

## UK Police Begin First Trial of Unmanned Helicopter for Aerial Support

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The UK's National Police Air Service (NPAS) has launched its first testing of an unmanned helicopter drone, marking a significant step toward modernising aerial policing. The trial began this summer over the Severn Estuary, where the drone operates in controlled airspace to assess whether it can effectively support frontline policing alongside traditional crewed aircraft.

The aircraft selected for the trial is the CAMCOPTER S-100, developed by Austrian manufacturer Schiebel. It is already in use by over 40 organisations globally, including the UK Royal Navy. The drone can operate beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS), and the trial is being carried out in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), air traffic control provider NATS, and the Home Office.

The testing corridor, situated over water to avoid populated areas, allows flights between 900 and 1,200 feet. The operation includes advanced 'detect and avoid' systems, which are vital for safely integrating uncrewed aircraft into busy airspace. NPAS has confirmed that the testing is fully authorised under existing aviation regulations and has been designed to ensure minimal disruption to the public or other air users.

David Walters, NPAS Head of Futures and Innovation, explained that the goal is to determine whether uncrewed aircraft can deliver the same or better outcomes than their crewed counterparts. He said the team aims to explore whether this capability adds value to the existing fleet while improving sustainability and operational flexibility.

The drone is being assessed for its potential to enhance the efficiency of police air operations, particularly in situations where traditional aircraft may not be the most practical or cost-effective option. Should the tests prove successful, the CAMCOPTER S-100 could be integrated into a blended NPAS fleet, which would include helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and uncrewed aerial systems.

Neil Hunter, Head of Global Sales at Schiebel, noted that the drone's proven track record and adaptability make it suitable for UK policing needs. The aircraft's ability to operate autonomously for extended

periods is seen as a major advantage, especially for search and surveillance operations.

According to the CAA's Director of Future Airspace, Sophie O'Sullivan, the initiative represents a major advance in the safe development of BVLOS drone use in UK emergency services. Results from the ongoing tests will inform future strategies for drone integration in police operations across England and Wales.