

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

27 May 2025

Airport Policing

Presented by: Superintendent Paul Minor

Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this report is to present an overview on West Midlands Police (WMP) activity and performance relating to the policing of Birmingham Airport.

1. Police and Crime Plan

There is no direct reference to Birmingham Airport in the current PCC Police and Crime Plan however there are core themes which run through every aspect of the considerable work done by the men and women of the Birmingham Airport Policing Unit (APU).

The purpose of the report is to analyse and evaluate the structure, effectiveness and challenges of policing at Birmingham Airport (BHX) and highlight how the team ensures the safety and security of passengers, staff and help protect the key national infrastructure which surrounds this major UK transport hub.

This report will also provide an overview of current and future security threats and discuss the potential risks posed by home grown and international terrorism, the safeguarding of vulnerable passengers, servitude and modern-day slavery, the importation of illegal substances and other criminal activity.

The Airport Policing Unit relies on a significant inter-agency co-operation from partners such as the United Kingdom Border Force (UKBF) as well as a range of governmental departments and bodies. Policing in the commercial environment of a busy international airport calls for a high degree of sensitivity as well highly developed inter-personal skills.

Uniformed officers are very much in the public eye and find themselves acting as ambassadors for the West Midlands but also representatives of the United Kingdom to those newly arrived in the country. Operational policing is provided on a 24/7 basis with officers working a shift pattern that enables periods of high demand to be adequately covered - at 3.00am the terminals can be as busy as a High Street on a Saturday afternoon.

The APU manages the safety and security of some 13 million passengers per year. Birmingham Airport has a diverse array of unique local by-laws which the APU can utilise to assist in this task. Above that of a normal Response Policing capability, the APU conducts independent and joint operations with key partners, predominantly using the Neighbourhood Team (NHT) that operates from the Airport.

The NHT comprises a dedicated group of officers which collaborates closely with UK Border Force and various other partner agencies to tackle insider threats, organised crime, and modern-day slavery within the unusual operating environment of an international airport. The team is instrumental in safeguarding the public, ensuring airport security, and disrupting serious organised crime.

To enable a safe and secure environment for our Airport Community, the Policing Units operate under 6 main pillars:



2. Achievements and Challenges

The main achievements made by the APU over the past 12 months have been driven through responding to the four critical challenges as identified below;

The threat from environment related protest

The continued increase in passenger numbers and the associated crowded spaces

The ongoing development and improvement of the Airport terminal and related infrastructure

The policing of organised crime gangs who use Birmingham Airport as a gateway to move vulnerable people and illegal substances into the UK

Environment Related protest

During Summer 2024, the UK aviation industry witnessed a significant increase in the threat of 'direct action' and civil disobedience from Just Stop Oil (JSO) following their announcement that they were to target commercial aviation as part of a "Summer of Disruption".

Collaboration between the APU and the Airport resulted in JSO failing to disrupt flights at Birmingham or mount any environmental protests during this period. The Airport has since secured a five-year High Court Injunction to mitigate against the risk of future environmental protests.

Increase in passenger numbers and the associated crowded space status

Improved systems are now in place to enhance the passenger journey experience and subsequent demands placed on the APU.

However, demand continues to rise at Birmingham Airport;

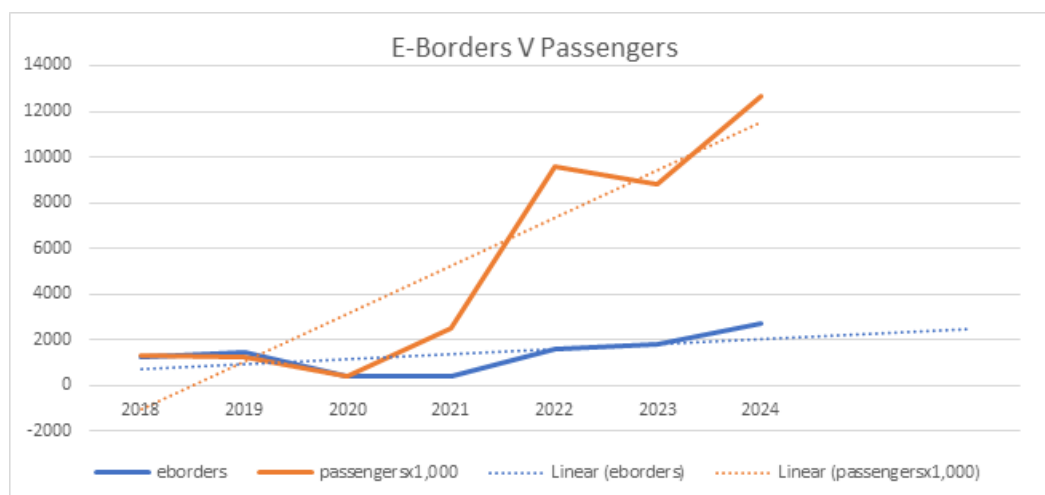
Calls for service 2023/2024 – 5873 resulting in 440 arrests

