



**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

ANNUAL REPORT

& THREAT
ASSESSMENT

2020/21

Organised Crime
in Northern Ireland

www.octf.gov.uk





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FEBRUARY 2022

FOREWORD BY JUSTICE MINISTER NAOMI LONG MLA

Following what has been another challenging year for us all, I am pleased to publish an update on the relentless work undertaken by our Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) partners to assess threat levels, disrupt organised crime groups and bring criminals to justice.

Working together, we have once again made significant progress at both a strategic and operational level over the 2020/21 period. In March 2021 I published the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy for 2021 - 2024, the overarching aim of which is to protect individuals, communities and businesses in Northern Ireland from organised crime. It commits the statutory organisations represented on the OCTF to delivering a wide range of strategic actions designed to help reduce the levels of organised crime and the harm it causes. This refreshed vision will guide and inform the collective efforts of partners to tackle organised criminality in all its forms.

An important element of the Strategy, and a key priority for me as Justice Minister, is full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017. I am particularly pleased to report that these additional provisions have now commenced in Northern Ireland bringing this jurisdiction into line with arrangements in place across the UK. Law enforcement agencies can now avail of a range of new asset recovery powers to disrupt the activity of organised crime groups and strip away the assets of the individuals connected to them. Where partners have successfully seized criminal assets, I want to ensure that funding is made available through the Asset Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) to support local initiatives across the communities most affected by organised crime.



Organised criminality takes many forms and in May 2021, I also published the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy which reinforces the commitment of my department and its partner organisations - statutory bodies and non-governmental groups alike - to identify and eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking. This remains a priority area as we seek to end the abuse and exploitation of our fellow human beings at the hands of callous organised criminals.

I want to acknowledge the work of all those involved in the OCTF, I know this is difficult and challenging work and I am impressed and encouraged by their dedication, commitment and persistence. Considerable tenacity and resilience is required to continually assess and address the threat, harm and vulnerabilities associated with organised crime.

Partner agencies, both individually and jointly, have been involved in a number of successful operations over this period, examples of these are set out in more detail in this report. From disrupting illegal drug supplies, through to seizing counterfeit goods and protecting victims of trafficking or modern slavery, it is clear that OCTF partners save both lives and livelihoods.

The value, impact and importance of this work cannot be overstated. It is also important to recognise that law enforcement agencies need support.

We can all play our part, no matter how small, in helping to rid society of these criminal parasites, who seek to control and destroy the very communities they claim to support and protect. We need to work with local people and communities to help influence attitudes and behaviours and address underlying vulnerabilities, so that organised criminals have less space within which to operate. As the last year has shown, situations can change quickly and without much warning. But no matter how the landscape changes - organised criminals will try to find a way to exploit it to their advantage and we therefore need to be agile and innovative in our response.

I commend the work of OCTF partners highlighted throughout this report. I encourage everyone to note the outcomes achieved and to think about ways in which we can help support the work of professional partners by reducing demand and reporting suspected criminality. Together we can deliver the shared outcome of safer communities where we respect the law and each other.



NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

**EVERYBODY'S HELP IS NEEDED
TO COMBAT ORGANISED CRIME...**

DON'T SUPPORT IT – REPORT IT!

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

PSNI

101

ACTION FRAUD

0300 123 2040

HMRC HOTLINE

0800 788 887

CONSUMERLINE

0300 123 6262

ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

0800 807060

MODERN SLAVERY HELPLINE

0800 0121 700

CRIMESTOPPERS

0800 555 111

***CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland is an independent charity that takes information about crime 100% anonymously via the freephone or by completing a secure anonymous online form.**

Professional and trained Contact Centre staff are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Every day concerned members of the public pass on what they know about crime – providing valuable information that otherwise might never reach law enforcement were it not for the charity's cast-iron guarantee of anonymity.

That promise has been kept since the charity began over 32 years ago.

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**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Tackling organised crime poses many challenges and no single agency can effectively tackle complex criminality on its own.

The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024 is a multi-agency strategy to protect individuals, communities and businesses in Northern Ireland from organised crime.

Partnership working is fully embedded in the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) approach as it continues to support operational law enforcement, relevant partners and wider civic society at a local and regional level in the fight against organised crime. The multi-agency strategic forum brings together those who actively seek out the organised criminal groups, bring them before the courts, and remove their criminal assets.

This Annual Report and Threat Assessment:

- sets out the current assessed threat from organised crime in Northern Ireland;
- highlights some of the activities of member agencies of the OCTF (both individually and collaboratively) to disrupt crime gangs and reduce the threat and harm from organised criminality;
- provides an overview of the results and success achieved; and
- provides advice to the public about what steps they can take to protect themselves and others from the harm caused by organised crime in order to help secure safer communities where we respect the law and each other and where organised criminals and their activities are not tolerated.

WHAT IS ORGANISED CRIME?

Organised crime can be defined as planned and coordinated criminal behaviour, conducted by people, groups or networks working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is usually, but not always, financial gain. Organised crime operates within and across jurisdictions and causes harm to individuals, communities and businesses.

Organised crime takes many forms including drug trafficking, modern slavery/human trafficking, counterfeiting, fuel laundering, tobacco smuggling, fraud or money laundering. Cyber related or enabled organised crime is increasingly a feature of the interconnected world in which we live. Organised crime is not static. OCTF partners work together to identify and assess any new and emerging crime types and keep these under review.

Organised crime may involve violence or the threat of violence, and in Northern Ireland some organised crime groups also have paramilitary connections. Criminals do not operate in a vacuum; they often bribe, coerce or prey on others to support their criminal enterprises, which can include the assistance of complicit or negligent professionals. While sophisticated technology has enabled criminality, in other ways it also allows law enforcement partners to harness that technology to improve their approach to prevention and pursuit.

Organised crime is not a victimless crime, it affects more than the direct victim. At an individual level, many people can be the target of and vulnerable to scams or online criminality involving fraud. Buying and using counterfeit goods can have a serious impact on health and well-being. The harmful impact that organised criminality such as drug dealing can have on local communities is clear. Commerce can suffer as organised criminals operating outside the law offer lower prices that legitimate businesses cannot compete with. More broadly, organised criminality diverts money away from investment in key public services and lines the pockets of those who seek to exploit others.

Organised criminality is driven by greed and shows complete disdain for the rights, safety and welfare of citizens, both young and old.

ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

There are, as of May 2021, approximately 77 organised crime groups (OCGs) assessed to be operating in Northern Ireland. Over this reporting period, a number of successful interventions such as searches, arrests and seizures have been carried out resulting in the frustration, disruption, or dismantling of an OCG. In the last quarter of the 2020/21, 59 OCGs were frustrated, 14 disrupted, and 4 dismantled. On occasions there were multiple interventions against individual OCGs. Many OCGs are involved in multiple types of organised criminality, with the vast majority linked to drugs offences.

There are also significant interactions and relationships between OCGs operating on both sides of the Northern Ireland and Ireland border, working together on a range of organised crime types including drugs, fraud, smuggling, money laundering and theft.

ABOUT THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) was established in Northern Ireland in 2000. It provides strategic leadership and supports a collaborative, joined-up response to the threat posed by organised crime through multi-agency partnership working.

The OCTF is a voluntary, multi-agency partnership which is unique within the United Kingdom and Ireland. Through its work it seeks to support law abiding citizens and enable the legitimate business community to flourish by identifying and mitigating the effects of organised crime.

The OCTF is co-ordinated by the Department of Justice. The OCTF Strategy Group includes senior representation from statutory agencies and law enforcement partners and provides oversight across a number of thematic Sub Groups tasked with the delivery of strategic objectives. It oversees the implementation of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024, which was published on 19 March 2021, and sets strategic direction for the response to organised crime in Northern Ireland. The Sub Groups focus in more detail on the assessment and response to issues such as criminal finance, drugs, cybercrime, modern slavery and human trafficking, and intellectual property crime (including counterfeit goods).

The member organisations include relevant Government departments, law enforcement agencies, the Public Prosecution Service, and at Sub Group level representatives from the business community. An Garda Síochána is also represented at Sub Group level to ensure effective cross-border co-operation. A list of OCTF partner organisations is included at Appendix 1.

The OCTF is a forum in which expertise and information can be shared. It supports the development of operational partnerships and plays a key role in informing the public about successful operations against criminal gangs and how to protect themselves from and report any suspicions of organised crime.

ASSET RECOVERY – SEIZING & REINVESTING ILL-GOTTEN GAINS

OCTF agencies can draw on powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to seek to recover criminal assets. Much of these recovered monies are reinvested either into projects aimed at benefitting communities by tackling crime and reducing the fear of crime (through the Assets Recovery Community Scheme, or 'ARCS') or into reinforcing law enforcement's capability to disrupt criminal activity through the pursuit of criminal assets (through the Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme, or 'ARIS'). More information about the projects that benefitted from ARCS funding in 2020/21 is set out in Chapter 3 of the report.

IRELAND/NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), which was agreed between the UK and the EU on 24 December 2020 became effective from 1 January 2021. The TCA contains a range of justice and cooperation measures that seek to replicate the key EU measures in place prior to the UK's exit from the EU that allowed for close cooperation and assistance to support the detection and prosecution of crime and public safety across the EU. The TCA measures provide for:

- fast track and warrant based arrangements for the surrender of requested persons;
- the sharing of criminal records and biometric data on DNA, fingerprints and, in future, vehicle registration details;
- transfer of passenger information for inter-EU flights;
- continued participation by the UK in both Europol and Eurojust;
- mutual legal assistance; and
- cooperation on assets freezing, money laundering and cybercrime.

The impact of the new arrangements will continue to be monitored to ensure that any capability gaps are identified and can be addressed by future enhanced arrangements and bilateral agreements negotiated between the UK and EU Member States.

Work continues with strategic partners, including law enforcement agencies and other Executive Departments to identify, manage and mitigate justice-related impacts arising from the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

OCGs are known for their ability to adapt their modes of operation with ease and speed in order to maximise their profits and avoid detection by law enforcement. In 2020, the OCTF established a multi-agency EU Exit Crime Sub Group to develop a strategic picture of the threat posed by criminals seeking to exploit the common travel area routing in and out of Northern Ireland in the lead up to the end of the Transition Period and beyond. The Sub Group - now known as the Emerging Threats Sub Group - continues to develop a shared understanding of risks and an ongoing programme of action to respond effectively to emerging threats.

A STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO TACKLE ORGANISED CRIME

Setting out a common vision, identifying roles, responsibilities, priorities and accountability structures is important not only for government and for agencies, it also demonstrates to the community the shared commitment to tackling organised criminality in all its forms.

The Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024 sets out a refreshed vision for Northern Ireland with the overarching aim of protecting individuals, communities and businesses in Northern Ireland from organised crime. It is clear statement of intent and includes a series of actions that OCTF partners plan to achieve together in that period to identify and mitigate assessed threats.

Organised crime in Northern Ireland is affected by many external factors. OCGs utilise the Common Travel Area (CTA) to enable or enhance their criminality and to avoid detection by law enforcement agency partners. Criminality includes the smuggling of various illicit commodities including drugs, fuel, firearms, counterfeit and contraband cigarettes and alcohol. The Strategy acknowledges interdependences and links with other work streams both at local and national level. It complements and aligns with the work being taken forward through the delivery of the **Executive Action Plan to Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime**, as well as the operational focus of the **Paramilitary Crime Task Force** (see **Appendix 2** for further details) and of the cross jurisdictional **Joint Agency Task Force**¹.

The strategic objectives are aligned to four thematic pillars:

- **Pursue:** pursuing offenders through investigation, disruption and prosecution.
- **Prepare and Protect:** supporting individuals, communities, systems and businesses to mitigate vulnerability and impact.
- **Prevent:** deterring and diverting people from engaging and re-engaging in organised crime.
- **Partnership:** creating a sustainable, efficient, effective and collaborative system response.

The Strategy came into effect on 1 April 2021.

The Strategy is available at:

www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/organised-crime-strategy

LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Commencement of relevant provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 in Northern Ireland

The Justice Minister made it a key priority to commence the new asset recovery powers under the Criminal Finances Act 2017 which provide law enforcement partners with additional powers to recover the proceeds of crime. Work to progress these new powers took place during the reporting period and the NI provisions were commenced in June 2021. Law enforcement agencies and Accredited Financial Investigators can now avail of asset recovery tools which had previously only been available in other parts of the United Kingdom and which include:

- new Account Freezing and Forfeiture powers;
- new Listed Asset Forfeiture powers;
- new Unexplained Wealth Order provisions;
- the ability to revisit confiscation orders; and
- disclosure orders in money laundering investigations.

Statutory codes of practice have also been put in place to assist practitioners in the exercise of the new powers. Workshops on the practical use of the new powers have been delivered.

1 JATF is a cross border operational task force established following the Fresh Start Agreement in December 2015

Assets recovery is the means to recover wealth and property gained under fraudulent means; to prevent money laundering; and to prevent the reinvestment of criminal funds into further crime and harm. It is a means to both dismantle and disrupt the activity of organised crime groups and individuals connected to them.

These measures, along with other existing measures under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, are vital in the fight against criminality as they hit criminals where it hurts, by taking away their profits and sending a powerful message that crime does not pay.

Proposals for new organised crime offences in Northern Ireland - Update

The Department of Justice carried out a public consultation during 2020/21 to seek views on a range of proposals to tackle organised crime through the introduction of specific legislative provisions.

All of the responses were supportive of the general principle of introducing bespoke organised crime legislation, including the introduction of new offences of directing and participating in serious organised crime.

Work has now commenced to address the detail of the issues raised during the consultation and to finalise robust policy proposals. This will ensure that any proposed legislation reinforces the response to serious organised crime in this jurisdiction. The Department will continue to progress this work in line with the actions in the Organised Crime Strategy.

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS IN 2020/21



150²
POTENTIAL VICTIMS
OF MODERN SLAVERY
RECOVERED

***Frustrated**

Planned activity by PSNI which prevents OCGs from carrying out criminal activity, or the arrest and or instigation of criminal proceedings against one or more group member(s) (not main principal) for an offence that would normally warrant a prison sentence, or seizure of assets on one occasion.

****Disrupted**

The arrest and/or instigation of criminal proceedings against one main principal for an offence which would normally warrant a prison sentence, or the arrest and/or instigation of criminal proceedings against two or more group members (not main principal) for an offence that would normally warrant a prison sentence, or seizure of assets on two or more occasions or a substantial single seizure.

*****Dismantled**

The arrest and charge or instigation of criminal proceedings against the main principals for an offence which would normally warrant a prison sentence.

² A total of 150 referrals were submitted to the Single Competent Authority from Northern Ireland First Responders.

