

**THE LONDON HELIPORT CONSULTATIVE GROUP**

Minutes of the meeting of The London Heliport Consultative Group held at Wandsworth Town Hall (Room 123), on Monday, 17th November 2008 at 7 p.m.

**PRESENT**

**Chairman**

Mr. Roger Bird

**Residents' representatives**

Mr. Kenneth Fergusson (deputising for Mr. Alan Fairleigh)  
Mr. Jonathan Harris

**Local Authority representatives**

Councillor Belton  
Councillor Hallmark  
Councillor Law

**Users' representatives**

Captain Ian Rose  
Captain Paul Watts  
Mr Peter Norton (deputising for Capt Robin Renton)

**Observers, advisers and officers**

Capt. Christopher Forrest (Operations Director, PremiAir Aviation Services Limited)  
Mr. Simon Hutchins (The London Heliport)  
Mr. Steve Mayner (Wandsworth Borough Council)  
Mr. Colin Stanbury (Wandsworth Borough Council)  
Mr. Francis de Lima (Wandsworth Borough Council)  
Mr. Max Dixon (Greater London Authority)

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Mr. Alan Fairleigh, Ms. Eryl Wrage, Councillor Condon-Simmonds, Capt. Renton and Capt. Ian Field.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

At the start of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Mr. Peter Norton, Chief Executive of the British Helicopter Advisory Board, who was deputising for Capt. Robin Renton, to the meeting.

The Consultative Group then attended to the matters of business set out in the agenda for the meeting.

Minutes (16.06.08). On item 1 (Paper A), the minutes of the last meeting of the Consultative Group held on 16th June 2008 were approved and were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Police helicopter operations in London. On item 2, the Chairman invited Capt. Watts to make his presentation to the Consultative Group.

Capt. Watts circulated a paper providing graphic information on helicopter activities undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service Air Support Unit (MPSASU). This paper is attached to these minutes as Annexe 1.

Capt. Watts explained that the graphs provide information into the Unit's range of activities and roles and the percentage of the time devoted to each of these sets of activities. The graphs also provide the 'Monthly flying hours total and hours flown per borough' – for each of the local boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Wandsworth, and Lambeth, as well as the 'Total hours flown', for the period April 2007 to October 2008 inclusive.

In reply to a question by Sir Peter Jennings, Capt. Watts confirmed that MPSASU was an integral part of the Metropolitan Police, not a contracted service. He informed the Consultative Group that the Unit, which has existed for some 27 years, is based at Epping Forest and has a fleet of three EC145 helicopters, one of which is on call for 24 hours of the day and a second for between 8 and 16 hours of the day. The third machine will normally be undergoing routine maintenance. The Unit covers the entire Metropolitan Police area, operates on 365 days of the year, and has a budget sufficient to fly 3,300 hours per year. Capt. Watts commented that the budget and the helicopter were a limited resource and, accordingly, were not used "willy-nilly". He advised that the number of flying hours had remained constant for the last ten years and that there were no plans to increase the number of flying hours.

Capt. Watts explained that all instructions to fly are received from the control room. Any Metropolitan Police officer can make a request to the Unit which vets every request received. A large number of requests for roof-top searches are received, which are scrutinised carefully for suitability and a large number of these are declined. Helicopter surveillance covers high profile events like the State Opening of Parliament and the Trooping the Colour ceremony. At other times, Police helicopters act to provide short-term deterrence over a week or two. There is very little helicopter activity by way of pursuit and, whilst some training is conducted in the air, this is not done over central London. He added that only 2% of the total flying time is carried out over the four local boroughs mentioned in the bar graphs; central London and some other central London boroughs receive more.

The helicopters carry cameras that are sharp and can take photographs from a great height. Capt. Watts explained that when Heathrow control is open, the helicopters can achieved even greater heights.

