs	£899,161	£526,259
Equipment replacement – helmets, NVG	£60,000	£2,462
Airframe credits (invoice tidy up)	£0	£2
Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme	£50,000	£166,620
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£10,530,000</b>	<b>£10,854,877</b>



# Projects

## **Operating a police aviation service involves much more than just putting aircraft in the sky.**

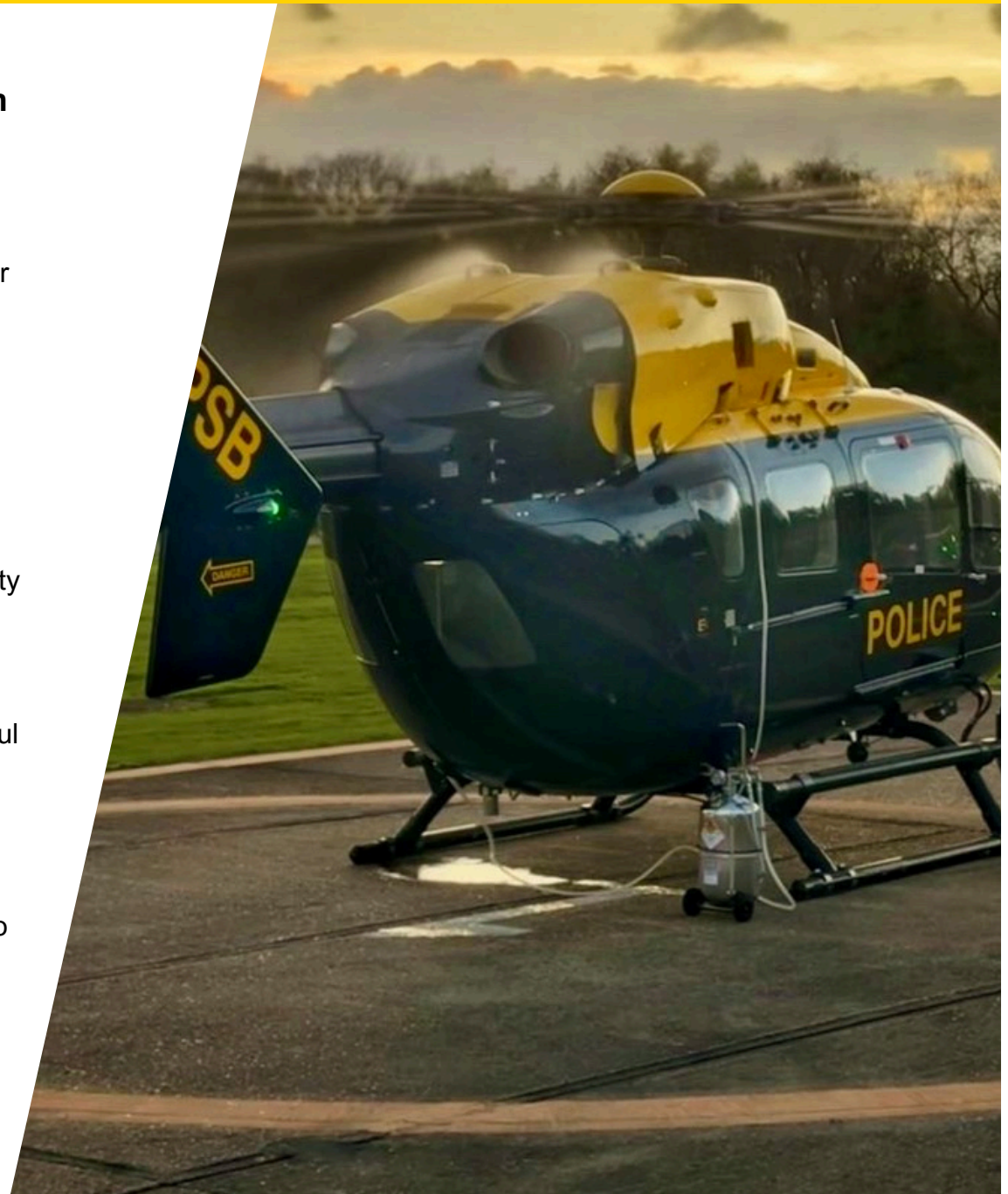
Our teams need the best equipment to work collaboratively, gather evidence, communicate and stay safe, which is why our Project Delivery Team is an integral part of our service.

The team has a wide scope, from arranging upgrades and the replacement of aircraft equipment, to managing major improvements within our base infrastructure. We refer to this work as ‘keeping the show in the air.’

The next five years will see a change in the size and complexity of projects undertaken by NPAS, as we address emerging obsolescence issues across the existing fleet, introduce new aircraft, implement replacement communications systems and procure rotary and fixed wing maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) contracts, alongside trialling new technologies.