DRUGS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

PSNI



8,349

Drug seizures



3,314

Drug-related arrests

BORDER FORCE SEIZURES



25.4 kg

Of Class A drugs



375 kg

Cannabis

SEIZURES OF OTHER ILLICIT GOODS BY BORDER FORCE



1.6 million

Cigarettes and
2,890 kg tobacco



22,000

Items of counterfeit
goods



265,000

Illicit prescription
drugs



Approx £779,363

recovered from criminal assets

OTHER FINANCIAL SUCCESSES BY PSNI

Cash
Forfeitures

£317,756

POCA Cash
Seizures

£1,024,548

Confiscation
Orders

£499,796



**ORGANISED
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THE THREAT AND OCFT RESPONSE IN 2020/21



CHAPTER 2: THE THREAT AND OCFT RESPONSE IN 2020/21

Successful partnerships allow organisations to draw on each other's strengths and work more quickly and efficiently. Partnerships are at the heart of the agenda for improving outcomes.

KEY PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REPORT



The Department of Justice (DoJ) is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system in Northern Ireland. The DoJ is the lead department for the Organised Crime Strategy and the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Strategy and supports the Organised Crime Task Force Strategy Group and its Sub Groups. The Department helps shape the policy context and leads on necessary legislative changes. The Department also funds the provision of analytical support to the OCTF and administers the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS).



Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is responsible for keeping people safe by investigating a range of offences across the crime spectrum. As such it is a major contributor to the work of the OCTF.

- **Cyber Crime**

The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre is a specialist unit to develop capability, capacity and connectivity in respect to the prevention, protection and detection of cybercrime to keep people safe in Northern Ireland. It is staffed by detectives with specialist technical and forensic capability and detectives who are experienced and knowledgeable concerning the investigation of cybercrime.

- **Drugs**

PSNI works closely with partners to target those who import, supply and use drugs. It takes a proactive role to stop drug dealers operating within our communities.

- **Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking**

The PSNI has had a dedicated Modern Slavery/ Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) in place since 2015. The PSNI's approach to MSHT is victim-centred with the need to identify, locate and recover any Potential Victims of Trafficking and offer police help and support in line with current legislation. PSNI also aim to frustrate, disrupt or dismantle the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved and bring to justice those involved in the trafficking of people.

- **Economic Crime**

Financial investigation forms a significant line of enquiry in all operations targeting organised criminal activity. PSNI's Economic Crime Unit and Organised Crime Unit work closely to combat money laundering and to prevent organised criminals benefiting from their illegal enterprises.

PSNI's Asset Confiscation and Enforcement Team provides a dedicated restraint and confiscation service to the organisation and assists partner agencies in identifying criminal assets, again to prevent criminals benefiting from their illegal activities.

- **Intellectual Property Crime**

The PSNI supports other OCTF partners to remove counterfeit goods from the market; to reduce the physical harm they can cause; to reduce the impact on legitimate traders; and to prevent earnings being used to fund other forms of organised crime.

- **Armed Robbery and Extortion**

The PSNI works closely with the cash in transit and banking industries to help ensure the safety of employees, to help prevent robberies and to bring to justice those who have committed such crimes.



The National Crime Agency (NCA) is the UK's national law enforcement Agency operating in Northern Ireland since May 2015. Its mission is to protect the public by leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC), operating as the vital link between the global and local threat. With the agreement of PSNI, who retain primacy, designated NCA officers are able to exercise the powers of a Northern Ireland constable. NCA supports operational partners, including PSNI, to tackle serious and organised crime impacting Northern Ireland and help protect Northern Ireland communities.



Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), a non-ministerial department of the UK Government, is the UK's tax, payments and customs authority and has a vital purpose collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services and helps families and individuals with targeted financial support.

HMRC helps the honest majority to get their tax right and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system.

HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) which has responsibility for civil and criminal investigations into the most serious tax evasion and fraud works closely with partner agencies locally and across international borders to draw upon and share expertise to tackle organised criminality in Northern Ireland



Border Force

Border Force is a law enforcement command within the Home Office. Border Force secures the border and promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by Border Force staff at ports and airports.



Immigration Enforcement

Immigration Enforcement is a Directorate of the Home Office and is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders and prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement carries out operations against document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers.



The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The Agency's primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. The NIEA Enforcement Branch focuses its resources on investigating cases which present a significant risk to the environment and public health, including waste crime.



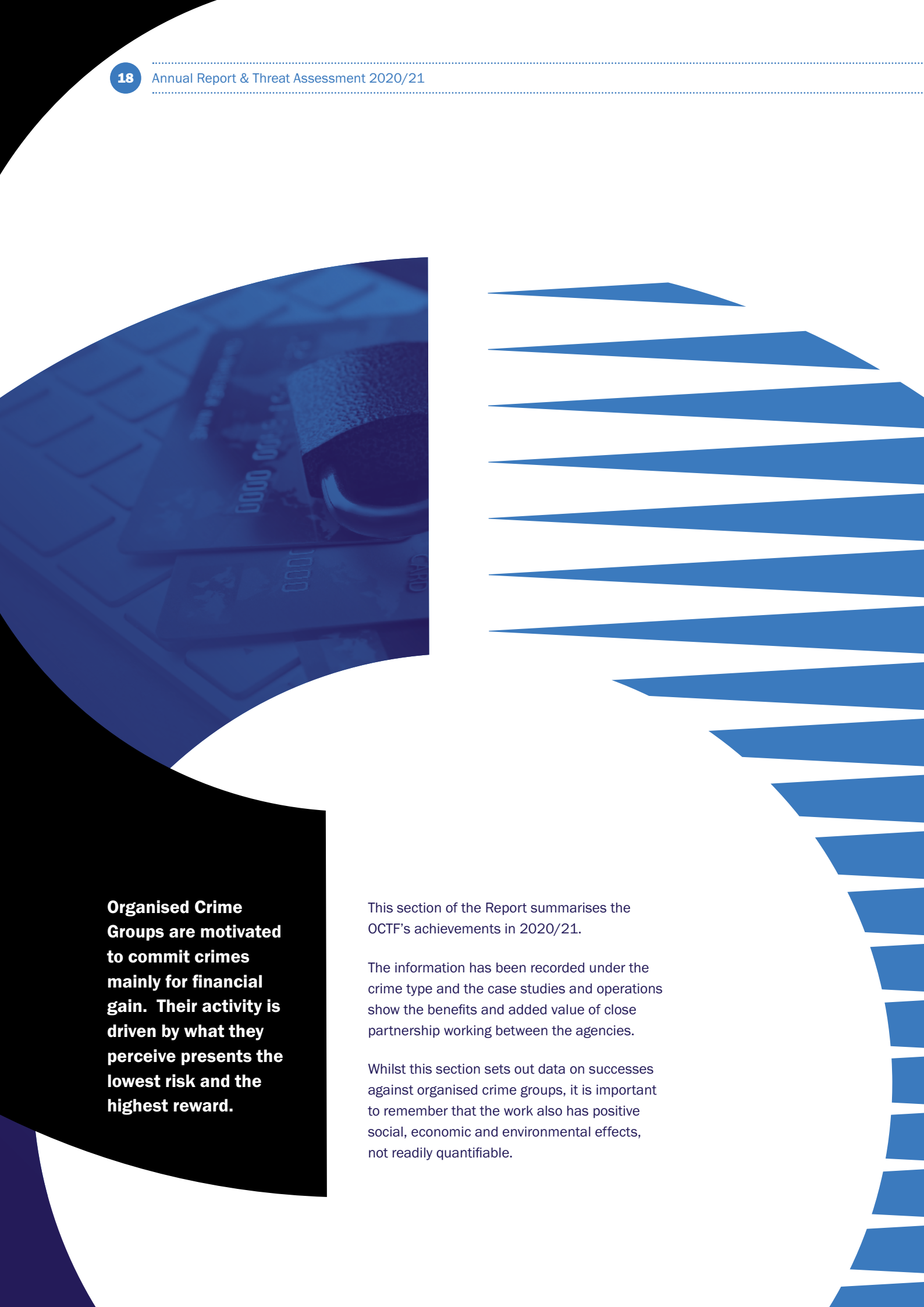
The Department for the Economy's **Trading Standards Service (TSS)** delivers consumer protection enforcement in Northern Ireland. TSS delivers a front-line public protection function for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the Northern Ireland economy. That function comprises the twin aims of protecting NI's consumers - particularly the most vulnerable - from illegal and unfair trading practices, and providing support and guidance for NI's businesses (particularly small businesses) so that they can deal effectively with regulation.



The Department for Communities Benefit Security Division – The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within the Benefit Security Division investigates any incident of potential organised criminality against the benefits system.



The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) – receives investigation files and determines if the Test for Prosecution is met and conducts criminal proceedings where appropriate.



Organised Crime Groups are motivated to commit crimes mainly for financial gain. Their activity is driven by what they perceive presents the lowest risk and the highest reward.

This section of the Report summarises the OCTF's achievements in 2020/21.

The information has been recorded under the crime type and the case studies and operations show the benefits and added value of close partnership working between the agencies.

Whilst this section sets out data on successes against organised crime groups, it is important to remember that the work also has positive social, economic and environmental effects, not readily quantifiable.

2.1 CYBER CRIME

THE THREAT

Criminal activity facilitated by the use of technology remains a conspicuous feature of crime in Northern Ireland.

Cyber-enabled crimes are traditional crime types enhanced in reach and scale by the use of technology, especially by use of the internet. High numbers of cyber-enabled fraud are regularly reported to police.

Reports of cyber-dependent crime - that is any crime that can only be committed using computers, computer networks or other forms of information communication technology - have increased. This is especially the case in terms of ransomware attacks, which can prevent individuals or organisations accessing data held on their systems unless a demand for some form of payment is met.

The global Covid-19 pandemic significantly changed how people and organisations carry out their business. Many more people started working from home, facilitated by the use of technology. Unfortunately not all organisations were able to fully prepare in advance of this new way of working. The lack of adequate security provisions such as the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and two factor authentication whilst signing in to work programs were cited as factors that allowed cyber criminals to access the networks of local organisations. Whilst restrictions are gradually being lifted, the threat from cyber criminals still exists and there is no doubt they are already planning how to take advantage of vulnerabilities as the situation changes. Cyber-attacks cost local businesses approximately £1.9 million during 2020/21, highlighting the extremely lucrative gains to be made by the criminals involved.

Despite the increase in incidents being reported to the PSNI, the under-reporting of cyber-dependent crime is an ongoing challenge for law enforcement. Businesses have a number of competing challenges when they fall victim to a cyber incident, including returning services to normal as soon as possible and providing reassurance to customers.

Delivering this whilst responding to evidential requests from police can be difficult. The investigative team at PSNI Cyber Crime Centre (CCC) is alive to

Basic security provisions such as two factor authentication can help prevent cyber criminals accessing your network.

these concerns and has developed an operational model, which incorporates an investigative mind-set into the recovery process. Using this model, the PSNI CCC's interactions with local organisations which have fallen victim to this type of crime have facilitated the swift exchange of information and have been viewed positively by the organisations involved.

Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) continue to actively target businesses and individuals in Northern Ireland with ransomware attacks. This form of cyber-attack involves unauthorised access to a network to encrypt business critical information. Demands are then made for payment in order to obtain the decryption key, without which decryption is impossible. Payment is usually sought by way of cryptocurrency, with BitCoin being the most popular form sought. Local organisations that have fallen victim to such attacks have received demands as high as £1million. Recent trends associated with ransomware attacks include the extraction of data from the victim organisation's network, with suspects using the threat of publication in an attempt to ensure that payment is made. Suspects have also threatened to contact partner organisations using stolen email lists to inform them about the ransomware attack on the victim organisation. Again, this is intended to leverage payment. However, payment does not guarantee that information will not be published as certain types of ransomware publish data irrespective of whether payment is made.

Police interaction with a company which fell victim to a ransomware attack has highlighted the research and reconnaissance that criminals undertake. The company received a demand for payment in BitCoin worth over £600,000. The criminals justified the size of the demand and highlighted the company's ability to pay by quoting from local press articles regarding recent contracts awarded.

Just under a quarter of all reports to PSNI CCC involve ransomware attacks, which are generally considered to be the most harmful.

Common forms of attacks are:

- **HACKING** - hacking refers to activities that seek to compromise digital devices, such as computers, smartphones, tablets, and even entire networks. Although hacking might not always be for malicious purposes, nowadays most references to hacking, and hackers, characterize this as unlawful activity by cyber criminals—motivated by financial gain, protest, information gathering (spying), and even just for the “fun” of the challenge. Reports of hacking make up half of all reports to PSNI CCC;
- **PHISHING/SMISHING** – e-mails and text messages specifically designed to entice recipients to follow a link to a website that looks genuine, to harvest personal information or download malicious software. Some are well constructed and can appear legitimate, others are more obviously suspicious;
- **Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) - DDoS** attacks are designed to take down websites or flood networks leaving them inoperable. Whilst DDoS attacks continue to feature in reports to PSNI CCC, numbers are declining in line with advances in network defences available;
- **FRAUD** - Fraud remains one of the main cyber-enabled crimes reported to the PSNI. Criminals employ a number of tactics, including the use of phishing emails, smishing text messages and compromising business emails. The key message for individuals and businesses remains the same: pay attention to what has been received; determine if the email address is correct and addressed to the recipient personally; check if it contains spelling mistakes or poor grammar; and decide if the message could be unsolicited; Fraudulent emails can be well constructed and appear to be from a trusted source whilst still containing links to sites that are designed to harvest personal information.
- **Ransomware as a Service (RaaS)** allows criminals without the required high level of technical ability to become involved in what is seen as a lucrative and relatively risk free crime.

The Internet of Things (IoT) relates to the dramatic increase in devices that can connect to the internet, ranging from fridges, TVs and speakers. Generic passwords have enabled cyber criminals to utilize these devices en masse for DDoS attacks and as the IoT expands to become the Internet of Everything (the networked connection of people, processes, data and things), cyber criminals will also be researching how to exploit this for their purposes.

The Dark Web continues to feature in investigations carried out at the PSNI CCC. The ability to trade in illegal commodities such as firearms, drugs and stolen personal details means that the Dark Web is an attractive platform for criminals. Coupled with the use of cryptocurrency, a largely unregulated virtual currency, the anonymity afforded to users can be a challenge for law enforcement. It is anticipated that criminality on this platform will continue to increase.

The motivations for cyber criminality remain largely unchanged. The recent spike in ransomware attacks clearly demonstrates that financial gain is high on the list, although press coverage also shows links between state-sponsored criminal groups and some high profile cyber-attacks. Other motivations include personal revenge and attempting to gain notoriety amongst peers.

The PSNI CCC has also observed a spike in ransomware attacks. During the period of this report, a total of 21 such attacks were reported, nine of which were in the fourth quarter of 2020/21.

A notable development associated with ransomware is its apparent availability as a service that criminals can buy.

Fraudulent emails can be well constructed and appear to be from a trusted source whilst still containing links to sites that are designed to harvest personal information.



RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

PSNI Cyber Crime Centre

The PSNI CCC maintains a specialist capability which is focussed on tackling the increasing threat posed by cyber criminals. A team of dedicated and experienced investigators is co-located with and supported by digital forensic experts operating from the purpose built Centre. The PSNI CCC works with both internal and external partners, on a local, national and international basis. As part of the Team Cyber UK network, liaison and partnership working helps police gain maximum benefit in progressing complex and challenging investigations

The PSNI CCC Investigative Team takes the lead on cyber-dependent crime, which as noted previously, is defined as any crime that can only be committed using computers, computer networks or other forms of information communication technology.

The majority of investigations relate to offences committed against businesses, government agencies, academia and critical national infrastructure, for example, transport networks, electrical supplies, water supply or communications.

The Investigative Team is currently involved in a number of complex investigations, each of which present challenges, including the international reach of investigations that is often associated with cyber criminality. In separate investigations, the PSNI is currently working in conjunction with the FBI, Dutch police and German police. This highlights the global nature of investigations and again emphasises the importance of partnership working with international law enforcement agencies.

PSNI Prevent

The PSNI CCC has one dedicated full time officer who delivers the PSNI Cyber Prevent programme, in line with the United Kingdom National Cyber Security Strategy 2016 - 2021²

The PSNI CCC works with counterparts in Regional Cyber Crime Units from across the UK and is a member of the Cyber Prevent Cross Government Working Group. The emphasis remains on delivering education and awareness of Computer Misuse Act 1990 legislation (including hacking), highlighting the consequences of offending and signposting towards cyber education and career pathways. This programme is predominantly directed at young people as the average age for this type of offending is 17 years old.

The PSNI CCC maximises exposure of the cyber prevent messaging across Northern Ireland's schools, government departments, private industry and other relevant organisations such as youth organisations. Due to Covid-19 restrictions a change in approach has been required, with a focus on remote engagement through much of this reporting period.

The PSNI is using recently developed Cyber Choices³ material, which is made up of Cyber Prevent key messaging and associated useful information. This material has been produced by National Crime Agency (NCA), for distribution to a number of different age groups, from under 12s through to teachers and parents.

Early interventions with low level cyber-dependent offenders is an important aspect of the Cyber Prevent work. PSNI has successfully maintained the delivery of Cease and Desist notices for offenders in this category, despite some difficulties presented by Covid-19 restrictions. By taking this approach, PSNI has been successful in diverting mainly young people away from a criminal pathway and signposting them to key partners and potential educational pathways.

Working collaboratively with key partners the PSNI has been instrumental in ensuring that key messaging continues to be shared through already established platforms and via new initiatives.

The PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer is an active member of the Cyber Skills Group. This Group works alongside key industry, government and academic representatives, using their connections, membership and influence to develop access to cyber skills and awareness and to encourage the take up of cyber learning pathways and careers. The collaboratively produced Online Schools Teaching Programme was launched virtually to Northern Ireland's post primary teachers in December 2020. This package was designed to raise awareness of the Cyber Prevent key messaging, in particular the Computer Misuse Act 1990, as well as signposting towards cyber educational and career pathways.

School closures affected the volume of Cyber Prevent educational delivery engagements, online teaching allowed the Cyber Prevent Officer to deliver appropriate Cyber Prevent key messaging through virtual platforms. 'In person' engagement has recommenced with the reopening of schools. Cyber material was delivered to P7 pupils in primary schools throughout the Mid Ulster area, alongside the PSNI's Schools Officers. This is a new joint initiative addressing online safety together with cyber prevent key messaging.

This Cyber First initiative recognises schools and colleges who are taking the lead in this area of education and encouraging pupils to pursue career paths into the cyber security profession. Five schools and colleges were successful with their applications and have been awarded either Gold, Silver or Bronze certification.

2 See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-cyber-security-strategy-2016-to-2021>

3 See: <https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/cyber-crime/cyberchoices>

PSNI Protect

As part of the UK Police Cyber Protect Network, the PSNI CCC has one full time Cyber Protect Officer contributing towards national efforts to fight cybercrime. This is led by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and coordinated by the City of London Police. In implementing this work the Protect Officer works with colleagues within the PSNI CCC and departments such as Crime Prevention Branch.

The UK Cyber Protect Network aims to help protect organisations and individuals from common cyber incidents, through engagement with partners and the delivery of government approved advice and guidance from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).

Alongside counterparts in the Regional Cyber Crime Units in England and Wales and Police Scotland, the PSNI Cyber Protect Officer also sits on the UK Cyber Protect working group, a group that aims to help develop new tools and the means of delivering consistent NCSC cyber protect messaging across the UK regions.

The Cyber Protect role within the PSNI involves engagement with local organisations across the public, private and charity/voluntary sectors. Victim engagements can result from referrals from within the CCC, support requests from colleagues in District Policing or as the result of notifications resulting from reports made to Action Fraud.

Examples of working with victims include:

- Post incident engagements with organisations suffering ransomware attacks;
- Delivery of vulnerability notifications to organisations believed to be using compromised credentials or vulnerable services; and
- Protect engagements and support to notified victims of Email Account Compromise.

Working in partnership is key to the success of the Cyber Protect programme both at a national and regional level. The adoption of online meetings and webinars as a result of Covid restrictions ensured existing partnerships could be maintained and new ones developed.

Examples of this partnership working include:

- circulation of cyber information updates to external partners;
- assisting Community Pharmacy NI with the raising of cyber awareness amongst local community pharmacies;
- supporting the annual Public Sector Cyber Security NI (virtual) event;
- supporting the work of ScamwiseNI in raising awareness of cyber security campaigns; and
- delivery of cyber awareness sessions to staff within banking and accounting sectors.

An important aspect of Cyber Protect is awareness raising across the PSNI of the steps that individuals and organisations can take to help secure themselves online from the vast majority of cyber incidents experienced in Northern Ireland. The PSNI CCC supports the delivery of cyber awareness sessions to police officers and staff, ensuring they are aware of the latest advice from the NCSC, Cyber Aware and partners and have access to material that can be provided to victims or interested parties.

OCTF Cyber Crime Engagement Sub Group

The OCTF Cyber Crime Engagement Sub Group provides a forum for engagement between the PSNI, government and relevant stakeholders across the private and NGO sectors, academia, the cyber security industry and local government in response to cyber crime and related developments, issues and threats. The Group aims to provide a safe environment for stakeholders to share concerns, threats and cyber incidents to law enforcement and discuss solutions to addressing further potential attacks.

RESULTS

Online crime⁴ (formerly cyber-enabled crime) is identified through the use of a 'flag' on the PSNI crime recording system. Its aim is to help provide a national and local picture of the extent to which the internet and digital communications technology are being used to commit crimes. An offence should be flagged where the reporting officer believes that on the balance of probability the offence was committed, in full or in part, through a computer, computer network or other computer-enabled device. A baseline for online crime was established in 2014/15.

During the 2020/21 financial year there were a total of 4,445 online crimes reported. This is compared to 3,686 during the previous 12 month period, representing an increase of 20.6%.

In the same period, 497 cyber-dependent offences were reported from Northern Ireland to Action Fraud. This is compared to 302 fraud offences reported during the previous 12 month period and represents an increase of 64.6%.

The increase may be as a result of:

- an increase in organisations having to allow staff to work from home due to Covid-19 and the increased use of technology to facilitate this;
- the use of Ransomware as a Service (RaaS); and
- a greater understanding of how to report cyber incidents.

CASE STUDY

LOCAL VULNERABILITY, INTERNATIONAL NOTIFICATION

The potential victim was a locally owned organisation with a global footprint. Partner law enforcement in the USA alerted the PSNI that the organisation was vulnerable to a ransomware attack. As PSNI PROTECT had already established a working relationship with the company, contact was made immediately. Details of the vulnerability and remediation advice were shared and, whilst the company was confident that it had already addressed the problem, the PSNI was soon updated that patching⁵ had been fully completed to mitigate the vulnerability.

CASE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL VICTIM, LOCAL SUSPECT

The PSNI Cyber Crime Investigators are working in partnership with the FBI in relation to a "credential stuffing attack" against a large multinational organisation, headquartered in the USA. A "credential stuffing attack" is a method whereby criminals use lists of compromised user credentials to breach a system. The attack may use "BOTS" in order to automate and increase the scale of the attack. A local suspect is under investigation for their part in the attack.

4 Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland Update to 31 March 2021 – Date of Publication 14 May 2021

5 Patching is the application of updates to firmware or software to improve security and/or enhance functionality

FORWARD LOOK

The PSNI CCC has joined other regional cyber teams in England and Wales in raising awareness of Police CyberAlarm, a new free online tool backed by the National Police Chiefs Council and aimed at helping organisations understand and monitor malicious cyber activity. Police CyberAlarm also allows member organisations to become part of a regional cyber defence network. With collected data from across Northern Ireland members made available to the PSNI CCC for analysis it can identify trends, raise awareness of ongoing threats and investigate Northern Ireland based offending.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There is a wealth of information available to help individuals or organisations take action to protect accounts, network and data. Taking some simple steps around passwords, backups, updates and crucially, two factor authentication, can help prevent the majority of cyber incidents seen across Northern Ireland. The following websites offer up to date advice and tools to help manage the threats:

Cyber Aware
www.cyberaware.gov.uk

National Cyber Security Centre
www.ncsc.gov.uk

(Check out the NCSC Exercise in a Box, an online tool which allows organisations to find out how resilient they are to cyber-attacks and practise their response).

Action Fraud
www.actionfraud.police.uk

Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre
www.nicybersecuritycentre.gov.uk

Police CyberAlarm
www.cyberalarm.police.uk
www.haveibeenpwned.com

If you have been a victim of actual or attempted cyber-crime, please report it to:

- **Action Fraud - www.actionfraud.police.uk**
- **PSNI Tel 101**
- **Via the PSNI website www.psni.police.uk/makeareport**
- **Crimestoppers Tel 0800 555 111 (anonymously)**
- **Via Crimestoppers-uk.org website (anonymously)**

If you have received a suspicious email, please forward it to report@phishing.gov.uk and see www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/report-suspicious-emails for more information.

If you receive a suspicious SMS, please forward this to your mobile network provider by forwarding it to 7726.

2.2 DRUGS

THE THREAT

Substance misuse causes a wide range of harm to individuals, their families and wider society. This harm includes crime committed to fuel drug dependence, organised criminality and the violence and exploitation that goes hand in hand with paramilitary style attacks. It causes irreparable damage and loss to the families and individuals whose lives it destroys.

The demand for illicit drugs remains high and is increasing in Northern Ireland, as evidenced by the upward trend in seizure incidents between 2006/07 and 2020/21 as well as increases in drugs possession and drug trafficking offences. A number of individual seizure incidents have resulted in significant amounts of drugs recovered, not only further evidencing the level of demand but also highlighting the capabilities of the OCGs involved in sourcing and transporting such large amounts.

The misuse of prescription drugs also continues to feature heavily within the Northern Ireland drugs profile.

A number of significant events during 2020/21 impacted on the importation, distribution and sale of drugs by organised crime groups in Northern Ireland:

- The Covid-19 Pandemic - countries closed their borders and imposed restriction on movements.
- The UK's exit from the EU – criminals importing drugs seeking to exploit the Common Travel Area (CTA) and Northern Ireland Protocol arrangements.
- Operation PHARMIC – investigation into the use of encrypted communications allowed previously unknown drug suppliers to be identified. This operation demonstrated that organised crime is a fluid network, rather than a structured organisation and highlighted the sophistication of OCGs and their increasing use of technology.

Substance misuse causes a wide range of harm to individuals, their families and wider society.

Possession of drugs and trafficking of drugs offences have increased for the fourth year in a row. During 2020/21 there were 7,127 possession of drugs offences compared to 6,886 during 2019/20, an increase of 3.5%. During 2020/21 there were 1,038 trafficking of drugs offences recorded compared to 916 during 2019/20, an increase of 13.3%.

RESULTS

Drugs⁶ seizure incidents and drug-related arrests, 2020/21 financial year compared with 2019/20

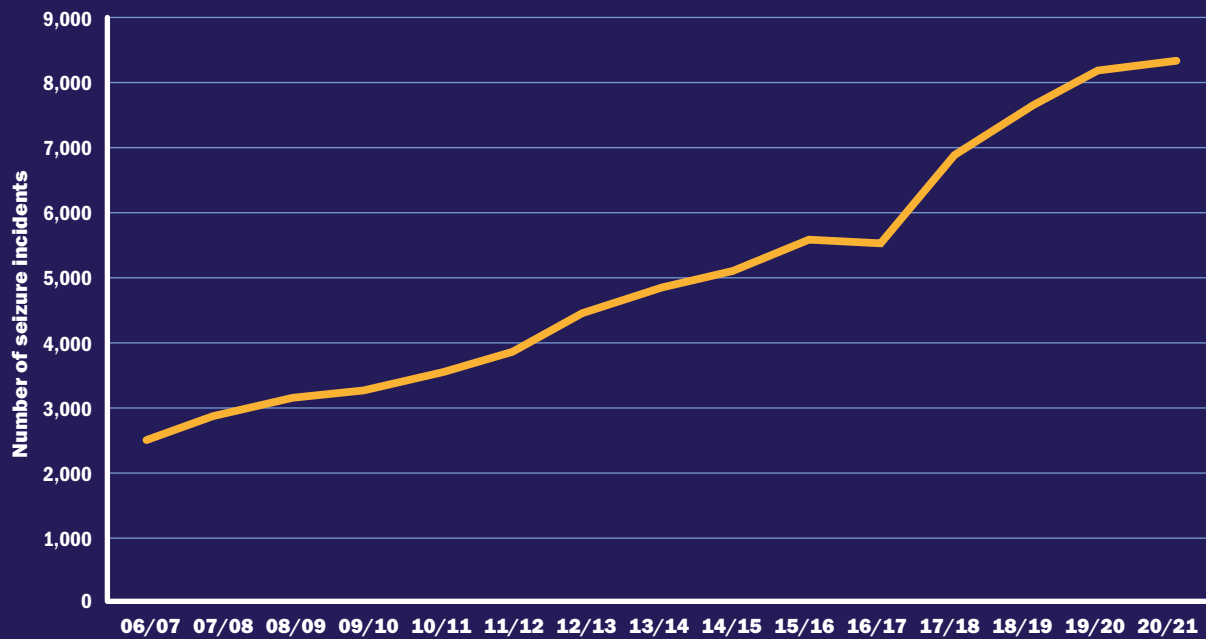
	Apr'19- Mar'20	Apr'20- Mar'21	change between years	% change between years
Drug Seizure Incidents	8,186	8,349	163	+2
Drug-related Arrests	3,829	3,314	-515	-13.4

- In the 12 months from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there were a total of 8,349 drug seizure incidents, an increase of 163 (2%) on the previous 12 month period.
- During 2020/21 there were 3,314 drug-related arrests, a decrease of 515 (13.4%) when compared with the previous 12 months.

The misuse of prescription drugs also continues to feature heavily within the Northern Ireland drugs profile.