Capt. Watts commented that the Unit were very aware about helicopter noise nuisance. He advised that complaints about noise by the Unit's helicopters could be lodged

through the Police. In response to a question by Councillor Hallmark about whether there are any time restrictions for any mission, Capt. Watts commented that it was difficult to assess the length of time a task would take as each task is different. Whilst most tasks may involve 15 to 20 minutes of helicopter activity, other, most serious occurrences, e.g. a siege or a major fire may require much more flying time. He advised that there were too many variables to allow for restrictions to be set.

Following Capt Watts' presentation, the Chairman invited comments and questions. In reply to a question by Councillor Belton, about whether the 3,300 hours' budget was a political or financial limit, Capt. Watts stated that it was both financial and logistical. He explained that, with the need for more engineers, the Unit struggled to achieve its 3,300 hours limit and, last year, flew for some 80 hours less than that limit. In reply to a question by Mr Fergusson, Capt. Watts explained that each helicopter had a crew of three – the Mission Commander, the pilot and the camera operator.

Mr Harris described the Unit's activities as representing high visibility policing and asked whether their activities were publicised as, if more people were aware of the Unit's activities, they might be more amenable to accept them, despite the noise involved. Capt. Watts said that the Unit did not publicise its own activities; publicity often derived from borough council initiatives e.g. Safer Streets, etc. He added that people generally welcomed the presence of the Police helicopters, whether in the air or on the ground.

In reply to a question by the Chairman, Capt. Watts said that Police helicopters do not use the Heliport much, except for refuelling when only one helicopter is available and is involved in an operation in central London. He added that the Unit has the option of using the Heliport out of hours but has never utilised this option.

In reply to a question by Mr Fergusson, Capt. Watts explained that, prior to acquiring the EC145 helicopters, the Unit flew EC55 aircraft. He added that the Unit's helicopters had a dark blue and yellow livery on the upper part of the craft. The Unit does use other helicopters for training.

The Chairman then drew the Consultative Group's attention to Ms Wrage's report which was tabled at the meeting. That report, which primarily provides examples of movements of helicopters accessing the Heliport, includes a comment by Councillor Condon-Simmonds, which, inter alia, states as follows: "... the flights are the tip of the iceberg. The ones I see are all the Police." The Chairman asked that Councillor Condon-Simmonds be sent a copy of the report circulated by Capt. Watts.

The Chairman then thanked Councillor Watts for his presentation.

Helicopter movements in London. On item 3, in response to Councillor Condon-Simmonds report, Capt. Forrest commented that the reference to "the amount of helicopter traffic ..... seems to have increased dramatically" was not specific to the Heliport but could apply to anywhere in central London. In reply to a question by the Chairman about helicopters being held in queues on busy days, Capt. Forrest advised the Consultative Group that, on occasion, it may be necessary to hold up helicopters accessing the Heliport over Chelsea Bridge or Caesar's Camp, Wimbledon Common, if it is not safe for them to approach the Heliport or if there is an emergency mission. However, there were not many such occurrences this year.

Capt. Watts informed the Consultative Group that, in respect of the parade following the Olympics, there were Police as well as press helicopters in the air over central London. In reply to questions by Councillor Law, who commented that there was a noticeable increase in helicopter activity during Palace garden parties, Capt. Watts confirmed that the Police do not contract in more helicopters and neither does it have much involvement in the garden parties other than to check the roads in advance.

The Chairman commented that, whenever there were issues about helicopters hovering over particular areas, it was best to lodge a complaint in order to obtain an explanation.

Helicopter noise data 2007. On item 4 (Paper B), Mr Stanbury introduced the report - Environmental Noise Monitoring Summary Report 2007 for the London Heliport.

Mr Stanbury explained that two sound energy recording stations had been installed at the Heliport (adjacent to the control tower) in January 2007. Environmental sound energy data is now being collected continuously, using automatic sound data logging equipment. These monitoring stations are fully maintained and paid for by the Heliport.