Calls for service 2024/2025 – 6684 resulting in 545 arrests

Well-developed processes ensure the APU supplies resources to effectively manage all e-borders activations - a process to arrest and detain individuals placed on PNC as wanted from within the UK and beyond.

A significant increase in requests has been accommodated through close liaison with originating forces and a requirement that officers from that force attend the airport.

The increase in activations is clearly illustrated in the below chart with the most dramatic rise in occurring post-Covid.



The ongoing development and improvement of the Airport terminal and related infrastructure

The APU is heavily engaged with regional and national projects related to the improvements to the rail and road network infrastructure in and around the airport site.

The new road layout and exit from the M42 to the terminal via the new A4545 has proven challenging and it has been acknowledged that new road users will be attracted to the area especially, with the addition of a new fast food restaurant accessible to both airport customers and the wider community.

In addition, HS2 is the largest development on the horizon and the Airport Policing Commander has been involved in numerous working groups from an early stage, along with other law enforcement agencies, to ensure that potential crime and safety risks are mitigated, ensuring Safe by Design principles are followed throughout construction and final build.

Occurring at the same time there was a significant improvement to the internal security regime for passengers transiting through the Airport with the introduction of a new lift system and an improved search area to improve passengers and staff movement around the terminal facility.

Due in large part to this system change, the Summer of 2024 saw issues relating to queuing at Birmingham Airport which were reported extensively both locally and nationally. Although not a core policing role, APU staff were deployed on a regular basis to maintain a safe environment for passengers and staff.

Alongside an increase in passenger numbers, the attendant number of airport employees has risen and now reaches approximately 10,000 peaking during Summer periods. Increased staffing brings the added challenge of 'insider threats' with organised and opportunist criminality exploiting the potential vulnerabilities present at the airport.

The policing of organised crime gangs who use Birmingham Airport as a gateway to move vulnerable people and illegal substances into the UK

The APU NHT works closely with UK Border Force to mitigate insider threats. Joint Project Servator deployments are conducted to disrupt criminal activity combining the resources, intelligence and knowledge of multiple agencies. This collaborative taskforce exercises customs powers to conduct searches of individuals, premises, and public/private aircraft seizing significant quantities of illegal drugs.

In addition to UK Border Force, the team collaborates with UK Regional Immigration Teams, the National Immigration Team, and the Criminal Financial Investigation Immigration Team. Information sharing, where legally permissible, enhances the team's ability to identify potential threats and respond effectively.

Tackling Serious Organised Crime - Operation Toscana

The NHT collaborates with the Regional Organised Crime Unit to address complex and high-level organised crime. Notable activity includes proactive operations targeting illicit cash smuggling out of the UK in partnership with UK Border Force.

A key initiative, Operation Toscana addresses organised immigration crime and modern-day slavery through the Common Travel Area and domestic routes. This operation uses the collective skills, intelligence systems, and expertise of all partners to identify offences, apprehend offenders, and support victims.

Through this co-ordinated effort, the taskforce has made significant arrests and successfully disrupted multiple organised criminal groups. The impact of Operation Toscana has been recognised nationally and is considered to be an example best practice among other airport police units.

