The responsibility for drone activity at civilian airports lies with the airport operators. As such Defence does not have a contingency plan to respond to such incidents. Despite this, Defence was able to deploy capability within 6 hours at the request of the Police. I am very proud of the support the Armed Forces provided. This support has allowed airport operators the time and space to make some rapid improvements to their standing counter-UAV infrastructure, ensuring flight safety can be maintained and disruption minimised.

An important lesson from Gatwick and Heathrow, beyond the fact that airport operators must build their standing UAV counter-measures, is that a national counter-UAV response capability is required. The Home Office is taking this forward now as a matter of urgency. But there are no simple answers here. Defence officials have been involved in counter-UAV work for a number of years and will work closely with the Home Office as work on the national capability progresses. Defence is also exploring options to reduce the vulnerability of military airfields.

Counter-UAV is a regular topic of discussion with allies, as part of wider counter-improvised threat discussions. We are yet to raise this situation formally with NATO colleagues although as you can imagine our key allies have already reached out to the department to seek early understanding and lessons from the Gatwick and Heathrow experience. The UK is not alone in seeking to improve counter-UAV response.

THE RT HON GAVIN WILLIAMSON-CBE MP

The Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP
Chair of the House of Commons Defence Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA