

Our Ref: 165-06-315
Your Ref:



Information Access Team
Surrey Police HQ
01483 254789
11th September 2006

Dear

I write in connection with your request for information dated 19th August 2006 concerning the Surrey Police Air Support Unit.

Your request for information has been considered and the information is enclosed.

How many complaints have you received about the noise?

There is no easily retrievable way of confirming the number of complaints that have been received regarding the helicopter. However, during the last few months the Air Operations Unit has been made aware of calls from members of the public about the helicopter at the request of the Unit Inspector. As a result since the beginning of August 2006, all such telephone enquiries have been logged and there have been 30 such calls. Of these, two were recorded as complaints, the others general calls regarding the reason for deployment. None of the calls were specifically complaints about the noise of the aircraft.

Please could you provide details regarding the cost to buy/lease, the helicopter?

The helicopter that Surrey Police uses is owned and not leased. The cost when it was bought was £3.2 million pounds, part of which was provided by Home Office grant.

How much it costs to maintain and provide the crew to fly it?

The costs for the business year 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 are:

Police officers	340,383
Premises/Hangar	46,815
Pilots/Maintenance	691,396
Equipment/ Communications	45,736
Fuel/ Transport	92,212
	1,216,542

The Home Office publication 9/88 "*The Comparative Rate of Searching by Police Aircraft and Men on Foot*" concludes that a foot search of 1 square mile is 38 times more expensive than the same search carried out by aircraft. In reaching this conclusion it recognises that aircraft also provide a faster response and spend considerably less time on the task.

The addition of sophisticated thermal imaging equipment and other aids to modern aircraft are thought to significantly increase the cost saving and most certainly impact positively on the number of finds and rate of searching. ACPO Air Ops Technical and Training sub-committee are in the process of attempting to commission a new study to determine up to date cost benefits.

Was the option of an unmanned drone aircraft ever considered?

The issue regarding UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) is an area that is more complex than first appears. The use and development within the military world is well documented and they offer a number of advantages within the battle-space. It is important that to note that the deployment of such UAVs in a civilian role is significantly different.

The Civil Aviation Authority regulates flying in the UK airspace and it is important that any potential deployment of a UAV does not endanger other aircraft. As such it would need to offer the same level of equivalence to that of an aircraft that has a pilot on board. At the current time any potential UAV in the UK cannot operate or provide the same degree of capability to that of a police aircraft. It should also be noted that there is not a generic UAV but a whole range of platforms which range from one that is capable of flying between continents at high altitudes to others which are hand held and have minimal endurance. The costs of some UAV systems are prohibitively expensive and do not necessarily offer reduced sound footprints.

The possible benefits of UAVs within the Police Service has been considered within a department of the Home Office but in view of the current regulatory framework, they do not offer a viable alternative to aircraft used in air operations.

I request a copy of the business case submitted to obtain the helicopter. Surrey Police had shared facilities with the Metropolitan Police until April 2004. In 2002 a Best Value report into the use of Air Support was conducted within Force. The recommendations of this established a two year project to consider the termination of the shared contract to full ownership of an aircraft and were presented to the Surrey Police Authority in October 2002.

I hope this is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Information Access Team

Surrey Police provides you the right to request a re-examination of your case under its review procedure. How to do this is set out in the attached Appeals Notice. Having followed the full procedure, if you are still dissatisfied, then you have the right to direct your comments to the Information Commissioner who will give your case consideration.

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