Our new NPAS Head of Projects was appointed in November 2023 and has responsibility for building the project management capability needed to deliver this growing portfolio of work. He gained approval in March 2024 to implement an enhanced and rigorous project governance framework.

Keeping a large fleet of specialist aircraft up to date and fit for purpose involves specialist skills, experience and coordination of many teams, inside and outside of NPAS.



# Projects

Here are some of the key projects delivered in 2023/24 as part of our 'keeping the show in the air' and 'major change' projects.

## Keeping the show in the air

**East Midlands Airport.** We established a new NPAS base at East Midlands Airport at the end of 2023, and saw the fixed wing teams resume operational flying from there in early 2024.

**Base improvement programme.** Minor refurbishment was undertaken at Husbands Bosworth and planning began for a full site refurbishment of our Birmingham base in September 2024, plus major building work at NPAS Lippitts Hill in July 2024.

**Skyforce Observer upgrade.** The mapping system which is installed in the EC145s and EC135 P2 type of aircraft was successfully upgraded to a newer version. This provides a faster and more accurate search function.

**T.AGG upgrade.** The units installed in the fixed wing and EC135 T2 aircraft to provide a mobile data and Wi-Fi hotspot service were updated to allow access to the internet and West Yorkshire Police IT systems, through Microsoft Azure. The AIMS mission system installed in these aircraft now also runs on the Microsoft Windows 10 operating system.

**G-POLU helicopter.** G-POLU was upgraded and re-introduced back into the NPAS fleet, allowing it to be assigned to future tactical flight officer and pilot training. The work included the installation of CVFDR (Cockpit Voice & Flight Data Recorders, including camera), height-adjustable seats for the pilots, iPad connectivity and standardisation of the landing light.

**Drones Restricted Airspace.** Work began with the Civil Aviation Authority for restricted airspace to be implemented around four bases that are not licensed aerodromes. This will ensure a safer operating environment as drones will not be permitted unless authorised by the NPAS Operations Centre.

## Major change projects

**Obsolescence.** A major review of aircraft systems and HQ infrastructure began in February 2024. The findings will inform future project work in 2024 and beyond.

**Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul (MRO).** The existing fixed wing aircraft MRO contract with GAMA Aviation was extended for a further two years (starting 1 April 2024) following a successful procurement exercise led by Blue Light Commercial (BLC). Negotiations continue with Airbus UK to extend the existing rotary MRO contract.

## Fleet replacement programme



**In 2023/24, BlueLight Commercial adopted the role as the Contracting Authority for the procurement of a replacement fleet of helicopters for NPAS.**

Introductory meetings with suppliers began in the autumn of 2023 to discuss the terms and conditions of the procurement process.

At the time of writing, the procurement process remained at a commercially sensitive stage, with tenders having been submitted for consideration.

It is anticipated that a contract will be awarded in 2025.

At the year end, £30.8 million was held in NPAS reserves towards the cost of the fleet replacement programme.

This was accrued through Home Office funding and contributions from forces.



## 20,000 flying hours for G-POLC

**G-POLC achieved a historic milestone in 2023 as the first helicopter of its type worldwide to achieve 20,000 flying hours.**

Operating from NPAS Barton, the aircraft - one of over 1,400 Airbus H135's operating in 65 countries - began its service in 2001 with the Chiltern Air Support Unit, supporting Thames Valley, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Police from Luton Airport.

By the end of 2023/24 with NPAS, the aircraft had clocked up a lifetime total of 20,558 flying hours.

Managing Director of Airbus Helicopters UK, Lenny Brown, said: "The helicopters flown by NPAS are among the hardest working aircraft that we provide to any customer anywhere in the world."

In its 22-year history, G-POLC has supported some of the highest profile and operationally challenging events, as well as having a critical part to play in momentous occasions, such as the London Olympics 2012.

In 2023/24, G-POLC attended 1,131 taskings, in support of 15 different police forces. The vast majority were to assist Greater Manchester Police (567), Merseyside Police (178) and Lancashire Police (157). It flew for 663 hours in 2023/24.



G-POLC and NPAS Barton crew on achieving its 20,000th flying hour



## Exploring the opportunities for a blended fleet

**Plans to explore the feasibility of a blended fleet of crewed and uncrewed aircraft to deliver future national police air support gathered pace in 2023/24.**

This work is being funded by the Home Office.

National Air Traffic Services (NATS) was appointed to support the development of an application to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) for planned trial flights of Beyond the Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) uncrewed aircraft. These will be operated from an existing NPAS air base.

The NPAS Futures and Innovation Team continued to work with the CAA Innovation Team to identify suitable areas in which to operate flight trials, and select an appropriate platform to test, via a tender process managed by BlueLight Commercial. The Ministry of Defence's 'Defence Laboratory' was also engaged to undertake proof of concept testing on radar equipment for use as a 'detect and avoid' system.