The purpose of the monitoring is to provide long-term objective data to enable trends in overall noise to be tracked. For example, on the basis of 2007 data, Graph 1 in the report indicated a trend of decreasing day and night time levels. Graph 1 provides information on a monthly average basis. Four noise metrics are monitored: LAeqT (Day and Night), LAeq T (Day), LAeq T (Night) and LA90.

Mr Stanbury suggested that the annual report format is currently not at a sufficiently high resolution to enable the noise events of individual helicopter flights to be identified and charted separately. At present, it is also not possible to use the data to make any robust predictions about noise levels at sensitive residential receptor locations around the Heliport.

Following discussion, during which Mr Stanbury answered members' questions, the Consultative Group agreed that Mr Stanbury should confer with the Heliport's acoustic consultant in order to ascertain if the data capture is at sufficient resolution to enable actual flight arrival and departure noise levels to be presented in future reports. Mr Stanbury also acceded to a request for him to investigate whether, in the longer term, it might be possible to use the noise monitoring data to produce noise contours around the Heliport.

*(Subsequent to the meeting. Mr Stanbury has provided the following elaboration on the information he provided at the meeting:*

#### **EXPLANATION OF ACOUSTIC TERMS**

*Noise is measured in decibels (dB). In understanding the report it is useful to consider decibel values of some everyday noise at the extreme ends of the range encountered. At the low end, 35 to 40 dB (A) is the normal noise level in a quiet living room, 35 dB (A) is the noise level given as a target for suburban bedrooms by the Wilson Report, a Government report on noise published in 1963. At the high end is the noise level experienced at the pavement edge of a busy main road, a level of 75 to 80 dB (A).*

*The sensitivity of the human ear varies with pitch or frequency. The designation 'A' used in the report simply means that the noise levels are being measured using a meter which is able electronically to respond very closely to the performance of the human ear. For some types of noise measurement which contains a high proportion of low frequency tones, a 'C' weighting may be used in order to replicate the extra annoyance that low frequency noise can cause.*

*Decibels are measured using a logarithmic scale, and, therefore, two numerically equal values cannot be added together arithmetically. Two equal noise levels occurring together form a new level which is 3 dB (A) higher than either alone. Thus two identical helicopters each producing 65 dB (A) at the measuring point will produce, not 130 dB (A), but 68 dB (A), if both engines are running together at the same distance from the microphone.*

*If one source of noise is 10 dB (A) below an adjacent louder source, then the combined effect will be virtually no different to the louder one alone.*

*Experiments have shown that most people will indicate that a noise has become twice as loud, when on a measuring meter it has risen by about 10 dB (A).*

*It is generally accepted that a difference in 3 dB (doubling in energy terms) is the smallest incremental step in a steady state noise source that can be distinguished by the average human ear.*

***L<sub>A90</sub>**. This is the noise level exceeded for 90% of a time interval T. L<sub>A90</sub> and it is termed background noise level. It is effectively a measure of the minimum noise level which is experienced in the absence of specific noisy events such as helicopter flights or Heathrow fixed wing arrivals.*

***L<sub>Aeq T</sub>** is the equivalent continuous noise level over a time T, which can be described as the 'energy – average' noise level. The A weighted Leq contains all the noise energy received over a particular time period*

*'T' in the context of this report means, Day + Night (24 hours), Day (18 hours - 07:00 hours to 23:00 hours), Night (23:00 hours to 07:00 hours). Thus L<sub>Aeq T(Night)</sub> is the sum of all the noise energy received over an 8 hour period divided by the number of seconds in 8 hours (28,800).*

***L<sub>A peak</sub>** is found at Graph 2 of the report. It represents the highest instantaneous noise level recorded by the measuring meter during a single event e.g. arriving helicopter. Peak noise measurements cannot be directly compared with Leq.)*

Monitoring of helicopter movements. On item 5 (Paper C), in introducing the report, Mr Mayner explained that this was an attempt to formalise an approach to dealing with reports about helicopter movements in connection with the Heliport.