Joint working over the last 3 months with ROCU/Border Force/Immigration and other security agencies has resulted in:

Activity;

- 36 Deployments
- 207 Flights screened
- 115 Intelligence Logs
- 80 Arrests
- 2 of which received custodial sentences of 18 and 20 months

Seizures;

- 22kg Class A drugs - which has a street value of approximately £8.25million
- £65,000 of Cannabis
- £110,000 of illicit cash

Vulnerability Operations - Operation Limelight

The NHT works alongside the West Midlands Police Public Protection Team and UK Border Force SAMS (Servitude and Modern-Day Slavery) officers on Operation Limelight. This initiative focuses on educating potential victims, identifying those at risk, and implementing safeguarding measures. Through targeted interventions, the team aims to raise awareness of exploitation.

Operations targeting forced marriage, human trafficking and honour-based abuse have resulted in:

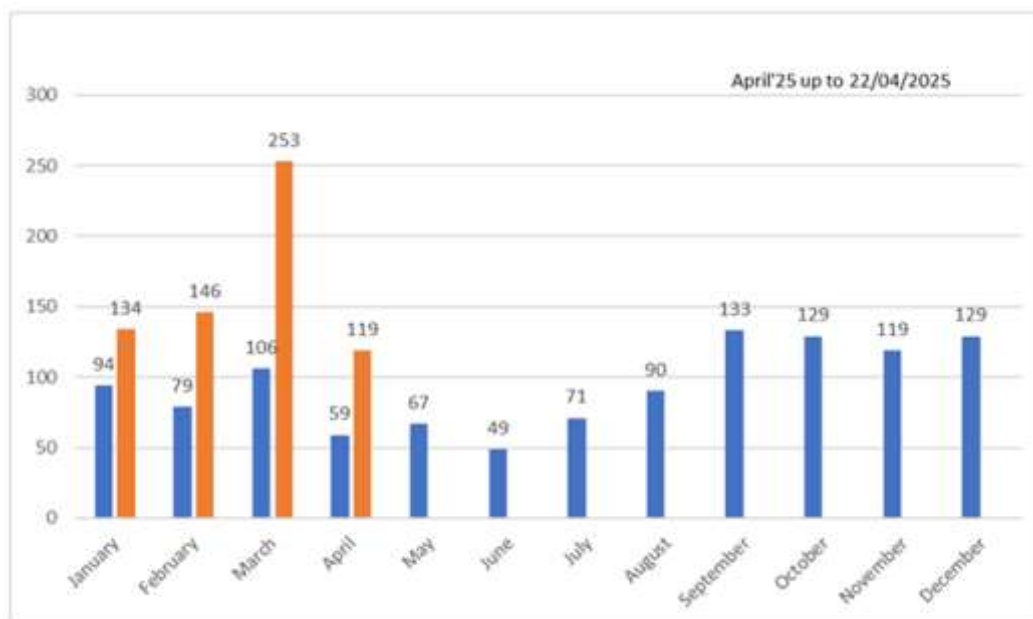
- 14 individuals identified being trafficked
- 1 Female who was victim of forced marriage but had also had her child kidnapped
- 3 referrals, one of which resulted in the arrest of a high-risk offender.

Protective Security and Stakeholder Engagement - Project Servator

Beyond enforcement, the APU carries out protective security patrols and engages with airport staff to improve relationships and awareness. The team participates in disruptive passenger forums and collaborates with stakeholders including NCP Parking, taxi licensing authorities, and Birmingham Airport Limited (BAL) security, thus ensuring a collaborative approach to airport safety.

Project Servator is a policing tactic that aims to disrupt a range of criminal activity - including terrorism - while providing a reassuring presence for public and staff at Birmingham Airport. The approach relies on unpredictable and highly visible police deployments, whilst at the same time building a network of vigilance comprising business and community partners and the general public.

Since January 2025 there has been a stepped increase in Project Servator APU deployments which have been credited as being some of the most professional and effective nationally.



Project Servator officers are specially-trained to identify individuals engaging in hostile reconnaissance - information gathering that may help them plan or prepare to commit a crime. Deployments take place every day at Birmingham Airport, and comprise a wide range of resources including police dogs, armed police officers, CCTV operators, security staff, ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) and Vehicle Check Points.