Full trials are expected to start in May 2025 and last six months. They will seek to test and verify:

- The feasibility and success rate of remotely piloting an uncrewed aircraft from an NPAS base.
- The capabilities of 'detect and avoid' radar technologies to enable safe integration into UK airspace.



## Regulation and compliance

**In 2023/24, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) carried out eight external audits on activities at NPAS headquarters and regional air bases.**

The purpose of these audits is to ensure NPAS is complying with CAA regulations, in addition to its own operating procedures.

A further two external audits were conducted by AHUK, the approved organisation that delivers maintenance to our helicopter fleet.

The annual programme of internal and external audits primarily focuses on two key areas - flight operations (including training) and the continuing airworthiness of our aircraft.

In addition, our internal team conducts audits with third-party suppliers, including engineering contractors, fuel providers and even small, independent airfields that we might sometimes use for re-fuelling.

The Civil Aviation Authority declared no findings following the audits of regional air bases. This is testament to the exceptionally high standards by which our bases are managed and operated.

### Audit schedule for 2023/24

#### Number of internal audits

These are conducted by our NPAS Compliance Monitoring Team and include planned and no-notice audits

61

#### Number of external audits

Eight were conducted by the Civil Aviation Authority, and two by AHUK

10

There was one recorded finding following the annual audit of our headquarters activity.

The regulator recommended that our Compliance Team conducts a specific audit on the procedures for approving our Night Vision Imaging Systems (NVIS), rather than including it as part of wider audits, as had previously been the case.

Implementing this change has led to enhancements in the way we manage the NVIS equipment, and introduced a more effective pre-use set-up process.

Internally, the Compliance Team continues to focus its audit work on NPAS operational procedures, ensuring they are effective and consistently followed.

## Managing safety

**Our robust Safety Management System (SMS) includes all the necessary organisational structures, accountabilities, policies and procedures to reduce, control and maintain risk to an As Low As Reasonably Practicable (ALARP) level.**

This approach has built a strong safety culture throughout NPAS.

All safety issues are reported, tracked and analysed through Centrik – an all-in-one computerised management system.

Along with a six-monthly internal Safety Review Board, chaired by the NPAS Accountable Manager, and Safety Action Group events involving staff representatives from across the service, we subscribed to the following national safety groups in 2023/24.

- Civil Aviation Authority Onshore Safety Leadership Group
- UK Laser Safety Working Group
- UK Flight Safety Committee
- Civil Aviation Authority Skywise
- British Helicopter Association Technical Committee
- Blue Light Aviation Safety Team

**The Civil Authority (CAA) requires evidence that any risks faced by our service are suitably monitored and managed.**

The top five risks are declared and reviewed by the CAA every six months. In 2023/24, these were:

1. Drones-related airborne conflict.
2. Organisational change affecting performance.
3. Reduction in performance resulting from human error.
4. Maintenance errors on the aircraft or equipment.
5. Over-reliance on single points of failure, such as limited staff able to carry out critical roles.

The CAA independently assessed NPAS throughout the year. This included auditing a selection of base locations and the NPAS headquarters.

The HQ CAA audit took place in August 2023.

The CAA concluded that NPAS is operating safely with effective management by the Accountable Manager and Nominated Form 4 post-holders. The CAA further reported that the Management of Change (MoC) process, designed and implemented by NPAS, was 'industry-leading'.

## Serious incidents 2023/24

**We received 1,007 safety reports from staff into the NPAS Safety Management System (SMS) in 2023/24.**

Of these, 168 were assessed to be Mandatory Occurrence Reports (MORs), requiring submission to the Civil Aviation Authority.

Of the 168 MORs, 77 were laser attacks against NPAS aircraft.

NPAS aircraft incur significantly more laser strikes than any other helicopters flying in England and Wales, with 85% of all rotary laser strikes being conducted against our crews.

We are well supported by local police forces and will pursue prosecutions through the criminal justice system.

Despite this, our overall record of reportable incidents remains in line with European industry expectations, as measured by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency.

However, with the increased use of drones, commercially and by hobbyists and the emergency services, airspace is becoming more congested year on year, presenting an ever growing risk to our aircraft crews.

In August 2023, one of our aircraft came into close proximity with a drone which was unlawfully operating at 1,800ft. This was reported to the Civil Aviation Authority and local police force. The pilot was arrested for endangering an aircraft.

In January 2024, one of our aircraft unexpectedly came into close proximity with a police drone, whilst operating in the same area, searching for suspects.

We have been working with the NPCC drones team to ensure processes are robust and interoperability is achieved, with effective two-way communication.