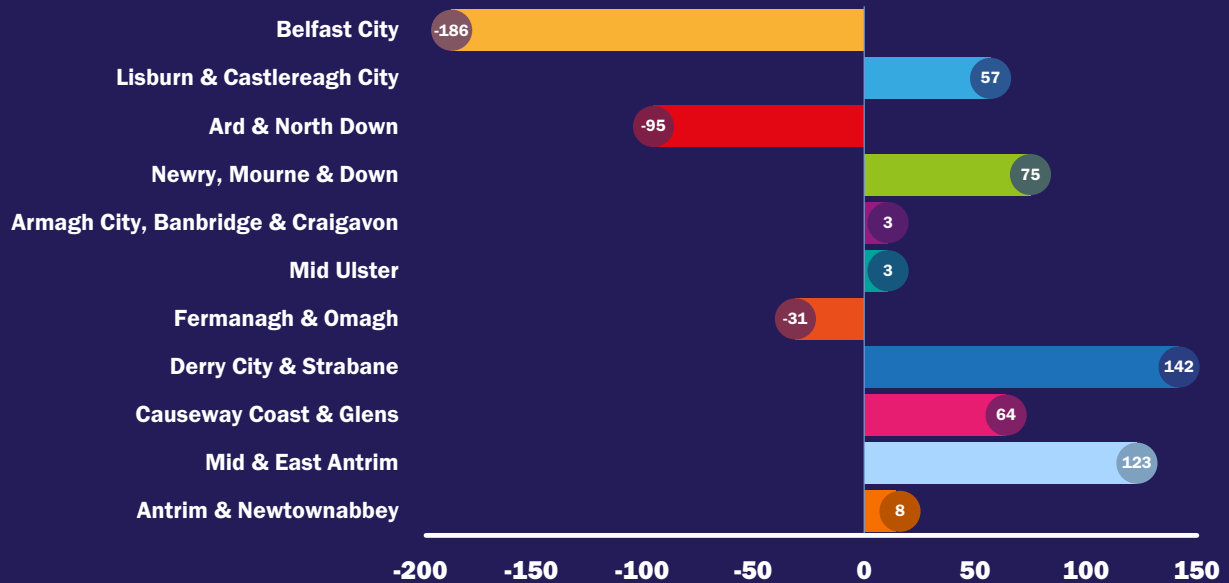
⁶ Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland, update to 31 March 2021 (published 21 May 2021)

TRENDS IN DRUG SEIZURE INCIDENTS SINCE 2006/07



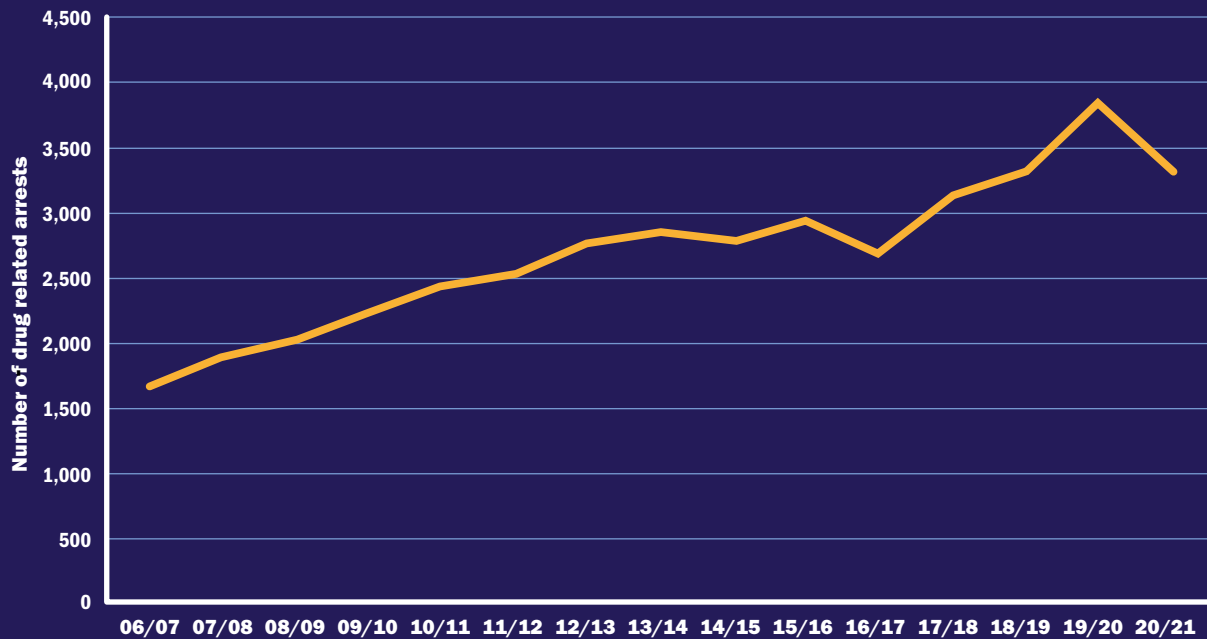
- During the 2020/21 financial year the number of drug seizure incidents was higher in seven out of the 12 months when compared to the previous 2019/20 financial year. The impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions should be taken into account when considering the fluctuation in monthly seizure incidents.

CHANGE IN DRUG SEIZURE INCIDENTS BY POLICING DISTRICT, 12 MONTHS TO MARCH 2021 COMPARED WITH THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS



- Eight policing districts showed an increase in drug seizure incidents, with the remaining three showing reductions.
- Belfast City Policing District experienced the largest reduction from 2019/20, with 186 fewer seizure incidents, representing a reduction of 7%. This is likely a result of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Despite this reduction the district continues to account for the largest proportion of seizure incidents with 29.4% of all seizures in 2020/21 occurring there.
- Derry City and Strabane District saw the largest increase with 142 more seizure incidents during 2020/21 compared to the previous 12 month period. Derry City and Strabane also accounts for the second largest proportion of seizure incidents with 9.7% of all seizure incidents occurring there.

TRENDS IN DRUG-RELATED ARRESTS SINCE 2006/07



- During 2020/21 there were 3,314 drug-related arrests. This is compared to 3,829 arrests during the 2019/20 financial year and represents a reduction of 13.4%.
- This is the first time in four years that drug-related arrests have seen a reduction from the previous year. As with seizure incidents, the Covid-19 restrictions may have impacted the number of drug-related arrests.
- During the 2020/21 financial year the number of drug-related arrests was lower eight out of the 12 months when compared to the previous 2019/20 financial year. Again the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions should be taken into account when considering the fluctuation in monthly arrests.

CHANGE IN DRUG-RELATED ARRESTS BY POLICING DISTRICT, 12 MONTHS TO MARCH 2021 COMPARED WITH THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS



- Nine of the 11 policing districts showed a decrease in drug-related arrests, which is the exact opposite of 2019/20 when nine of the 11 districts saw increases when compared to the previous 12 months.
- As well as experiencing the largest reduction in seizure incidents, Belfast City District also saw the largest reduction in drug-related arrests during 2020/21, with 340 fewer arrests than 2019/20. Again this is in direct contrast to 2019/20 during which Belfast City experienced the largest increase in arrests from the previous 12 months.
- Despite the reduction in arrests, Belfast City still accounts for the largest proportion of drug-related arrests with 36.2% of all drug-related arrest occurring there.

Number of drug seizures by class and drug type

Drug class ⁱ	Drug type ⁱ	Drug seizure incidents ⁱⁱ			Numbers
		Apr'19-Mar'20	Apr'20-Mar'21	change	
Class A	Cocaine	1,114	1,090	-24	
	Ecstasy	231	149	-82	
	Heroin	241	170	-71	
	LSD	16	22	6	
	Methadone	11	22	11	
	Morphine	16	16	0	
	Other Class A ⁱⁱⁱ	110	102	-8	
	All Class A	1,655	1,497	-158	
Class B	<i>Herbal cannabis</i>	4,816	5,275	459	
	<i>Cannabis resin</i>	507	133	-374	
	<i>Cannabis plants</i>	94	129	35	
	<i>Cannabis, other formats</i>	671	667	-4	
	Total cannabis	5,637	5,836	199	
	Amphetamines	89	127	38	
	Mephedrone	14	7	-7	
	Other Class B ^{iv}	120	123	3	
All Class B	5,781	5,998	217		
Class C	Anabolic steroids	33	45	12	
	Benzodiazepines	1,197	1,295	98	
	Other Class C ^{v,vi}	922	838	-84	
	All Class C	1,869	1,918	49	
All drugs	8,186	8,349	163		

Table References:

i - As each seizure incident can involve more than one class or type of drug, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals as this will sum to more than the total number of seizures. Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as records from 1st April 2020 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes.

ii - Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.

iii - Other Class A drugs include fentanyl/ fentanyl derivatives, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms) and methamphetamine (crystal meth).

iv - Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine, barbiturates and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists

v - Other Class C drugs include tramadol, buprenorphine, GHB/ GBL and 'Z-class' drugs (zolpidem, zopiclone and zaleplon).

vi - Other Class C drugs also include Pregabalin and Gabapentin which were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019.

- During 2020/21 there were lower levels of seizure incidents for Class A with a reduction of 9.5% compared to the previous 12 months.
- During the same time period, there were increases for Classes B and C, with 3.6% and 2.6% more seizure incidents respectively.
- Seizure incidents were higher in seven out of the 12 months of 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.
- In terms of drug types seized, trends have remained consistent with last year in that cannabis (Class B) was the most commonly seized drug type, followed by benzodiazepines (Class C) and cocaine (Class A).
- The postal system and courier services continue to be one of the main methods used for the importation of illicit and prescription drugs into Northern Ireland. In particular, the use of 'Click & Collect' services have increased, where goods can be sent to a collecting address, mainly local small convenience stores or petrol stations.

Class A:

- Cocaine, the third most commonly seized drug in Northern Ireland, experienced a slight reduction in seizure incidents with 24 fewer seizures during 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, representing a reduction of 2.2%.
- Ecstasy experienced the largest decrease in seizure incidents involving Class A drugs, with 82 fewer seizures compared to 2019/20, representing a reduction of 35.5%.
- Heroin seizures also experienced a notable 29.5% reduction, with levels falling from 241 in 2019/20 to 170 during 2020/21.

Class B:

- Cannabis remains the most commonly seized drug overall in Northern Ireland, with 5,836 seizure incidents during 2020/21. This is also 199 more seizure incidents when compared to the previous 12 months and represents an increase of 3.5%.
- Herbal cannabis accounted for the largest amount of cannabis seizure incidents, and the number of herbal seizures increased by 9.5% compared to 2019/20.

- Cannabis resin seizures saw the largest reduction of all Class A, B and C drug types, with levels falling from 507 in 2019/20 to 133 during 2020/21. This represents a reduction of 73.8%.
- New markets appear to be developing in respect of other cannabis derivatives, such as oils and edibles. Changes in the law are likely to have made the oils market particularly vulnerable to manipulation by OCGs. Ingestion via vaping is increasingly more common. The term cannabis 'edibles' refers to cannabis infused edible products, such as sweets, cakes, biscuits or buns. Most recently hard-boiled sweets, lollies and chocolate have been recovered in the postal system from Belgium and the Netherlands.

Class C:

- Benzodiazepines, the second most common drug type seized overall, accounted for the largest number of Class C seizure incidents, with levels also increasing by 8.2% when compared to 2019/20.
- The category of Other Class C drugs also include Pregabalin and Gabapentin which were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019. It is difficult to ascertain how much of the Pregabalin seized was supplied through legal prescriptions, which had either legitimately been filled by the user and then sold illicitly, or the prescription itself was diverted into the illicit market. It appears local demand is being met by a combination of both supply sources.

Drug-related Deaths⁷

In March 2021, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released the most up to date official figures for drug-related deaths covering the 2019 calendar year. There were a total of 191 drug-related deaths in 2019, three more than 2018 and the highest number in the last ten years.

There were a total of 191 drug-related deaths in 2019.

⁷ NISRA "Drug-related and Drug Misuse Deaths 2009 - 2019". (Date published 16 March 2021).

Males accounted for 133 of the 191 drug-related deaths and almost half of the total (45.5%) were men aged 25-44.

In terms of all deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2019 (15,758), drug-related deaths accounted for 1.2% of the total; the same proportion as 2018.

Poly drug use (the mixing of multiple drug types) and the misuse of prescription medication continues to be a prominent feature of many drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland. Figures indicate that 56% of all drug-related deaths in 2019 involved three or more drugs.

Consumption of alcohol with drugs is also common practice and this combination can have fatal consequences. 16% of all drug-related deaths in 2019 also mentioned alcohol on the death certificate, a fall from 23% in 2018.

Diazepam was listed in 36.6% of all drug-related deaths in 2019, a fall in the proportion to that recorded in previous years. However, drug-related deaths involving Pregabalin continued its upward trend and appears in 40.3% of all drug-related deaths.

In 2019, a total of 128 drug-related deaths had an opioid mentioned on the death certificate. Heroin and morphine were the most frequently mentioned opioids in 2019, connected to 46 drug-related deaths; the highest number on record.

Drug-related deaths involving cocaine increased from 28 in 2018 to 37 in 2019 and is the highest level on record.

Statistics also show an inextricable link between drug-related deaths and socio-economic deprivation, as people living in the most deprived areas are five times more likely to die from drug-related causes than in the least deprived areas.

CASE STUDY

CANNABIS AT BELFAST DOCKS AND BALLYCLARE

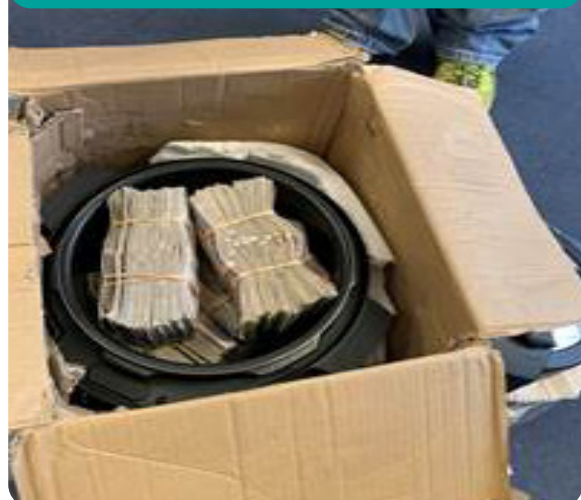
In May 2020 during an operation targeting the cultivation and supply of cannabis, searches were conducted at Belfast docks to a residential property in Ballyclare resulting in the recovery of cannabis worth in excess of approximately £640,000, and the seizure of a high value vehicle.



CASE STUDY

CANNABIS AND CASH FOUND

From May to July 2020 an investigation was conducted into an OCG involved in the importation of cannabis and subsequent exportation of cash to and from Northern Ireland resulted in the recovery of £100,000 in cash and 187 kg of cannabis.