He explained that it would be possible to use the Council's cameras for a limited period of time and that it might be possible to employ other cameras as well. He hoped to be in a position to offer more information to the Consultative Group, at the next meeting.

The Chairman welcomed the proposal in the report for ‘audits’ by members of the Consultative Group.

In answer to questions by Councillor Hallmark regarding the proposed ‘unplanned’ visits to the Heliport, Mr Mayner explained that these visits would be unscheduled but, as a matter of courtesy to the operators of the Heliport, it was proposed that 48 hours notice of a visit should normally be given. Capt. Forrest commented that, ordinarily, there would be no problem if a member turned up at the Heliport unannounced. However, it would matter if, for operational reasons, it was not convenient to host a visit.

Mr Harris argued that what was important was to have a system of monitoring helicopter movements when the Heliport was not aware that its activities were being monitored. Accordingly, he suggested that monitoring ought to be conducted off-site because, he suggested, people behave differently if they know they are being monitored. Mr Stanbury replied that was precisely what the officers were seeking to establish in their discussions with the Council’s Community Safety Section.

At the end of the discussion, the Consultative Group agreed to support the arrangements recommended in the report for a programme of on-site monitoring of helicopter movements at the Heliport.

Information on helicopter movements. On item 6 (Paper D), in introducing the report, Capt. Forrest commented that the deteriorating economic conditions in the country would undoubtedly affect the Heliport as well.

Noise complaints. On item 7 (Paper E), the Chairman commented that, especially in view of the nine items which involved instances of helicopters coming near buildings or of ‘cutting the corner’, the monitoring proposed in Paper C would be of help.

Mr Fergusson commented that he was particularly struck by two of the recorded complaints – those of complaint references 08/020 and 08/022. In the case of the first complaint, there was an example of a helicopter being held for a period of time. The second complaint demonstrated that a clear report by the complainant enabled identification of the helicopter in question and it was possible to remind the pilot involved and his company of the correct procedure. He commented generally that the list of complaints in Paper E and the descriptions of the Heliport’s responses to each, demonstrated that the system that has been instituted for monitoring complaints, was working effectively. Mr Fergusson also referred to the comments provided by Ms Wrage in the paper tabled at the meeting and wondered why she had not reported formally on the incidents she had observed.

Capt. Forrest agreed on the value of complaints of which, he explained, the Heliport “were not shy”. He appealed for as much detail as possible to be given by complainants as this facilitated easy identification of the aircraft involved. In reply to Mr Fergusson’s comments regarding the complaint set out by Ms Wrage in her paper, Capt. Forrest explained that this was reflected in the complaint listed under Complaint reference 08/017, which was followed up by the Heliport and resulted in the pilot/company being reprimanded.

Capt. Forrest then informed the Consultative Group about an incident a couple of weeks ago when an RAF Chinook helicopter that entered the Heliport in the correct way, had departed in an incorrect way. The Heliport had made a formal complaint to the pilot’s

squadron and had received a reply, which Capt. Forrest read out. He advised the Consultative Group that it had been explained to the RAF that a proper debriefing of departure procedure would be required before the pilot involved was allowed back at the Heliport.

Residents' items. On item 8, the Consultative Group then considered the matters placed on the agenda by the residents' representatives.

As regards item (a) (Enhancement of complaints procedure) – the Chairman commented that, while improved monitoring was already being proposed, the “adoption of best practices used at other airports and heliports” might present some difficulty given that, as experience had demonstrated, other airports and heliports may not have advanced as far as the London Heliport had in establishing complaints procedures and monitoring of activities. He enquired whether such information was readily available in respect of other airports and heliports.

