



Department  
for Transport

# Gatwick Drones December 2018

CROSS-WHITEHALL LESSONS IDENTIFIED REPORT

Transport Security Operations Centre (TSOC)  
DFT | XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

INCIDENT	GATWICK DRONES DEC 2018
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### Approvals

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# Executive Summary

## Top Lines

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

## Background

On 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at approximately 21:00 there were multiple sightings of drones at Gatwick airport. Gatwick closed the runway, with operations returning to business as usual on 23<sup>rd</sup> December. Sussex Police and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) deployed additional resource and its counter unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities to help detect any additional drone sightings.

The closure of the runway caused major disruption to flights and affected approximately 120,000 passengers as flights were delayed, cancelled or diverted to other UK airports. XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

DfT activated its crisis management team, the Transport Security Operations Centre (TSOC) on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018, which ran through the holiday period until the beginning of January. [something about the OGDs involved]

[Something about Heathrow here]

Following the cross-Whitehall response, a lessons identified process was carried out, gathering feedback across DfT, XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24] in the Home Office, Gatwick Airport and Border Force from those involved in the response [make sure change this re. the ones that responded to the chaser emails]. All parties were provided with a survey to complete, tailored to their grade (if internal to DfT), or their status as either an OGD or industry. Seniors from DfT and XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24] were interviewed. The survey and interview questions are contained in Annex A.

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

# 1 Introduction

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

## 1.1 Background

Due to drone sightings in the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018, Gatwick airport closed the runway for the majority of 20<sup>th</sup> December. At this point, the severity of the incident was not apparent, as this was assumed to be a short-term closure. However, at both 03:00 and 09:00, Gatwick attempted to re-open the runway, but further sightings of the drone prevented this. Military capabilities were deployed on 21<sup>st</sup> December, and the last drone sighting occurred on 21<sup>st</sup> December. [focus on role of MoD and HO here; something about MACA requests]

Approximately 120,000 passengers were affected by the incident and offered welfare assistance by airlines and Gatwick Airport on booking alternative flights, accommodation and subsistence. Those passengers that were diverted to other UK airports were transported by coach to Gatwick Airport.

Gatwick was able to deal with the backlog of flights on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, and returned to business as usual on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, following the deployment of military capability. Gatwick is now urgently procuring additional commercial capabilities to support its operational response to drones.

Following the Gatwick drone incident, at 17:00 on 8<sup>th</sup> January, multiple sightings of a drone were reported at Heathrow Airport over the Terminal 5 northern runway and Terminal 3. Heathrow closed the northern runway until 18:30. The southern runway remained open, accepting arrivals while all departing flights were grounded. This caused minor operational delays but Heathrow caught up with its schedule by the evening. There were no further sightings of the drone. XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

Although drone sightings at airports are relatively common, this was the first instance in the UK of a drone causing mass disruption by shutting down an airport runway entirely for a sustained period. For context, flying a drone above 400ft (120m) and within 1km of an airport or airfield is illegal. It is a criminal offence to endanger the safety of an aircraft, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 5 years.

## **1.2 Department for Transport Response**

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

## **1.3 Lessons Identified Approach**

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

## **2 Lessons Identified**

### **2.1 Information Flows**

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S40]

### **2.2 Roles and Responsibilities**

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

### **3 Recommendations**

XXXX [REDACTED UNDER S24]

# **Annex A Survey and Interview Questions**

## **DfT Non-SCS Survey**

### Leadership

1. How did you find the coordination of the overall response?
2. Do you have any comments on the leadership of the response at Silver/Gold?

### Information flows

3. What was your experience of engaging with other teams in DfT during this incident?
4. What was your experience of engaging with OGDs, police and industry during this incident?
5. How did you find the quality, accuracy and timeliness of the information, you received from industry, police and OGDs?

### Wellbeing

6. Did you feel as though your wellbeing was considered during the response?
7. What was the impact of working out of hours and over the holiday period?