CASE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL ARRESTS

In August 2020, as part of a Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force Operation, judicial authorities and police from the UK, Lithuania and Ireland, with support from Eurojust and Europol, conducted a joint search and arrest operation targeting an international OCG. In total 18 arrests were made (ten from Lithuania; four from Republic of Ireland and four from Northern Ireland). 65 searches were completed between Lithuania, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. €210,000 and £2,600 in cash and various assets were seized with an estimated overall value of €700,000.

CASE STUDY

COCAINE FACTORY IN COOKSTOWN

In October 2020, a property was searched in the Cookstown area and a cocaine factory was identified. Approximately £10,000 in cash seized, cocaine with estimated street value of £600,000, herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £4,000, phones and two hydraulic presses. Follow-up searches resulted in the seizure of a high value BMW and approximately £50,000 worth of bouncy castles and other suspected criminal property. All three males were arrested and charged with serious drugs offences.

CASE STUDY

HOLYHEAD £6 MILLION SEIZURE

Seizure of 83 kg cocaine (worth around £6 million at street level) at the Port of Holyhead in October 2020 as part of an NCA/PSNI and Border Force investigation. Border Force officers located the drugs concealed in a lorry load of refrigerated goods and arrested the lorry driver. Further searches were conducted with the support of PSNI and NCA officers later charged the driver, from Derry/Londonderry, with exporting Class A Drugs.

It is thought that the drugs were destined for Northern Ireland where they would have caused significant harm to communities. This seizure will have significantly disrupted and damaged the criminal enterprise. This seizure is one of the largest in recent times.

CASE STUDY

COCAINE INVESTIGATION

In January 2021, an investigation was initiated into an OCG involved in the distribution of Class A drugs which took place in Derry/Londonderry, 3.5 kg of cocaine was seized and one arrest was made. Members of this OCG have been engaged in drug-related criminality over recent years within the mid-Ulster area, which incorporates the importation and distribution of cocaine within Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

COLLABORATIVE WORKING WITH THE WEST MIDLANDS

As part of a proactive operation into the distribution of Class B drugs by an OCG, from January to March 2021, six arrests were made between the PSNI and UK Border Force with 82 kg of cannabis attributed to these offenders. A further seven arrests were carried out in April 2021 with an additional 65 kg of cannabis attributed. £80,000 cash has been seized and liaison with West Midlands colleagues resulted in two further arrests and £30,000 cash seized in their jurisdiction. Since the inception of the operation in 2018 to date, a total of 80 people have been arrested, 1,043 kg of cannabis and 1.5 kg of cocaine recovered and a total of £834,000 cash seized.

CASE STUDY

HERBAL CANNABIS SEIZED AT LARNE SEA PORT

In March 2021, as part of an investigation into OCGs who exploit the haulage industry, an offensive weapon and 34.4 kg of suspected herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £510,000 was seized from an HGV at Larne Sea Port. During follow-up searches approximately £3,000 and €3,000 have been seized. A 37 year old male has been charged and remanded.



CASE STUDY

LARGE DRUG SEIZURE IN BELGIUM, DESTINED FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

In March 2021, as part of an ongoing PSNI led operation, 37 kg of cocaine was recovered from a vehicle parked in Ostend, Belgium, which is believed to have been bound for importation into Northern Ireland. Two males were arrested in relation to drug offences and a subsequent search of their vehicle revealed another hide, where passports and documentation were located. This is the largest drugs seizure destined for Northern Ireland and directly linked to an OCG. The two males are currently subject to enquiries and there is ongoing cross jurisdictional work with Belgium.



CASE STUDY

DIAZEPAM SEIZURE

90,000 Diazepam tablets were detected at a fast parcel depot. The seizure was referred to the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit who arrested two people and seized £2,000 cash. A further 50,000 tablets were detected in follow-up searches. The street value is approximately £140,000.



CASE STUDY

COCAINE SEIZURE AT BELFAST DOCKS

As part of a multi-agency Organised Crime Task Force operation, Border Force officers, working alongside the NCA, the PSNI Organised Crime Unit and Harbour Police, seized 20 kg of cocaine with an estimated street value of £2 million at Belfast Docks.

The haul was discovered in a professionally constructed metal fuel tank within the load. The box van had arrived from Birkenhead. The driver was arrested and later charged with drugs offences. Further arrests were also made in the Birmingham area in connection with the find.



CASE STUDY

ILLICIT PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES

Border Force continues to work alongside the PSNI and the Medicines Regulatory Group on imports of illicit prescription medicine, making referrals for further investigation where appropriate. The majority of seizures are made from China and India and suspected to be counterfeit.



CASE STUDY

COCAINE SEIZURE AT A PARCEL DEPOT

2.3 kg of cocaine was detected by Border Force officers at a parcel depot. Two large brown taped blocks were concealed within a Bran Flakes box. The PSNI's Organised Crime Unit arrested two persons in connection with the find. A small cannabis factory was also located in follow-up searches the street value is approximately £150,000.

CASE STUDY

DRUGS CONCEALED WITHIN JIGSAW PUZZLES

Nearly 19 kg of various drugs were seized concealed within jigsaw puzzles. Seizures included cocaine, cannabis, ketamine and amphetamine. Referrals were made to the NCA and the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) for further investigation. Four arrests were made in connection with the seizures.



CASE STUDY

HERBAL CANNABIS SEIZURE

More than 38 kg of herbal cannabis was detected by Border Force Officers at a fast parcel depot. The seizure was referred to the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit who arrested five people and seized a further 22 kg of cannabis at a property. Further arrests were also made in the Midlands area of England in connection with the haul. The street value is approximately £600,000.

Border Force continues to work closely with the PSNI Organised Crime Unit on referrals of cannabis detected at postal depots. Seizures made by Border Force often lead to wider criminal investigations. Partner agencies working collaboratively together have been successful in disrupting and frustrating OCGs in the import and supply of cannabis into Northern Ireland.



CASE STUDY

CLASS B DRUGS FOUND IN NEWRY

In March 2021 the PSNI carried out a proactive search at a business address in Newry. An articulated curtain sider lorry was searched and sophisticated purpose-built hides inside pallets of ceramic tiles were found in 24 pallets with 763 bags of suspected herbal cannabis located. This weighed approximately 916 kg with an estimated street value of £13.74 million. This is the largest Class B drug seizure in Northern Ireland to date. A 34 year old male was arrested and subsequently charged for a number of drug-related offences including Importation of Class B drugs and possession of Class B with intent to supply.

CASE STUDY

CANNABIS INFUSED SWEETS

Border Force has seen an increase in cannabis-infused sweets being imported into Northern Ireland. The packaging is brightly coloured with cartoon pictures giving the appearance of a normal packet of sweets. This kind of packaging would be attractive to a child, resulting in dangerous consequences if consumed.

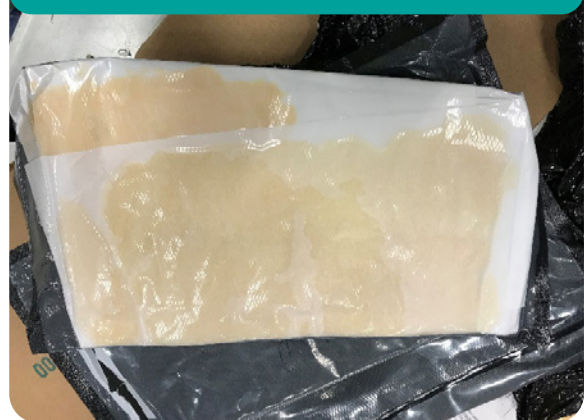


CASE STUDY

CANNABIS SHATTER

Cannabis Shatter is Butane Hash Oil that has gone through a vacuuming process in an oven, leaving a glass-like extract that hardens to give the appearance of cooled caramel or honeycomb. This is then broken up into small shards and smoked. Cannabis shatter can be more potent than cannabis in its traditional form and there is evidence that it can cause long lasting psychiatric problems, anxiety and paranoia.

Border Force has seen a few examples of imports of Cannabis Shatter through the postal system mainly from the USA. Seizures have been referred to the PSNI for further investigation.



CASE STUDY

BENZOCAINE DETECTIONS (CUTTING AGENT)

Border Force has seen an increase in Benzocaine detections. Benzocaine is a cutting agent that is often mixed with cocaine to 'stretch' it and increases the profits for drug dealers.

Border Force Officers detected 54 kg of Benzocaine that arrived from China and was going to an address in Co Down. Border Force referred the detection to the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) who arrested two people. A quantity of Class A and Class B drugs, as well as cash were also seized during subsequent house searches.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you see or suspect drug dealing in your area help stop it:

- Report it to the police tel: 101
- Via the PSNI website www.psni.police.uk/makeareport
- Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel : **0800 555 111**
- www.talktofrank.com/news/spiking

Your local policing team is operating 'Silent Guardian' project aimed at tackling drug dealing in your area. Find out more about how you can stop it at: www.psni.police.uk/crime/drugs/silent-guardian/

2.3 MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THE THREAT

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that incorporates both the offence of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and the offence of human trafficking. Victims are often afraid, or unable to report their ordeal, due to language barriers or because they are held captive. Modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) is an extremely lucrative criminal activity and is assessed to be the fastest growing international crime. It can take many forms and is not always immediately obvious, often referred to as a crime hidden in plain sight. While it can be difficult to quantify the true scale of MSHT, it is happening in Northern Ireland. The main driver of MSHT offending is the pursuit of profit by coercing victims into some form of exploitation.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK-wide framework for identifying and referring potential victims of MSHT and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The number of MSHT offences and the number of potential victims identified through the NRM increased during 2020/21. The number of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland increased by 35% on the 2019/20 referral figures, from 111 in 2019/20 to 150 referrals in the 2020/21 financial year.

Whilst an increase in the number of NRM referrals could be interpreted as indicating an increase in the scale of modern slavery/human trafficking, it could be due to higher levels of awareness leading to increased identification of victims and reporting of suspected cases.

Victims of modern slavery are often afraid or unable to report their ordeal.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The PSNI's entire approach to modern slavery/human trafficking is victim centred, which prioritises the need to identify, locate and recover any potential victims of trafficking (PVoT) and offer them police help and support in line with current legislation. The PSNI also strive to tackle the Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) involved and detain or detect people involved in the trafficking of people.

In 2020/2021, PSNI's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) further improved its capabilities. The unit consists of 16 officers, at Detective Chief Inspector, Detective Inspector, Detective Sergeant and Detective Constable levels. In addition, the District Policing Command is committed to providing three uniform officers on a year-long secondment to the MSHTU. A Home Office Criminal Financial Investigator (CFI) is also embedded in the team. Their role includes representing CFI within the PSNI, sharing best practice, identifying opportunities to share intelligence and contributing to investigations. The officer also participates in internal and external training. This increase in numbers will also increase the capacity of MSHTU to conduct pro-active investigations which will ensure Northern Ireland is not seen as an easy option by OCGs operating within and outside the jurisdiction.

The PSNI has continued to run training courses for detectives on the subject of MSHT. The nationally recognised College of Policing accredited Modern Slavery/ Human Trafficking Specialist Investigators training course has been attended by police officers from various departments within the PSNI during 2020/2021. A total of three, (week-long) courses took place with support from the PSNI Investigative Training Department and other partner organisations. The PSNI further increased its pool of nationally accredited trained officers in all areas of Northern Ireland. The PSNI now has in excess of 50 officers who have successfully completed this training.



The photograph above shows members of the MSHTU team on a training exercise.

The PSNI has also developed a new updated online learning module on MSHT. To date in excess of 5,000 police officers and staff have completed online training packages on this topic.

Detectives from the MSHTU, in some cases alongside DoJ, have also delivered training to a number of public and private sector groups over this reporting period including Women's Aid, Seafarers Mission, Public Protection Advisory Group and many other NGOs and charities. MSHTU detectives have also attended conferences and seminars organised by and in conjunction with a number of partner agencies including the National Police Chief's Council, GRETA (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings), EU Project Connexions and the Anti-Slavery Commissioner. IBM, the American owned multi-national technology company was represented at a Zoom seminar regarding anti trafficking software systems.

These training events and engagements strengthen links with partner agencies, NGOs and private sector businesses which in turn increases the overall level of skills, knowledge and contacts in areas that can be very relevant to investigating MSHT offences.

Partnership with An Garda Síochána

PSNI MSHTU continues to work closely with the An Garda Síochána (AGS) Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit and the AGS Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit, which focuses on targeting organised prostitution and associated offences.

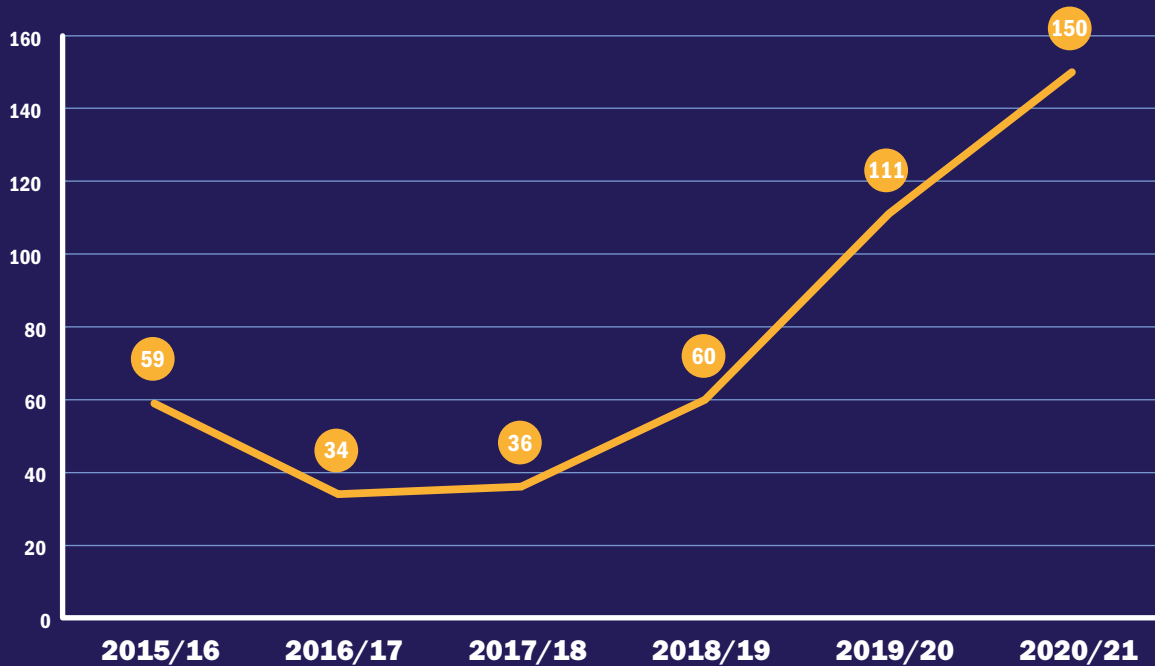
Modern Slavery is a key priority for the Joint Agency Task Force. PSNI and AGS work in partnership with each other and other agencies to assess emerging threats and trends north and south of the border. This co-operation assists in progressing investigations and in ensuring the continued safety and welfare of potential victims.