Mr Mayner explained that Shoreham Airport had been used as a model in establishing the Consultative Group and that the experience of Paris had also been examined. He said that he would seek to follow up on the suggested improvement. Capt. Forrest informed the Consultative Group that the French equivalent of the Civil Aviation Authority had sent representatives over to Britain to fact find here and Capt. Rose added that, in Germany, there was much less corporate use of helicopters than in Britain. Mr Hutchins reminded the Consultative Group that, as reported at the last meeting, in March 2008, Mr de Lima and he had hosted visitors from Rotterdam who had visited London specifically to learn, among other matters, how the Heliport had dealt with complaints and the kind of procedures that had been instituted here.

Mr Harris informed the meeting that he was a member of an association of residents associations between Putney and Lambeth Bridge and that, following the last meeting of the Consultative Group, he had circulated emails intended to drum up interest in issues relating to the Heliport. He advised the Consultative Group that most people had responded negatively, from which he had concluded that it was imperative to engage with the general public until the monitoring of the Heliport's activities and the complaints procedure was improved. He said that he wanted to feel confident that people would seek to register a complaint if they had something to complain about.

In response, the Chairman commented that this was a consultative group – the “ultimate talking shop” – whose aim was to bring local people together with a view to addressing issues relating to the activities of the Heliport. He observed that it would be a futile endeavour if people were reluctant to report issues. He noted, however, that the Consultative Group was beginning to see more complaints being reported – and, importantly, responded to. He hoped that this represented the start of the process.

Mr Harris commented that the residents wanted to see the process the Chairman had referred to, grow. Mr Fergusson agreed with the need to better inform people throughout the Borough about the work of the Consultative Group. He suggested that this process was assisted by the last article on the subject in *BrightSide* and suggested that another article – on the Heliport's complaints procedure – might be helpful.

The Chairman said that people who were sceptical about the value of the Consultative Group ought to be encouraged to engage with the process that had been established, to attend meetings of the Consultative Group and to meet with its members.

Mr. Hutchins informed the Consultative Group that he had met with residents at Oyster Walk that afternoon who had expressed their desire to establish a residents' group and were keen to make contact with the residents' representatives on the Consultative Group. Mr Harris suggested that they could be advised to do so via the Wandsworth website.

Mr Mayner undertook to arrange for an article on the Heliport's complaints procedure to be placed in *BrightSide*. He emphasised, however, that it was necessary to have similar articles appear in the journals produced by Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham Councils as well.

Mr Hutchins asked that, in any articles or publicity material issued, it should be emphasised that all complaints received by the Heliport are recorded, addressed and responded to – and reported on to the Consultative Group at each meeting.

Mr Fergusson reported that he had written an article for the Battersea Society – which he had copied to Mr de Lima – in which he had described the channel for lodging complaints about helicopter nuisance.

In response to Councillor Belton's comments that only residents in the private sector housing developments had been invited to be represented on the Consultative Group, the Chairman commented that, shortly, it might be sensible to review the consultative arrangements.

As regards item (b) (Helicopter types and their certified noise levels), the Chairman noted that this aspect had been covered in an earlier discussion.



As regards item (c) (Central point of contact for complaints about helicopter noise within the UK), Mr Mayner observed that action arising from the research commissioned by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) would hopefully lead to the establishment of greater co-ordination between agencies on the matter of helicopter noise nuisance. He suggested that possibly the GLA could be instrumental in undertaking such co-ordination.

Mr Dixon advised the Consultative Group that the London Assembly's Environment Committee would be addressing the recommendations in DEFRA's report and would pursue the Department for Transport for a response.

Any other business. On item 9, at the end of the business set out in the agenda, the Chairman enquired whether members of the Consultative Group wished to raise any other matters. No other items of business were raised.

Date of next meeting. On item 10, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Consultative Group should be held on Monday, 27th April 2009 at 7.00 p.m.

The meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.

