

National Police Air Service (NPAS): five things you need to know

Published on 8 December 2025 Written by Lisa Fleming, Communications Lead, National Police Air Service

Tips on how and when to deploy air support to help save lives, tackle criminality and protect communities

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When time is critical, the National Police Air Service (NPAS) delivers fast, cost-effective aerial support, enhancing outcomes across a wide range of policing operations, including:

- searches
- command and control
- officer transport
- evidence gathering

NPAS exists to help you save lives, tackle criminality and protect communities. By understanding how and when to deploy air support, you can make the most of this vital resource.

1. An early call saves time and money

Every minute counts. As time passes, search areas expand and the likelihood of success decreases.

NPAS tactical flight officers (TFOs) are trained to provide real-time tactical advice on the best use of air assets. They help to assess a situation and advise on the most effective options.

Tip: Early notification allows crews to plan and prepare, increasing the chances of a successful outcome.

2. Know your assets – but do not be limited by them

While it's useful to know the operating hours of your local NPAS base, never let that stop you from making a request.

Aircraft can be deployed from alternative bases and NPAS crews can relocate to forward operating sites to improve response times.

Tip: Always check with the NPAS operations centre. They will explore all available options to support your incident.

3. Crewed and uncrewed aircraft – it's not either/or

Drones and NPAS aircraft are complementary tools, not interchangeable ones.

Drones are excellent for certain tasks, but they cannot always match the endurance, equipment or tactical flexibility of a helicopter or aeroplane crew. A blended approach often delivers the best results.

Tip: Do not delay air support waiting for a drone if a crewed aircraft is the better fit for the task.

4. Information is everything

Providing clear, timely and detailed information is vital, especially around search parameters. Whether you contact the NPAS via a log transfer or a phone call, be sure to include:

- talk group channels
- last known locations
- phone activity
- any relevant intelligence, including search tactics

This helps NPAS crews to prepare and ensures they are ready to act the moment they are airborne.

Tip: Even if you are not ready to deploy air support, an early heads-up allows NPAS to monitor and prepare.

5. NPAS offers more than just an eye in the sky

NPAS offers a range of capabilities that can enhance police operations. These span from live video downlinks and thermal imaging to rapid transport, evidence gathering and remote area access.

Helicopter crews regularly support each other with cross-border cover, so do not assume you cannot access air support. Plus, do not forget about the NPAS aeroplanes. They can provide up to eight hours of uninterrupted surveillance anywhere in England and Wales.

Tip: Familiarise yourself with NPAS capabilities. Consider visiting your local base or joining a familiarisation flight.

- This article was peer reviewed by PC Jack Yule, Police Search Advisor, Greater Manchester Police

Contact the NPAS operations centre

- Southern region: 01924 962815
- Northern region: 01924 962813

For more information, please visit the [NPAS website](#)

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