

UK's first 24-hour police drone unit has lift off

Footage from the force of the cutting edge drone in flight.



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By - Sophie Garrod - Police Oracle

Devon & Cornwall and Dorset Police's 24-hour drone unit, the first in the UK, has finally taken off.



The latest in drone technology has been trialed since November 2015 and now the operational unit has been created.

Chief Superintendent Jim Nye said: "This is an historic step for the Alliance [of the two forces] and policing in the UK; Drone capability is a cutting edge way to support operational policing across Devon, Cornwall and Dorset.

"This technology offers a highly cost effective approach in supporting our officers on the ground in operational policing.

"Drones will aid officers as part of missing person searches; crime scene photography; responding to major road traffic collisions; coastal and woodland searches and to combat wildlife crime.

"Drones can even help police track and monitor suspects during a firearm or terrorist incident, as it will allow officers to gain vital information, quickly, safely, and allow us to respond effectively at the scene.

"Being the first police forces in the country to have a stand-alone, fully operational drone unit is a great source of pride for the Alliance, and proves that we continue to work hard to find innovative ways to adapt to the ever-changing policing landscape."

Drone Team Manager, Andy Hamilton, added: "It is fantastic to see both forces working together to lead the way in utilising new, cutting-edge technology. Having previously been a police officer for 30 years, I have seen how technology has changed and can help us become more efficient in what we are trying to achieve.

"An example of this is historically, any aerial photos or videos have been captured by The National Police Air Service (NPAS) helicopter; this is not always the best use of resources. Instead of always sending a helicopter on an hour's flight to take a few photos of a crime scene, we can now use a drone to carry out the same task.

"Whilst drones will enhance our roads policing function, I also see this technology being able to complement NPAS by allowing helicopters to be available for more serious incidents across the South West."

The Drone Unit is currently using a DJI Inspire drone equipped with a zoom camera and a thermal imaging to allow for operational use 24 hours a day.



Thermal imaging in action

The camera is HD/4K quality and can capture both video and still images. We have also purchased a smaller DJI Mavic to test its portability as it is smaller and lighter in weight.

Chief Supt Nye said: "At present we have five officers trained across both forces. Over the next twelve months we are aiming to have a further 40 officers having completed their Civil Aviation (CAA) training, allow them to be fully accredited and enable them to operate the drone.

"We will also be adding to the number of drones we have as the number of trained officer's increases."