

Shared police helicopter responds to 100 incidents in month

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By Paula Roberts

DORSET'S new shared police helicopter has been called to deal with 101 incidents in the county since the switchover last month.

The force signed up to the National Police Air Service to replace its existing helicopter and achieve an annual saving of more than £500,000 a year.

Dorset's helicopter service has merged with other police forces in the South West, including Devon and Cornwall, Avon and Somerset and Gloucestershire.

Wiltshire and South Wales will join the scheme later.

Helicopters are currently based at Winfrith, Exeter Airport and Filton in Bristol.

The Dorset base will move from **Dorset Police** HQ to **Bournemouth Airport** in January or February next year.

A spokesman for NPAS said since it took over the running of the helicopter service on July 3, the aircraft has been called to 101 incidents by Dorset Police.

The helicopters are sent out to incidents by the national control centre and will be deployed to surrounding counties as well as Dorset.

Flying time in Dorset has increased from the previous 19 hours per day operated by the force's helicopter to 24-hour coverage.

Chief Superintendent Martin Hiles said: "Effective air support is critical to Dorset Police and often provides the best tactical option to address major incidents, ranging from locating vulnerable missing people through to assisting in tracking pursuits and arresting criminals."

He said the incident figures highlighted the "vital role the facility plays within the force".

Chief Supt Hiles added: "Dorset looks set to benefit from the services of two helicopters in the future, one covering the west of the force area and the other covering the east."

Dorset's Police and Crime Commissioner Martyn Underhill, who helped negotiate the agreement, said: "I welcome the National Police Air Service to Dorset. This is a great example of police working together to improve services for the public while saving money. I am confident that NPAS will deliver better public protection at lower cost."

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