Representatives from PSNI and AGS had intended to carry out an Exchange Programme in 2020/21, so that both organisations continue to learn from the different practices adopted in response to MSHT. Due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions imposed, this was not possible during this reporting period, but it will be a priority for PSNI and AGS when circumstances permit.

In conjunction with the Garda National Protective Services Bureau, through the Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force, the PSNI's MSHTU issued safeguarding messages in a number of languages to sex workers still advertising during the pandemic. The messages offered help and support if required and provided dedicated phone lines that could be contacted if any assistance was required.

There have been various responses to the SMS messages. In one case, a female escort working in London contacted the dedicated phone lines provided by AGS seeking assistance in relation to a crime. Through joint co-operation between AGS and the PSNI, a point of contact within the Metropolitan Police in London was established for the potential victim.

NRM REFERRALS



RESULTS

The graph shows the continued increase in NRM referrals in recent years.

The total number of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland increased by 35% on the 2019/20 referral figures, from 111 in 2019/20 to 150 referrals in the 2020/21 financial year. Of the 150 referrals, 45 were female and 105 were male. Labour exploitation was the most commonly referred exploitation type in Northern Ireland followed by sexual exploitation.

Adult Services Websites (ASW) remain a key enabler for sexual exploitation, again showing the ever-increasing scale of the digital footprint across most organised crime types in Northern Ireland.

Of those 150 potential victims referred:

- 87 were in relation to Labour Exploitation
- 15 were in relation to Domestic Servitude
- 22 were in relation to Sexual Exploitation
- 7 were in relation to Securing Services (where the person has been subjected to force, threats, abduction, coercion, fraud or deception), and
- 19 were recorded as unknown.

Of the 150 referrals to the NRM, the potential victims of trafficking were from 17 different nationalities.

Total NRM figures are a combination of potential victims who are suspected to have been exploited either in Northern Ireland or overseas. Of the 150 potential victims referred during 2020/21, 37 claimed that the exploitation occurred within Northern Ireland while the remaining 113 involved claims of exploitation occurring in other countries throughout the world. This is compared to 32 potential victims exploited in Northern Ireland during 2019/20 with the remaining 79 referrals involving exploitation overseas.

During 2020/21 the PSNI MSHTU:

- Conducted 133 screening assessments (a process to safeguard victims through early recognition and subsequent intervention);
- Conducted 5 Warrant Searches and 66 safeguarding visits/non-warrant operations;
- Made 8 arrests for modern slavery/human trafficking and/or related offences;
- Charged 3 persons with modern slavery/human trafficking and/or related offences;

- Reported 1 person to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for modern slavery/human trafficking and /or related offences; and
- Secured 8 convictions for human trafficking related offences and 2 persons were convicted of linked drug offences.

The PSNI is committed to tackling MSHT criminality in whatever way possible. The complex nature of investigations and the difficulties in securing victim engagement with the criminal justice system means that proactive victimless prosecutions may be pursued; these types of investigations are often challenging and lengthy. The PSNI continues to work with partners to seek to disrupt OCGs involved in MSHT and remains committed to securing criminal justice outcomes wherever possible.

The following are some anonymised examples of investigations undertaken in the reporting period that demonstrate the different types of investigation undertaken and the outcomes achieved.

CASE STUDY

ROMANIAN MALES INVOLVED IN CONTROLLING PROSTITUTION

This was a proactive investigation into modern slavery/human trafficking for sexual exploitation that commenced in 2018. Extensive efforts from the investigation team led to the arrest of two Romanian males in 2019 for a number of offences including human trafficking, controlling prostitution for gain and money laundering. Whilst still on bail the suspects remained under investigation and were again interviewed in 2020, following which they were reported to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). Five sex buyers were also arrested as part of this investigation and following reports to the PPS two have since received cautions. There is also an ongoing Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002 application in respect of £15,000 seized from the suspects.

CASE STUDY

MALE AND FEMALE ARRESTED FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING, MONEY LAUNDERING AND DRUGS OFFENCES

This is a proactive investigation involving the suspected trafficking of a female for sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. It commenced in September 2020 and led to the arrest of a Romanian male and a Romanian female in December 2020 for the offences of human trafficking, controlling prostitution and money laundering as well as drugs offences and assault. Whilst both parties remain on bail for the trafficking related criminality, they admitted possession of a Class A drug (cocaine) for which they were charged. They pleaded guilty to this offence in court and were both given fines. This investigation is a further example of the close co-operation between the PSNI and AGS. During the course of the investigation the potential victim of trafficking was left at Dublin Airport in a vulnerable state. As a result of concerns for the young victim, AGS made contact with PSNI and went on to conduct enquiries on behalf of the PSNI. Joint co-operation between the PSNI and AGS has led to the early intervention/arrest and disruption of these suspects' criminal activities on the island of Ireland.

CASE STUDY

DISRUPTION

In September 2020, MSHTU received a report of five Eastern European nationals claiming to have been brought from Germany to Northern Ireland to work in apple orchards. They had been in Northern Ireland for approximately three weeks and had not received any pay. They were living in very poor conditions and said they had no money for food. There was also an allegation that they had been threatened with violence if they refused to work. A reception centre was set up in Lurgan Town Hall. Each potential victim was interviewed by officers from MSHTU. All five consented to a referral through the NRM and accessed appropriate support. None of the potential victims wished to engage in the criminal justice process but rather elected for repatriation. Follow-up safeguards and information sharing was undertaken to ensure foreign national workers were aware of their rights in relation to pay and conditions.

Operation AIDANT

This national operation involves surges of activity focussing on a particular type of exploitation, in which the PSNI works alongside law enforcement colleagues from other parts of the UK.

This year a series of multi-agency operations involving Border Force and PSNI MSHTU targeted flights at Belfast International and Belfast City Airports in relation to human trafficking and modern slavery. Several referrals were made to the PSNI for further investigation.

During the reporting period there were several weeks of intense focus on labour exploitation and the impact Covid-19 has had on workers within industries such as agriculture and carwashes. Examples of some of the activities include:

- In June/July 2020 along with GLAA (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority) representatives, MSHTU visited farms and orchards. Eleven people were screened. The visits highlighted to these industries that both PSNI and GLAA are committed to tackling modern slavery/human trafficking criminality by working together. The DoJ in consultation with the PSNI, MSHTU and the GLAA published an article in Farming Life⁸ highlighting the risks of Labour Exploitation and Modern Slavery during the pandemic.
- September 2020 – MSHTU officers and GLAA officers conducted joint safeguarding visits in relation to shellfish gathering.
- September 2020 - MSHTU officers attended Belfast City Airport and conducted a joint safeguarding operation at Passport Control with UK Border Force Officers over a three day period. Again the focus was labour exploitation. Officers spoke to passengers arriving into the UK from a number of flights.
- Throughout 2020, MSHTU also conducted safeguarding visits at Belfast Sea Port, targeting visiting cargo ships. No signs of trafficking were encountered but this pro-active operation continues to reassure the visiting crews that Northern Ireland is a safe location with a zero tolerance to labour exploitation.
- Modern Slavery Day in October 2020 also provided an opportunity to raise awareness at Belfast City Airport.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) published its first in-depth assessment of how the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland deals with modern slavery and human trafficking in October 2020.

The inspection report examined the work carried out by the PSNI, DOJ, Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland (PPS) to investigate and prosecute cases of modern slavery and human trafficking and how organisations engaged with victims.

This report made three strategic and eight operational recommendations as well as areas for improvement aimed at better understanding the nature and

⁸ See: <https://www.farminglife.com/country-and-farming/be-aware-signs-slavery-during-fruit-picking-season-2910292?amp>

scale of modern slavery and human trafficking and developing a more effective legislative and strategic response. This includes a revised police strategic analysis to inform future potential investigative demands and victim support needs.

The Department of Justice and MSHTU continue to progress the recommendations in the CJINI report⁹.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

During the periods of lockdown, Adult Service Website (ASW) adverts reduced considerably in comparison to pre-Covid-19 numbers. The ASWs were encouraging the use of webcams and phone calls rather than face to face contact between clients and escorts. In the period following the first lockdown the number of adverts began to increase and face to face contact between escorts and clients also increased. During these lockdown periods there was also a reduction in demand for the services of victims in labour sectors such as car washes, nail bars and restaurants which for the most part had been closed. In spite of this and the affect Covid-19 has had on MSHTU operationally, 2020/2021 has seen only a slight decrease in screening assessments, and an increase in NRM referrals in comparison with 2019/2020.

THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE - A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

The Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy for 2021/22 was published in May 2021 with the overall aim to equip Northern Ireland to identify and eradicate these crimes. It is the fourth strategy since bespoke legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2015, and represents a significant body of work. Progress against this Strategy is monitored by the OCTF Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking Sub Group. Through the Department of Justice Non-Governmental Organisations Engagement Group, partners from civil society also help to inform and deliver the strategic response.

The Strategy sets out the key priorities and activities for the Department and its partners under three strands: pursuing offenders; protecting victims; and preventing these crimes from happening in the first place.

Transparency in Supply Chains (TISC)

It is incumbent on us all to make responsible choices that support a safe environment for everyone. The Department has published the outcome of the consultation on measures to improve accountability in supply chains which ran between February and May 2021. The proposals would make the existing reporting requirements on commercial organisations in scope (£36m turnover) more rigorous and extend these to public sector organisations in Northern Ireland for the first time.

Legislative Changes

The Department of Justice is taking forward proposed changes to the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2015 through the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill.

The first change is to extend statutory assistance and support to adult potential victims of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour where there is no element of trafficking. Putting this support on a legislative footing reflects existing practice. It will also provide reassurance of the Department's commitment to assisting those who have been impacted by all forms of modern slavery/human trafficking, whether or not there has been an element of trafficking.

The second proposed change is to move from an annual strategy to the publication of a strategy every three years. A three year strategic planning cycle will allow for a longer term vision for the protection and support of victims and the prosecution of traffickers. It will also give the Department and its partners the opportunity to address a range of issues on a more comprehensive, long term basis.

⁹ <http://www.cjini.org/getattachment/df690ef3-5352-457e-bbeb-ea2957b531b0/report.aspx>

FORWARD LOOK

The Department is working closely with operational partners and support services to address the issues raised in recent reports, including by the Criminal Justice Inspection NI, and by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner¹⁰. Scoping work has begun in relation to the introduction of Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders and the commencement of provisions to improve data collection about potential victims.

Subject to Assembly approval to the legislative changes outlined above, the Department will develop a new three year strategy in conjunction with statutory and NGO partners. This is a dynamic policy area and the response needs to adapt as understanding grows of this complex and abusive form of criminality.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you suspect that someone is a victim, please call:

999 in case of an emergency

101 about general situations

Via the PSNI website

www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport

Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel:

0800 555 111

0800 0121 700 for Modern Slavery Helpline

Do you know about the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority? (www.gla.gov.uk)

- If you are an employment agency, labour provider or gangmaster who provides workers to the sectors listed below you will need a GLAA licence:
 - Agriculture;
 - Horticulture;
 - Shellfish gathering; and
 - Any associated processing and packaging

Need business advice on keeping your supply chains free of modern slavery? Learn more at:

www.stronger2gether.org

2.4 ORGANISED IMMIGRATION CRIME

THE THREAT

Various OCTF partners are working to disrupt organised crime involving the movement of people, goods and money in and out of Northern Ireland. Immigration Enforcement, a Directorate of the Home Office, is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders, prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime and driving cross-sector action to increase compliance with immigration law.

Immigration Enforcement's mission is to prevent illegal immigration and reduce the harm it causes. In Northern Ireland, Immigration Enforcement conducts operations against a range of immigration crimes, such as document fraud, sham marriages, and offences connected to illegal working. It also has an important role to play in preventing abuse of the Common Travel Area (CTA).

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

During 2020/21, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, enforcement activities with OCTF partners has strengthened Northern Ireland's capacity to tackle immigration-related crime and resulted in convictions of serious criminals.

Immigration Enforcement uses all available powers to intercept, arrest and/or prosecute immigration offenders, including foreign national criminals seeking to circumvent UK immigration controls. Criminal Investigators are embedded into the PSNI's Organised Crime Team and the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team to assist with joint investigations. Immigration Enforcement also works closely with criminal investigators from the Irish authorities on cross border investigations into organised CTA abuse, facilitation and the production and supply of false documentation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You have the information needed to improve the intelligence picture, and it couldn't be easier to tell us what you know
www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime

CASE STUDIES

Between September 2020 and December 2020, a number of Romanian nationals, who had entered the UK illegally either across the land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland or en route to Scotland, were intercepted.

They were found to have previously served prison sentences for offences including robbery, soliciting a prostitute and firearms crimes. In all cases the individuals were removed from the UK and deported to Romania.

In addition, a Romanian national, who was illegally in the UK in breach of their UK Deportation Order, was prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach, alongside theft and common assault charges and received an 8-month prison sentence.

FORWARD LOOK

In the coming year, Immigration Enforcement will continue to extend its reach, making it increasingly difficult for people to live or stay in Northern Ireland illegally and for criminals to commit immigration-related crime.

Immigration Enforcement will continue to intervene upstream through its overseas networks to disrupt organised criminals abroad and provide intelligence to the visa issuing process to prevent inadmissible passengers from travelling to the UK. It will continue to strengthen its relationship with the Republic of Ireland to ensure that individuals who would not be admissible to either jurisdiction are unable to travel to the CTA.

Immigration Enforcement will build on its work with Northern Ireland's OCTF partners and the Republic of Ireland's law enforcement agencies to target foreign national offenders and organised immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement will continue to play its part in the cross border organised crime structures and continue its work with An Garda Síochána and UK Border Force in conducting intensification campaigns to tackle cross border and wider immigration crime.

2.5 BORDER CRIME

THE THREAT

The UK border is a primary defence against a range of threats but it also has a number of vulnerabilities that are known to and targeted by those who seek to undermine the controls in place, either for criminal gain, illegal migration or terrorist activity.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Organised crime groups (OCGs) attempt to use every means possible to exploit border vulnerabilities and smuggle criminal commodities into Northern Ireland. They actively seek any gaps and weaknesses in our ports, airports and transportation services as well as individuals who are willing to facilitate crime through our borders.

Safeguarding at the border

Frontline staff in Border Force are provided with training in identifying potential victims of modern slavery, and guidance issued to staff sets out indicators of modern slavery, including forced labour. In addition, Border Force also has a network of specially trained Safeguarding and Modern Slavery (SAMS) teams who receive classroom training focussing on the knowledge and skills needed for this area.

Working with OCTF partners

During the past year Border Force has worked alongside partner agencies in planned and reactive operational activity. Collaborative working has been key in frustrating and disrupting OCGs throughout the year.

