Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Minister for Public Services

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MB/LA/2765/15

Rt Hon. Theresa May MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

23 July 2015

Dear Theresa,

I am writing regarding the Dyfed-Powys Police Helicopter service which operates across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys and the cuts proposed by the National Police Air Service (NPAS).

The NPAS proposes closing the helicopter bases in Pembrey in Carmarthenshire and Rhuddlan in North Wales as part of a cost cutting exercise across England and Wales.

There are genuine concerns about the ability of the new, reduced service to provide the necessary support in Wales – particularly in the more rural areas of Dyfed-Powys. I am aware there has been a proposal that fixed-wing aircraft could take over some of the duties of the police helicopter, but there are concerns that the terrain in rural Wales is not suitable for this.

The current X99 service provides support which impacts on several areas of police work. For example, it significantly reduces the risks associated with the management of pursuits, allowing police cars to withdraw from pursuit situations where their presence increases the risk to the public. It also carries out searches for missing people which would take considerable amount of time for police and the emergency services. In the open countryside carrying out searches by air ensures a much larger area can be covered, supported by technical equipment such as thermal imaging. Furthermore, there are occasions where the movement of resources such as firearms officers, dogs and search officers to a scene can be significantly accelerated by the use of air support. This is particularly true in rural locations. It should not be forgotten that Dyfed-Powys is the largest police force in England and Wales geographically and there is concern that public safety would be undermined if the proposed cuts are implemented.

There has been cross party consensus here at the National Assembly to oppose the cut to this service and I urge you to intervene to ask the NPAS to reconsider their decision to close the Welsh bases.

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I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Wales and am writing in the same terms to the NPAS.

Yours sincerely,

Leighton Andrews AC / AM
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Minister for Public Services