



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

**FOI Reference number: 02/2019**

**Date: 15 March 2019**

**Request:**

Have the PSNI been issuing reports on the use of Drones (Unmanned Air Vehicles) even when the policing board wasn't sitting? If so would it be possible to get a copy of these reports?

**Answer:**

The Policing Board received three reports on the use of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA) from PSNI during the period when the Board was not legally constituted. Information in respect of the covert use of SUA is not provided by PSNI.

The three reports are attached for information.

If you have queries about this request or the decision please contact the Board quoting the reference number above. If you are unhappy with the service you have received and wish to make a complaint or request a review you should write to the Board's Chief Executive at the following address:

Northern Ireland Policing Board  
Waterside Tower  
31 Clarendon Road  
Clarendon Dock  
Belfast BT1 3BG

Email: [foi@nipolicingboard.org.uk](mailto:foi@nipolicingboard.org.uk)

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner. Generally, the Information Commissioner's Office cannot investigate or make a decision on a case unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Board. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:-

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
SK9 5AF

Telephone: - 0303 1231114

Email: - [ni@ico.org.uk](mailto:ni@ico.org.uk)

Please be advised that Policing Board replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.nipolicingboard.org.uk](http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk).

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.

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Keeping People Safe



**STEPHEN MARTIN, QPM, FCIPD, DIP IoD  
ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE, CRIME OPERATIONS**

Chair of Performance Committee  
Northern Ireland Policing Board  
Waterside Tower  
31 Clarendon Road  
Clarendon Dock  
Belfast  
BT1 3BG

19 May 2017

Dear Chair,

**USE OF SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT**

I write with reference to the PSNI's ongoing use of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA) and to update you regarding the present position.

As previously agreed, to enable the Performance Committee of the Policing Board to monitor effectively PSNI's use of SUAs, the Committee should, every 6 months, be provided with a report on the nature and extent of Small Unmanned Aircraft use.

Please note this report covers a 7 month period to align with financial year reporting, subsequent reports will revert to the 6 monthly format.

**Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA):**

SUA	Deployments	Hours
Sept	14	8.33
Oct	13	8.05
Nov	15	17
Dec	3	4.05
Jan	3	4
Feb	15	12.5
Mar	15	13.10

Ref No:		Chair's Copy
Received:	22/5/2017	
Scanned:		
Allocated To:		
Action:		

These are the overt deployments spanning the reporting period. Deployments are balanced in conjunction with other aircraft and are also used as resilience when competing tasks determine operational commitments for other aircraft.

Typical deployments of SUAs include:

- Video footage
- Missing person search in Ballymoney
- High risk explosive operations
- Site security at Hillsborough Castle (VIP Visit)
- Top cover at quarry blasts
- Search for persons after abandoning a vehicle

All deployments are governed by ECHR as they are used in pursuit of a legitimate aim and necessary to meet an identified pressing need (lawful, necessary and proportionate).

7 members of staff are trained to operate the Small Unmanned Aircraft with training provided as part of the overall purchase.

At present Air Support Unit are working on a multi-agency partnership with PSNI Wildlife Crime, Raptor Study Group (NI) and Dept. of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The main goal of this collaboration is to assist in the safeguarding of Peregrine Falcons and fishery protection at various sites across NI. Various media organisations, especially BBC NI, are keen to positively highlight the PSNI's use of SUA. Initial trials have proved valuable and endangered wildlife have shown no adverse reaction to the presence of the PSNI SUA. This will allow for more work of this nature over the coming months. Other developments include ongoing discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority to extend flight limit permissions, over water deployments and Search and Rescue techniques.

I trust this is helpful

Yours sincerely

  
PP **STEPHEN MARTIN**  
Assistant Chief Constable



**STEPHEN MARTIN, QPM, FCIPD, DIP IoD  
ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE, CRIME OPERATIONS**

23 November 2017

Chair of Performance Committee  
Northern Ireland Policing Board  
Waterside Tower  
31 Clarendon Road  
Clarendon Dock  
Belfast  
BT1 3BG

Dear Chair,

**USE OF SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT**

I write with reference to the PSNI's ongoing use of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUAs).

In line with the Performance Committee's earlier request the previous report submitted, covered a 7 month period up until 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 2017; In order to reflect financial year reporting timeframes. I can confirm this report has now reverted to the ongoing 6 monthly reporting period, in this instance covering 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017-30<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

Please see below:

**Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA):**

SUA	Deployments	Hours/Mins
April	22	11.45
May	15	7.40
June	10	4
July	18	9.50
August	5	2.15
Sept	24	23.45
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>58.30</b>

Ref No:		Chair's Copy
Received:	28/11/17	
Scanned:		
Allocated To:	[Redacted]	
Action:	[Redacted]	

These are the overt deployments spanning the reporting period. Deployments are balanced in conjunction with other aircraft and are also used as resilience when competitive tasks determine operational commitments for other aircraft.

Typical deployments of SUAs include:

- Video Footage
- High risk Explosive Operations
- Site security at Hillsborough Castle (VIP Visit)
- Top cover at Quarry Blasts
- Peregrine Watch (National Wildlife Operation)
- Hare Coursing
- Deer Poaching
- Wildlife Operations

All deployments are governed by ECHR as they are used in pursuit of a legitimate aim and necessary to meet an identified pressing need (lawful, necessary and proportionate).

7 members of staff are trained to operate the Small Unmanned Aircraft, training being provided as part of the overall purchase package.

PSNI Air Support Unit in conjunction with PSNI Wildlife Unit is actively utilising SUA to conduct operations against those who commit Wildlife Crime against Peregrine falcons, in support of fishery protection and against hare coursing and deer poaching. This has attracted a lot of media attention with PSNI being highlighted nationally as proactively using SUA to tackle such crime. This has led to the PSNI Air Support Unit having been nominated for a National Wildlife Award.

After a period of significant negotiation PSNI have now been successfully granted extended flight limit permissions by the Civil Aviation Authority, including over-water deployments and Search and Rescue techniques which will further enhance the scope and capabilities of the SUA's.

I trust this is of use to you and should you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

  
STEPHEN MARTIN  
Assistant Chief Constable



**BARBARA GRAY QPM  
T/ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE, CRIME OPERATIONS**

27 December 2018

Amanda Stewart  
Chief Executive  
Northern Ireland Policing Board  
Waterside Tower  
31 Clarendon Road  
Clarendon Dock  
Belfast  
BT1 3BG

**RE: USE OF SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT**

Dear Amanda,

I write with reference to the PSNI's ongoing use of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA) and to update you regarding the present position.

As previously agreed, to enable the Performance Committee of the Policing Board to monitor effectively PSNI's use of SUAs, the Committee should, every 6 months, be provided with a report on the nature and extent of Small Unmanned Aircraft use.

Please see below:

**Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA):**

SUA	Deployments	Hours/Mins
Apr 18	2	01:10
May 18	12	12:05
Jun 18	10	17:45
Jul 18	0	00:00
Aug 18	6	11:00
Sep 18	8	12:30
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>54:30</b>

These are the overt deployments spanning the reporting period. Deployments are balanced in conjunction with other aircraft and are also used as resilience when competitive tasks determine operational commitments for other aircraft.

All deployments are compliant with European Convention on Human Rights as they are used in pursuit of a legitimate aim and necessary to meet an identified pressing need (lawful, necessary and proportionate). Seven members of staff are trained to operate the Small Unmanned Aircraft, training provided as part of the overall purchase.

I trust this meets your requirements and should you have any queries please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Barbara Gray.

**BARBARA GRAY**  
Assistant Chief Constable