BORDER FORCE RESULTS

While mentioned under the specific crime types in this report it is worth noting the overall Border Force results in 2020/21.

Border Force seizures:

- 25.4 kg of Class A drugs
- 375 kg of cannabis
- 2,890 kg of tobacco (2.89 tonnes)
- 1.6 million cigarettes
- 265,000 illicit prescription tablets
- 120 kg of Benzocaine
- 22,000 counterfeit items
- £2,000 and €10,000 in cash

CASE STUDY

TOBACCO SEIZURE

2.34 tons of tobacco was detected at Belfast Docks after the examination of a container arriving from the Netherlands was examined. Nine pallets within the load contained the tobacco which was manifested as "Auto Filters". The revenue evaded is approx. £700,000 and the seizure was passed to HMRC for further investigation.

CASE STUDY

CIGARETTE SEIZURES

Nearly 500,000 cigarettes were detected in various fast parcels during a two week pre-Christmas clampdown on the illicit movement of goods through the postal system. The goods arrived from various countries with many wrapped in Christmas paper. Border Force referred the seizures to HMRC for further investigation.



CASE STUDY

CIGARETTE AND TOBACCO SEIZURES AT BELFAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Over a six week period in late summer and autumn, nearly 500,000 cigarettes and a quarter ton of tobacco were seized from flights at Belfast International Airport. The seizures were mainly from Turkish and Spanish flights.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, air travel has been limited. However, opportunist smugglers and OCGs used the limited flights to import illicit tobacco products for sale on the black market. Referrals were made to HMRC for further investigation.



CASE STUDY

CASH SEIZURE AT BELFAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Border Force officers at Belfast International Airport detected €10,000 in the hand baggage of a Polish national travelling outbound to Spain. The passenger's account for carrying the cash was not plausible and therefore the detection was referred to the NCA who adopted the seizure for further investigation. The cash was seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.



CASE STUDY

CASH BEING EXPORTED TO CHINA

During checks on outbound parcel movements, Border Force officers detected £2,000 in cash that was being exported to China. The parcel was described as containing postcards. The money was seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and referred to the NCA for further investigation.

CASE STUDY

HIGH VALUE ELECTRICAL GOODS SEIZED

A consignment of 120 boxes of high value electrical goods was detected after arriving from China and Hong Kong. Boxes consisted of mainly mobile phones, camera equipment and watches. The goods were grossly under-valued on import. A referral was made to HMRC who discovered a further 30 boxes at a self-storage unit. The goods were valued at approximately £5 million.

EU EXIT

An EU Exit Sub Group of the OCTF was established in 2020 to identify and proactively respond to emerging threats that might arise due to the end of the Transition Period marking the UK's formal exit from the European Union (EU). The Group focused on the potential exploitation of the Common Travel Area (CTA) by OCGs involved in drugs importation and distribution, organised immigration crime, modern slavery/human trafficking, firearms, the importation of tobacco, alcohol and counterfeit goods. This Sub Group has now developed into the Emerging Threats Sub Group.

Since the end of the Transition Period there has been a rise in freight travelling directly to the Republic of Ireland from Continental Europe. Whether OCGs seek to hide their criminal activities amongst this increase in traffic remains to be seen.

Partners work together to tackle this type of criminality, to closely monitor trends as Covid-19 restrictions ease and to conduct robust proactive operations to counter any emerging threats as a consequence of the new political and economic arrangements between the UK and the EU.

FORWARD LOOK

Border Force will continue to engage with partner law enforcement agencies and conduct planned and reactive operational activity to frustrate organised crime and to better understand the implications of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol on serious and organised criminality.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have any information regarding the smuggling of goods or people, please contact:

CrimeStoppers on 0800 555111

Customs hotline on 0800 595000

2.6 ECONOMIC CRIME

THE THREAT

Financial gain remains the principal driver of organised criminality, with OCGs seeking to generate and benefit from income produced through a wide range of illegal enterprises. These illegal enterprises can be wholly within the criminal marketplace, such as the supply of controlled drugs or they can involve exploitation of legal markets, for example through selling illicit goods such as tobacco products, alcohol or counterfeit goods.

Regardless of the illegal means by which the income is generated, there remains a need to legitimise and mask its true source, making money laundering a key factor in almost all organised criminality.

Fraud continues to pose a significant threat to individuals, businesses and the wider economy. The threat associated with fraud continues to increase with the nature of offending becoming increasingly enabled by the use of modern technology. Modern technological advances have reshaped the fraud landscape creating greater opportunities for fraudsters, whilst simultaneously making fraud investigation more complex and introducing cross-jurisdictional challenges.

Offenders have also exploited the Covid-19 situation, using various pandemic-themed issues to target and defraud individuals during a particularly vulnerable time.

Official PSNI statistics show 5,285 recorded fraud offences from April 2020 to March 2021, compared with 4,245 in the previous financial year. This shows that fraud offences have increased following an initial reduction in fraud levels in the first phase of lockdown from April 2020 to June 2020.

Fraud continues to pose a significant threat to individuals, businesses and the wider economy.

The following fraud types continue to feature heavily in the Northern Ireland fraud landscape:

- **Telephone & Email Fraud** – These are a cyclical problem that appear to affect those most vulnerable in our society, in particular the elderly. The victim receives unsolicited contact from a person purporting to be from an official organisation, for example HMRC or PSNI. This type of contact frightens the victim into believing that they owe the organisation money and if it is not paid urgently they will be subject to arrest. The victim normally pays the fraudster using iTunes vouchers, again relying on the victim's lack of knowledge. Recent variations of this fraud have seen elderly individuals contacted by someone claiming to be a police officer who persuades the victim to leave cash or valuable jewellery in an envelope outside their door, which is then subsequently collected and stolen.
- **Bank Security Department Frauds** – The victim is contacted by the fraudster pretending to be their bank or a police officer investigating bank employees. They may provide information about the account which tricks the victim into believing they are actually speaking to their bank. The victim is told that they are the victim of fraud and need to move their money to a “safe account” quickly, but this account is actually a “mule” account controlled by the fraudster.
- **Sextortion** - these scams are a type of phishing attack whereby people are coerced into paying a ransom, usually by means of a virtual currency, because they have been threatened with sharing video of themselves visiting adult websites or engaged in a sexual act. Many offenders involved in these offences are located overseas which creates barriers to investigations.
- **Invoice Redirection** – this remains a growing trend and typically entails contact with a victim via email (which appears to be from a trusted source) asking for payment to go to a new bank account. This is affecting all types of business. The email can either imitate a trusted source or may involve the trusted source having their email system compromised. The money is then disbursed via a series of “mule” accounts, typically located in another jurisdiction which hinders the investigation.

- **Investment and Pension Fraud** - the threat posed by investment scammers continues to grow across the UK, with the most commonly reported scams involving opportunities for victims to invest in shares, bonds or cryptocurrencies. Scammers traditionally make unexpected contact with the victim and use tactics such as time pressure, fake social proof and outline unrealistic returns to encourage victims to transfer funds.

Money Laundering

Money laundering is the process by which the proceeds of crime are converted into assets which appear to have a legitimate origin, so that they can be retained permanently or recycled into further criminal enterprises. Money laundering is a key enabler of serious and organised crime. In acknowledging the importance of the need to combat this type of crime and the removal of criminal benefit, PSNI Crime Operations Department have made money laundering a priority. This focus on money laundering has been particularly important as new entrants and technological developments within the legal financing arena have created new and innovative opportunities for criminals to exploit weaknesses and laundering criminal proceeds.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

To combat criminals benefiting from their crimes the PSNI's dedicated Asset Confiscation and Enforcement (ACE) Team, located within the Economic Crime Unit (ECU) in Belfast provide a service throughout the organisation and to partner agencies with the objective of identifying criminal benefit and property and having it removed from the criminals.

Money laundering is a key enabler of serious and organised crime.

RESULTS

The figures below show the PSNI Restraint and Confiscation Orders and POCA Cash Seizures and Forfeitures for the 2020/21 financial year.

	Number	Cash Amount
PSNI Cash Forfeitures	73	£1,024,548
Cash Forfeitures	33	£317,756
Restraint Orders	21	£4,339,732
Confiscation Orders	14	£499,796

See also page 81.

CASE STUDY

MONEY LAUNDERING INVESTIGATION

In March 2021 PSNI ECU launched a money laundering investigation following the detection of a 29 year old male and 33 year old female in Belfast in possession of cannabis worth £10,000 and cash. Follow-up searches discovered a further £80,000. As a result of liaison with HMRC and financial institutions, a Restraint Order has been successfully applied for under Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002. Assets include bank accounts containing £24,000, cash of £84,000 and vehicles valued at £18,000.

CASE STUDY

FRAUD TARGETING THE ELDERLY

Since January 2020 the ECU has been investigating a series of more than 300 incidents of fraud where the suspects target the elderly, alleging to be police officers and requesting that money or jewellery is left outside their house for safe keeping; it is subsequently stolen. During the past year disruption to this OCG has been achieved through 14 searches and 10 suspects arrested. Partnership work is ongoing with financial institutions to detect this type of crime and also with other agencies such as the Commissioner for Older People, Social Services and Care Providers to increase crime prevention and public awareness.

CASE STUDY

£0.5 MILLION FRAUD

An OCG was identified in March 2018 following a report from one of the banking institutions of a fraud amounting to approximately £500,000. The fraud involved the suspect ringing the bank and gaining enough information to access the bank accounts of a company based in County Wicklow. 32 beneficiaries were identified. This is a protracted investigation, involving liaison with An Garda Síochána and financial institutions. In January 2021 eight files were submitted to the PPS and in February 2021 and March 2021 five suspects were interviewed in relation to the investigation which has further disrupted their activity.

CASE STUDY

£215 MILLION LAUNDERED OVER SIX YEAR PERIOD ACROSS 60 COMPANIES

ECU launched a standalone money laundering investigation in 2018 which focussed on the financial criminal activity of a known nominal operating across the UK and the Republic of Ireland and on an international level. This has involved collaborative working with both the NCA and An Garda Síochána. It has been established that there has been money laundering over a six year period totalling £215 million through over 60 companies. £12 million has been laundered through EU Member States, of which around £1.4 million has been laundered in the Republic of Ireland. A restraining order is in place with numerous properties restrained across the UK. 18 suspects have been arrested and interviewed. In December 2020, 82 production orders were granted and in early 2021 60 of the orders were executed across GB and 22 in Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

MONEY LAUNDERING OFFENCES AND FOOD HYGIENE BREACHES

In January 2020 the ECU worked closely with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency (NIEA) conducting a series of searches in County Tyrone and in Scotland in relation to reports of mass poaching of deer. It was believed that a 45 year old male was supplying poached deer to food suppliers and making a monetary gain. A file is currently with the PPS in relation to money laundering offences. In addition, the suspect's illegal activity has been further disrupted by an investigation by the FSA which resulted in the suspect receiving a substantial fine for offences under food hygiene regulations.

CASE STUDY

DEFRAUDING AN ELDERLY, VULNERABLE MAN

In May 2020 the ECU became aware of the potential financial abuse of a 73 year old male with mental health issues who would be considered vulnerable. Following a thorough investigation the suspect, a young male, was interviewed and charged with Fraud by Abuse of Position, Fraud by False Representation and Money Laundering offences, which were committed between July 2019 and May 2020. The criminal benefit was calculated to be approximately £60,000. The defendant appeared in court in January 2021 following which a full file was submitted to the PPS. The Suspicious Activity Report (SAR)¹¹ stopped the financial abuse. Detectives liaised with the Department of Health and other agencies which has improved the elderly man's quality of life immensely.

CASE STUDY

BENEFIT FRAUD

Detectives in the ECU have worked in partnership with Social Services Agency (SSA) following a report of benefit fraud. Following ongoing liaison with SSA and financial institutions two suspects were identified and were arrested and charged with a total of nine offences.

CIVIL RECOVERY

The NCA has unique powers to pursue serious and organised criminals through combining both the powers under Part 5 (Civil) and Part 6 (Tax) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to fundamentally impact on the wealth and status of criminals who operate at the high end of high risk.

In total, the NCA Asset Denial Team within the Paramilitary Crime Task Force is progressing seven live investigations into circa. £1.8m of assets / tax liabilities. At present, around £200,000 of these assets are restrained under Property Freezing Orders.

CASE STUDY

RECOVERY ORDER FOR NORTH BELFAST PROPERTY

In November 2020, under Operation PULASAN, NCA obtained a Recovery Order by consent in respect of seven residential apartments and five commercial units in the North Belfast area. The total value of the property is estimated at £650,000. The Defendant in this case is associated with historic drugs offences, fraud and money laundering. The defendant has now been deprived of the monthly rental income of these properties, which amounts to c. £6,000 per calendar month.

¹¹ Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) alert law enforcement to potential instances of money. SARs are made by financial institutions and other professionals such as solicitors, accountants and estate agents and are a vital source of information on economic crime.

FORWARD LOOK

The additional powers in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 will enhance existing powers and tools to tackle criminal finances and associated serious organised crime in Northern Ireland.

To further enhance, develop and support the work of the PSNI's Economic Crime Unit the staff and officers within the team continue to work collaboratively with partner agencies and internal policing teams to maximise seizure and restraint of criminal assets.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Report concerns or suspected economic criminal activity to:

- Police tel: 101
- Via the PSNI website
www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport
- Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel: **0800 555 111**

2.7 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME (IPC)

THE THREAT

Intellectual Property Crime (IPC) represents a range of threats, including consumer safety, community harm, economic harm as well as financial loss.

The sale of counterfeit and illicit goods may help to fuel further harm to communities and individuals through other forms of criminality such as drug trafficking. This is because those involved in IPC are often linked to various other forms of serious organised crime.

The scale and distribution of fake/illicit goods continues to grow through the use of the internet, with goods frequently advertised for sale via social media, auction sites and online classifieds. There are also thousands of websites dedicated to the sale of counterfeit goods. Whilst these websites often give the impression of being secure and trustworthy, using these sites and providing personal and banking details means that consumers are leaving themselves open to becoming victims of identity fraud or having their devices compromised by malicious software and potentially used for further criminality.

The most common types of counterfeit goods regularly seized in Northern Ireland include clothing, alcohol, tobacco, cosmetics, sunglasses, handbags, footwear, DVDs, CDs and electrical items.

The issue of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) remains one of the main IPC concerns in Northern Ireland. Rising costs of subscription TV and streaming services are encouraging more people to turn to illegal services. Using services can place individuals at high risk of being hacked and having their details stolen and as such this may result in higher levels of fraud and online crime.

As with many other crime types, offenders have also exploited all possible criminal opportunities linked to Covid-19, particularly in the form of counterfeit PPE and Covid-19 testing kits. Going forward, as Covid-19 restrictions ease, it is possible there may be an increase in the availability and use of counterfeit vaccination certificates.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The OCTF Intellectual Property Crime Sub Group has continued to meet virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. Relationships between the various partners have strengthened, with a Memorandum of Understanding on information sharing being signed between Philip Morris Ltd and the PSNI in order to streamline the flow of information on illicit activity in Northern Ireland and to enhance investigative action and opportunities.