	 <b>METROPOLITAN POLICE</b> Working together for a safer London
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<b>Author</b>	Capt P Watts
<b>Creating Branch / Code and Operational Command Unit/ Directorate</b>	CO11(9) OCU Air Support Unit
<b>Date created</b>	

1. This presentation was produced at the request of the London Heliport Consultative Group. The aim is to give the group members information as to the type of activities undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service Air Support Unit (MPSASU) and the number of hours flown in the local area.
2. The MPSASU is based in Epping Forest to the North of London and has a fleet of three EC145 helicopters; one machine is on call 24 hours per day and a second for between 8 and 16 hours. The third machine will normally be undergoing routine maintenance. The unit covers the entire Metropolitan Police area and has a budget sufficient to fly 3300 hours per year. The number of flying hours has remained constant for the last ten years and there are no plans for them to increase.
3. The aircraft is called upon to perform a wide variety of roles and the attached chart shows how this is broken down. The attached graphs show the number of hours flown in support of local boroughs.

**Report Author:**

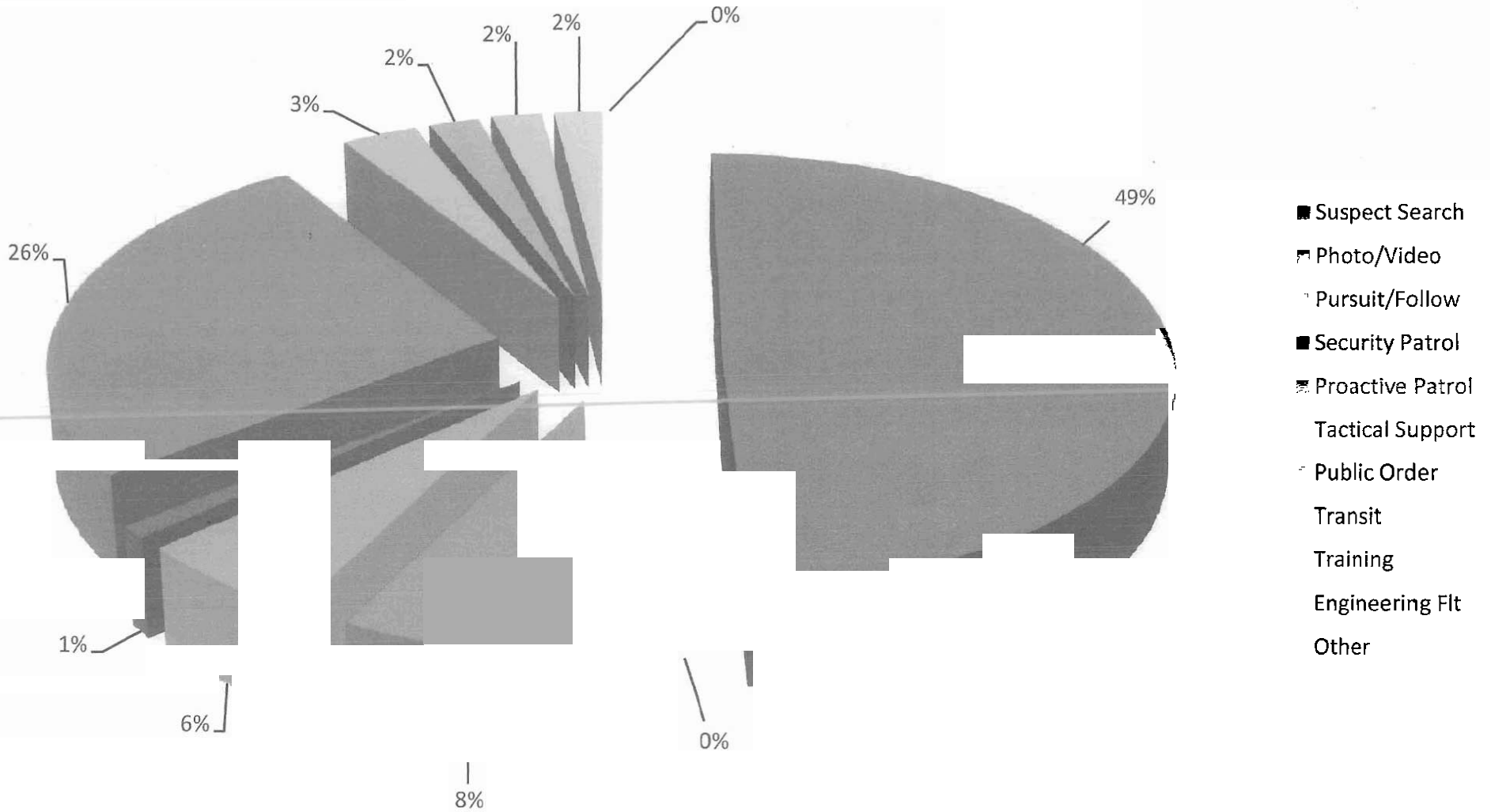
Signature

P Watts

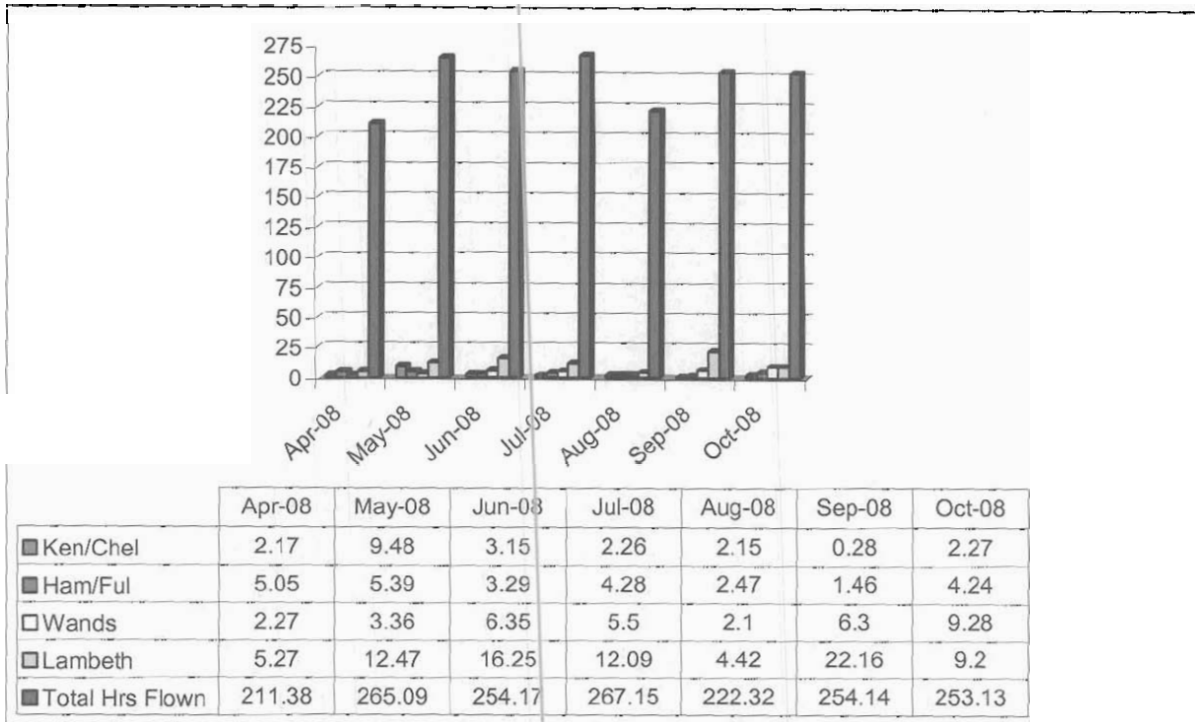
Date: - 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008

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## All Tasking Overview Apr 07 - Mar 08



Not Protectively Marked



Monthly flying hours total and hours flown per borough