Plain clothes police officers are deployed in all areas of the Airport, operating undetected with the public and staff, while uniformed police officers engage with the public to provide visible reassurance and to raise awareness of the role the community can play in preventing crime. Project Servator officers from West Midlands Police work closely with other specialist teams at the airport to support deployments, including UK Border Force and Counter Terrorism Policing West Midlands.

Assisted Departure Flights - Lebanon

Due to the deteriorating security situation in Lebanon in September 2024 Birmingham Airport was requested to assist receiving four assisted departure flights direct from Beirut.

The operation was supported by the activation of the West Midlands Resilience Forum and effectively policed by the APU without any requirement for wider support from WMP. All of the British nationals repatriated, were processed and assisted with onward travel with no issues and no disruption to normal operations at the airport.

A Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) was activated and chaired by West Midlands Police and all relevant stakeholders supported in the operation.

The effectiveness of Birmingham Airport and the APU's operation can be illustrated by noting that is now the third occasion where Birmingham has been selected to host emergency departure flights, having previously managed flights from Afghanistan and Sudan.

Counter Terrorism Unit

Counter Terrorism Policing is critical to protecting national security from threats posed by terrorism at UK borders and ports. Borders officers manage the threat posed by individuals and groups seeking to travel across borders in furtherance of terrorism.

Officers primarily utilise powers under Schedule 7 Terrorism Act 2000. These powers enable officers at ports to stop and question 'examine' individuals entering or leaving the UK, to determine whether they are, or have been, involved in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism, without any grounds for suspicion. The powers of examination include - detention for up to 6 hours; search of the person; seizure of property including mobile devices; examination and copying of electronic data; fingerprinting and taking of DNA. Failing to cooperate with an examination is a criminal offence.

Although the selection of a person for examination is not conditional upon the examining officer having grounds to suspect that person of being engaged in terrorism, the decision to select a person for examination must not be arbitrary. It is not appropriate for race, ethnic background, religion and/or other "protected characteristics" (whether separately or together) to be used as criteria for selection except to the extent that they are used in association with considerations that relate to the threat from terrorism.

The powers contained in Schedule 7 may only be used by police officers who have been accredited by their Chief Officer as having met a national standard in the use of the powers and a specific code of practice exists to regulate the use of the power.

Within Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP), it is recognised that their ability to alleviate the threat posed by terrorist activity in the UK is dependent on an understanding of the long-term picture and taking the appropriate action. The National Control Strategy is the model through which CTP effectively seeks to mitigate this threat and its associated risk.

3. Actions undertaken

Included within section 2.

4. Future Work

Work is ongoing to mitigate the threat and risk to Birmingham Airport as an ever-increasing crowded space and part of key critical national infrastructure.

All the initiatives mentioned will continue to develop and grow with the ever-changing landscape of the airport and its surrounding services.

AI technology is clearly enhancing police activity at pace and the airport is an attractive environment to embrace and develop such a capability.

The interaction between the airport, railway, HS2, national exhibition centre and resorts world means that in a concentrated area there are multiple travel hubs, accommodation and event venues that can cater and host all.

There will be a continuous re-evaluation of the number of officers posted to the APU. As has been identified in this report, the airport is constantly expanding commercial operations leading to ever-increasing number of passengers and staff. As a consequence, WMP is engaged in regular discussions detailing demand management

and the existing capacity of the APU.

5. Financial Implications

All financial aspects are underpinned by a Police Service Agreement between BAL and WMP which is Commercial in Confidence and monitored on a daily basis by the Airport Policing Commander and BAL representatives overseen by monthly meetings.

6. Legal Implications

Airport Policing is organised under the Airport Security Planning Framework defined by the Policing & Crime Act 2009. This framework brings together stakeholders who contribute to airport security enabling them to work together effectively.

The Aviation Security Act 1982 designated that Birmingham Airport should be policed in the interests of the preservation of the peace and prevention of crime.

7. Equality Implications

All aspects of APU work at BHX are subject Equality Impact Assessments before being published. This ensures APU demonstrates transparency and achieves better outcomes for all.

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