### Workload, Roles & Responsibilities

8. Did you feel as though the workload was equally balanced across ops and policy staff?
9. Did you have adequate resources to deal with the incident?
10. Did you feel that you were trained, able and prepared to deal with this incident?
11. What would've assisted you in your role during the response?

### Heathrow

12. Did you do anything differently in response to the Heathrow drone incident? If so, what and why?
13. What, if anything, would you do differently if a similar incident should arise in the future?

### General

14. Did you identify any specific lessons for yourself, your team or other involved parties?
15. Did you experience any obstacles in your role that affected the response?
16. Please provide any additional comments

## **DFT SCS (Interview)**

### Initial Response

1. When were you made aware of the incident?
2. Do you think the response would've differed had it initially occurred during working hours? If so, how so?

## Ongoing

3. Was there effective coordination inside DfT?
4. What was the coordination like between DfT and OGDs, industry and the police?
5. Were you provided with advice and support from staff?
  - a. Was it timely/accurate/useful?
6. How informed were you of events happening on the ground?
7. Did you have appropriate resources to respond to the incident?
8. Did all the right meetings happen, did you attend and were they at the right level?
9. What was the impact of working out of hours and over the holiday period during the response?

## Return to BAU

10. Do you have any views on the length of response?

## General

11. Did you feel that you were trained, able and prepared to deal with this incident?
12. Do you think all staff (inc. other SCS) were adequately trained and prepared to deal with this incident?
13. What would've assisted you in your role during the response?
14. Were you clear on the roles and responsibilities of you and your team?
15. Did you do anything differently in response to the Heathrow drone incident?  
If so, what and why?
16. What, if anything, would you do differently if a similar incident should arise in the future?
17. Anything else to add?

## **DFT Private Office (Survey)**

### Initial Response

1. When were you made aware of the incident?

### Ongoing

2. How informed were you of events happening on the ground?
3. Were you provided with advice and support from staff?
4. Did all the right cross-government meetings happen, did you attend and were they at the right level?
5. How did you find the coordination of the response?
6. Do you have any comments on the leadership of the response?
7. What was your experience of engaging with other teams in DfT during this incident?
8. What was your experience of engaging with OGDs, police and industry during this incident?

Wind down

9. Do you have any views on the length of response?

Heathrow

10. Did you do anything differently in response to the Heathrow drone incident?  
If so, what and why?
11. What, if anything, would you do differently if a similar incident should arise in the future?

General

12. Did you identify any specific lessons for yourself, your team or other involved parties?
13. Are you able to share anything about what Ministers thought about the response?
14. Is there anything that could be done differently to better support Ministers?
15. Please provide any additional comments

## **OGDs (Survey)**

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Were you clear about your department's role in the response? Why/ why not?
2. Were you clear about DfT's role in the response?
3. Do you have any comments on the leadership of the response?
4. What would've assisted you in your role during the response?
5. Do you think the response would've differed had it initially occurred during working hours? If so, how so?

Information Flows

6. When were you made aware of the incident?
7. What was the communication like between your department and DfT?

Leadership

8. In your opinion, how well was the overall response coordinated?

Heathrow

9. Did you do anything differently in response to the Heathrow drone incident?  
If so, what and why?

General

10. What, if anything, would you do differently if a similar incident should arise in the future?
11. How could DfT improve their response, should a similar incident occur?
12. How could OGDs improve their response, should a similar incident occur?

## **Other (Gatwick, CAA, Borders) (Survey)**

Information Flows/Communication

1. What was your experience of engaging with DfT during this incident?

2. What was your experience of engaging with OGDs during this incident?
3. What was the quality and timeliness of the information you received from DfT?

#### Roles & Responsibilities

4. Were you clear about HMG's role in the incident response?
5. Were you clear about your organisation's role in the incident response? If not, why not?

#### Heathrow

6. Did you do anything differently in response to the Heathrow drone incident? If so, what and why? [only for CAA and Borders]

#### Leadership

7. In your opinion, how well was the overall response coordinated?

#### General

8. How could DfT improve their response, should a similar incident occur?
9. What, if anything, would you do differently if a similar incident should arise in the future?