NPAS bases have also been proactively engaging with local police drones units to share safety practices. We independently audited the drones reporting process, which was established through the NPAS Operations Centre, to assess its effectiveness in preventing conflict between aircraft and drones in shared airspaces. The audit concluded the process was effective. At the same time, the NPAS Head of Futures and Innovation has been working on possible technological devices which could be used to provide better awareness for our pilots of where police drones are operating.

We had 17 near-miss incidents with drones in 2023/24.



## Procurement and contracts

**We work in partnership with many valued suppliers who are procured, with the support of BlueLight Commercial, to deliver a wide range of services.**

Our greatest contract spend continues to be for the maintenance of our fleet.

Suppliers delivering contracts with an annual value of £100k or more are listed in the table.

The total budget for freelance pilots is £150k, which is spent across different suppliers.

The tender process for the maintenance of our fixed wing fleet was initiated in September 2022 but had to be cancelled because of the closure of Doncaster Sheffield Airport and the temporary use of Leeds Bradford Airport, before the final relocation to East Midlands Airport at the end of 2023.

Lower value, but significant, contracts included the supply of:

- Aviation command and aircraft navigation system (ACANS)
- Support for fixed wing and ground station mission system software
- Fixed wing MX10 camera support and maintenance
- Service and maintenance of aircrew helmets

Contract detail	Supplier	Start date	End date
Rotary maintenance, continuing airworthiness management, spare parts, engine support aircraft modifications	AHUK	01/05/2019	30/09/2024 (Option to extend to 30/09/2028)
Aviation fuel (Barton, Lippitts Hill, Newcastle, North Weald, Carr Gate)	Total Energies Marketing UK Ltd	07/06/2023	31/05/2026 (Option to extend to 31/05/2028)
Aviation fuel (Almondsbury, Husbands Bosworth)	World Fuel Services Europe Ltd	07/06/2023	31/05/2026 (Option to extend to 31/05/2028)
Rotary wing flight simulator	Babcock International	01/09/2022	31/08/2025
Rotary wing freelance pilot services	Allen Aviation Ltd, Bernd Clayton Photograph, GreyStar Aviation	01/09/2023	31/08/2024 (WYCA agreed on 06/06/2024 that contract can be extended to 2026)
Rotary wing freelance pilot services	TT Aviation Ltd	22/04/2024	31/08/2024 (WYCA agreed on 06/06/2024 that contract can be extended to 2026)
Maintenance service of fuel farm installations and bowzers	Flofuel	01/09/2022	31/08/2025
Fixed wing maintenance, repair and overhaul	Gama Aviation	01/04/2024	31/03/2026
Provision of Tetra air-to-ground radio device maintenance and repair goods and services	Chelton Ltd (Trading as Cobham Aerospace Connectivity)	01/01/2024	31/12/2024 (Option to extend to 31/12/2025)
Rotary maintenance, repair and overhaul	AHUK Ltd	01/05/2019	30/09/2024 (Option to extend 30/09/2026)
Fixed wing mission equipment extended warranty	Airborne Technologies	01/10/2022	30/09/2024

## A final word



**Reflecting on the past year and being reminded of just some of the thousands of jobs that have been supported by police air crews in 2023/24, there is little doubt that the National Police Air Service is unique in the work it delivers and the benefits it brings to operational policing.**

Its value is best evidenced in the 1,050 missing and vulnerable people that were found in the year, as a direct result of NPAS air support.

Or the 2,881 suspects caught after being seen by a member of an NPAS air crew.

In fact, the aircraft were deployed more times in 2023/24 than in the previous year, indicating the ongoing need for aerial support in a range of policing operations.

Focus naturally falls on the capabilities of the aircraft and the vital mission equipment that is used to find missing people, track vehicles and direct police officers safely.

And as technology advances, it is important we work with our partners within the aviation industry, such as the Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Control Service, to explore new technological opportunities for air support.

However, it is equally important that we recognise the skills, experience, knowledge and passion of the people who sit within the National Police Air Service.

Very few people get to see behind the scenes of NPAS and witness the level of professionalism and training which goes into delivering an aviation service which is both safe and meets strict regulatory requirements, whilst also retaining the ability to adapt to the dynamic nature of policing and all that requires in terms of delivering efficiencies.

From our pilots, tactical flight officers and despatchers, to our technical services, projects and headquarters staff, plus our suppliers and service delivery partners, every single person plays an essential part in delivering public safety from the air.

I thank them for their contribution and commitment to the National Police Air Service.

Glenn Shelley  
NPAS Accountable Manager (January to August 2024)



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## NATIONAL POLICE AIR SERVICE

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We thank everyone at NPAS for their dedication in the delivery of our service.

Your achievements are measured in the lives saved and criminality disrupted.

We also thank our police, emergency service and search and rescue colleagues who work alongside us, with courage and commitment, to help build safer and stronger communities.

It is a true team effort.