With the impact of Covid-19 on working practices, enforcement has seen a decline over this period. However, within the PSNI the formation of an internal email system for IPC advice has resulted in greater engagement between detectives and uniform colleagues uncovering suspected illicit products through routine stop and searches. This is followed-up by contact with partners providing expert evidence on whether items are indeed counterfeit/illicit.

Whilst the day to day enforcement has seen a decline, through a lack of trading establishments being open for business, several high value operations are underway with the impact on partners being in the millions of pounds of commercial loss. Work is ongoing with law enforcement and civil partners.

In the year ahead, the PSNI will be running a number of operations and it is envisaged the routine enforcement will increase as public footfall on the high street grows. Also, as other means of trading are exploited by criminals, police will continue to increase their engagement with OCTF partners to tackle this substantially lucrative industry funding criminality.

**Buying illicit goods
online leaves
consumers vulnerable
to identity fraud.**

RESULTS

Border Force officers have seized substantial amounts of counterfeit goods that have been imported into Northern Ireland in the last year. Goods included trainers, t-shirts, football tops, phones, chargers, football face masks and car hub caps. Items are often mis-described and bear no resemblance to what they were supposed to be.

Goods are mainly imported from China. Referrals are made to the rights holder who decides what course of action they wish to take against the importer.



Trading Standards Services

The policy driver behind TSS's enforcement function is the desire to create a "fair trading environment" in which consumers can buy goods and services with confidence and lawful businesses are protected from unfair competition and have the opportunity to thrive.

TSS tackles businesses that trade unfairly and advises members of the public on their consumer rights. In this way TSS makes its contribution to consumer confidence, business competitiveness and economic recovery.

Doorstep crime is an additional revenue stream for other criminality; it is carried out by callous, unscrupulous OCGs who deliberately prey on the most vulnerable in society.

Doorstep Crime

Doorstep crime (DSC) affects a large volume of consumers across the country and is a priority work area for TSS. This type of crime is often aimed at elderly and vulnerable consumers and cuts across other existing priorities, which include scams and e-crime.

Doorstep crime is considered as being low risk to many criminals and has become attractive to OCGs. It is seen as an additional revenue stream for other criminality; it is carried out by callous, unscrupulous OCGs who deliberately prey on the most vulnerable in society - predominantly older people. Doorstep criminals are mobile, working throughout Northern Ireland, GB and across the border with the Republic of Ireland.

The impact on victims of doorstep crime can be devastating; they can lose trust in those who are close to them, shutting people out of their lives. There is evidence that suggests that some victims never recover from what has happened to them and are no longer able or confident to live alone. In some instances, entire life savings are wiped out to pay for often unnecessary work, leaving the victim penniless and reliant on others or the state for support.

Protecting vulnerable people from doorstep crime is a key priority for TSS. Unfortunately, a huge number of doorstep crime cases go unreported, leaving the path clear for these criminals to devastate and destroy lives.

There is also a detrimental impact on the local economy as doorstep crime draws trade away from genuine local businesses.

CASE STUDY

POOR QUALITY, OVERPRICED HOME IMPROVEMENTS

One consumer paid £67,000 for home improvement work that was carried out to an extremely poor standard and was vastly overpriced. The consumer engaged the trader after reading positive testimonials on a rated professionals' website; however, the reviews seem to be fake. The trader used a false address and ignored repeated requests from the consumer to provide financial redress. An independent report indicates that it would cost £14,500 to fix and repair the work undertaken by the rogue trader.

CASE STUDY

WORK PAID FOR BUT NOT COMPLETED

A consumer was cold called by a trader in June 2020 and agreed a price of £2,400 for painting a house. The trader informed the consumer that his van needed repair work and he couldn't transport workers to do the work until it was repaired. He asked for payment up front to allow him to have the vehicle repaired. The consumer was apprehensive about paying up front but was told by the trader that if they didn't pay, he would increase the cost of the work. Reluctantly, the consumer paid the money in advance. The work was never completed and following assistance and intervention from TSS, the trader returned £1,800 to the consumer in September 2020.

TSS has tackled OCGs involved in doorstep crime in a number of ways, namely:

- A number of TSS prosecutions and joint cases with the PSNI are currently in court in which elderly victims have paid thousands of pounds for work that was not carried out.
- TSS has recently received a significant increase in reports of doorstep crime following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions. Advice has been provided to the consumers affected and investigations have commenced, where necessary.
- TSS works with partner agencies to increase awareness and reduce the impact of doorstep crime while developing preventative actions to disrupt problem traders and reduce consumer detriment.
- Raising public awareness of doorstep crime and participating in national and regional prevention activities, such as the '*Friends Against Scams*'¹² campaign which includes information on doorstep crime.
- TSS liaised with PSNI Crime Prevention officers and financial institutions. A series of online presentations were given to church leaders, neighbourhood watch coordinators and community groups highlighting Covid-19 related scams, including doorstep crime.
- TSS also reproduced the flyer 'Wash your hands of Coronavirus Scams' (created by Friends against Scams) and had it delivered with over 30,000 food parcels that were being distributed to the elderly and those self-isolating. Several thousand flyers were also hand delivered by TSS officers within their local communities where they believed the residents may be more vulnerable to scams and cold callers. PSNI Crime Prevention Officers also distributed leaflets within their relevant districts.

Scams

TSS works to tackle mass marketing scams and disrupt the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. It works in partnership with other agencies and with the National Trading Standards Scams Team to identify and support victims of mass marketing fraud and reach out to all the known scam victims in Northern Ireland who are listed as people that have sent money to scammers.

¹² See: <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/>

In the majority of cases victims have lost thousands of pounds and have been identified as incredibly vulnerable. Despite the restrictions, TSS officers continued to engage with known victims remotely and provide invaluable advice and support to each person as well as investigating the scammers and taking enforcement action, where possible.

TSS remains a member of the Scamwise NI partnership which shares intelligence and helps formulate strategy and policy on protecting vulnerable consumers in NI from being caught out by sophisticated and extremely detrimental scams.

In 2020/21 TSS pro-actively worked to combat mass-marketed scams by regularly issuing warnings advising people to remain vigilant following a rise in reports of scams. The top scams reported to TSS included:

- **PayPal Text Scams** – These texts mimic official messages informing the recipient that someone has logged into their account. They ask the recipient to tap a link to a bogus website which requests login details, supposedly for ‘verification and to secure your PayPal account’. This information is then sent to scammers who may gain access to the PayPal account. Use of online payments has risen as part of the increase in online shopping during the Covid-19 lockdown. This text scam is the latest in similarly themed scam texts, including bogus supermarket delivery texts, fake bank security messages, and phoney Royal Mail shipping fee texts.
- **Free trial subscription trap scams** – Consumers can be enticed by online offers of “free trial” slimming pills, health supplements, teeth whitening kits or beauty products. These scams trap consumers into long-term costly contracts as the terms and conditions are hidden within the small print, with consumers believing they are only entering their card details to pay a small fee for postage and packaging. It is only when checking their bank account that consumers realise they have been charged lump sums or regular payments, with average losses of £135.
- **Mass Marketed Mail Scams** – The victim receives unsolicited mail relating to fake lotteries in which they have to pay fees to receive a prize that never materialises; clairvoyants offer good fortune in return for payment or the purchase of luck charms; and fake charity scams. The victims of these types of scams tend to be older people who may also be vulnerable. The scammers use convincing and persuasive techniques in order to get the victims to part with their cash, which in some instances has amounted to the victim’s life savings. These scams are particularly dangerous and can have devastating effects on people’s lives, causing financial loss, emotional distress, social isolation, a loss of confidence and in some cases physical harm caused by poverty and stress. There are hundreds of people in Northern Ireland who respond regularly to mass marketed mail scams and are likely to be on a list that is shared among scammers and OCGs. Replying to just one scam phone call/text or letter can lead to a person being added to the list and they will be bombarded with more scams. £10 billion is lost every year in the UK to these scams.
- **Cryptocurrency Scams** - Fraudsters will use social media platforms to advertise ‘get rich quick’ investments in cryptocurrencies. The TSS has had an increase in complaints about cryptocurrency scams with victims losing between £500 and £2,000 each. Fraudsters will convince victims to sign up to cryptocurrency investment websites and provide their personal details such as credit card details and driving licences to open a trading account. The victim will then make an initial minimum deposit, after which the fraudster will call them to persuade them to invest again in order to achieve a greater profit. Consumers should avoid uninvited investment offers, especially those over cold calls. No-one should invest without getting independent advice and doing thorough research with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) Register.

- **Phishing scams:** Phishing is where an email apparently from the receiver's bank arrives requesting them to update, validate or confirm details. It is designed to trick people into revealing personal information and passwords so that scammers can access their account. Phishing emails can also include links which infect the victim's computer or device with malware resulting in theft of online account details.
- **Vishing scams:** This is a phone scam where fraudsters impersonate someone from a bank, the police or other legitimate organisation such as a telephone or internet provider. Increasingly, this scam involves the victim being persuaded to transfer their money to a new 'safe' account. Fraudsters can also deceive the victim into transferring money from their own bank account to one which is accessible to the fraudster.

In response TSS has:

- Worked with advertisers to try and stop scammers from posting adverts through take downs.
- Provided evidence and intelligence to the National Trading Standards Scams Team, which has enabled them to undertake investigations and disrupt scams e.g. this has led to the shutting down of PO Boxes, which had been used by scammers.
- Continued participation in the 'Friends Against Scams' initiative rolled out across Northern Ireland.
- Produced a social media video highlighting Covid-related scams for Scams Awareness week.
- Distributing 'Wash your hands of Coronavirus Scams' leaflets via food parcels in partnership with Local Authorities, charities and supermarkets.
- Worked with the NI business community to raise awareness of the 'Businesses Against Scams' initiative - which includes a number of resources that companies can share with their employees which can educate them on a variety of common business related frauds.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Think about the cost – price is usually a good indicator as to whether goods are likely to be counterfeit.

Be wary about buying branded goods particularly online and outside of usual premises.

Many counterfeits are difficult to spot but consumers should look out for poor packaging, bad spelling or printing, photocopied instructions and lack of regulatory markings.

Online photographs of genuine items can be used to promote items but the delivered goods may well be counterfeit.

Report your suspicions to:

PSNI Telephone **101**

Via the PSNI website

www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport

Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel:

0800 555 111

Consumerline Tel **0300 123 62 62**

Trading standards at:

www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service

2.8 ARMED ROBBERY AND EXTORTION

THE THREAT

Cash in Transit (CIT) robberies continue to be an infrequent occurrence in Northern Ireland. This is assessed to be partly due to increased security measures and the continued level of partnership working between CIT companies and law enforcement. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, there was a series of three incidents, two of which occurred on the same day in April 2020. These incidents were more opportunistic in nature rather than anything well organised, resulting in a number of arrests. Towards the latter part of the financial year, there were a further three CIT attacks linked to Organised Crime Groups. Aided by the increased security measures deployed by CIT companies in collaboration with the PSNI, to counter such incidents, several suspects were arrested and subsequently charged in connection with these attacks.

Various 'target hardening' measures have been introduced during 2020/21 with the principal intent of preventing robberies from taking place or when they do, assisting police in quickly apprehending those responsible as well as ensuring that any cash stolen in the robberies is rendered unusable.

The partnerships and close working relationships formed as a result of the OCTF Armed Robbery Sub Group continue to play an important role in crime prevention, reducing the risk of harm and ensuring that services to the community are protected.

ATM gas attacks and Black Box attacks (where holes are drilled into the ATM to gain access to its internal structure) regularly occur throughout mainland UK and the Republic of Ireland but are not experienced to the same level in Northern Ireland.

Extortion

It is assessed that paramilitary groups (both loyalist and republican), or individuals claiming to be from these groups, continue to be actively involved in extortion attempts, particularly the racketeering of small businesses and building sites in towns and cities across Northern Ireland.

It is believed that significant under-reporting continues due to an unwillingness of victims to come forward to police. Online extortion continues to grow, with criminals seeking money by threatening to damage the reputation of an individual or business.

Illegal money lending/loan sharking continues in Northern Ireland; however it is believed that many of these incidents also go unreported to police. The Northern Ireland Executive Programme to Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime has launched a public awareness campaign, which focusses on how paramilitary gangs use illegal money lending as a means to control and exploit vulnerable people.¹³



WHAT YOU CAN DO

The public are asked to remain vigilant around banking instructions, cash-in-transit vehicles and ATM sites.

Any suspicious activity should be reported to the police using the 101 number unless the circumstances justify an emergency call to the 999 system.

Alternatively information may be reported anonymously through to the independent CrimeStoppers charity on Tel **0800 555 111**.

¹³ See: www.endingtheharm.com

2.9 EXCISE EVASION AND TAX FRAUD

THE THREAT

HMRC is the UK tax, payments and customs authority with the purpose of collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services and help families and individuals with targeted financial support.

HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) is responsible for the department's civil and criminal investigations into the most serious fraud and wrongdoing. FIS ensures that HMRC has an effective approach to tackling the most serious tax evasion and fraud.

FIS is home to a wide range of people with a variety of skills and professional backgrounds – including accountants, cybercrime specialists, criminal justice professionals, tax professionals and operational delivery support teams. A range of powers and approaches are used to protect funding for UK public services, investigating the most harmful tax cheats and ensuring nobody is operating outside the law.

FIS works closely with partner agencies locally and across international borders to draw upon and share expertise to tackle organised criminality in Northern Ireland.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Illicit Finance

Money laundering is used by organised criminals to realise their illicit proceeds. HMRC works to prevent this activity as a supervisory body for Money Service Businesses, Accountancy Service Providers, Trust or Company Service Providers, Estate Agency Businesses, Letting Agency Businesses, Art Market Participants, High Value Dealers, Bill Payment Service Providers and IT and Digital Payment Service Providers.

In addition, HMRC pursues money laundering as a law enforcement agency, working in close partnership with other law enforcement agencies including the PSNI, NCA, and Border Force, as well as the private sector through the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT).

Physical cash continues to pose a severe threat due to its anonymity, its ease of access and its lack of an audit trail. Cash is moved across the border primarily for one of two reasons; to realise profits in a foreign jurisdiction or to reinvest that finance in more illicit goods in order to facilitate further frauds. Money Service Businesses (MSBs) are also exploited by OCGs to facilitate the movement of cash, complicate audit trails and obscure the true beneficiaries of funds. Remittance via MSBs of money across borders poses two issues; the dispersal of profits from UK criminal activity overseas, and the return of criminal profits into the UK financial system or used to fund further criminality.

HMRC assess that Covid-19 related travel restrictions have hindered OCGs' movements of cash, but that they have adapted to this. This has included exploiting the financial vulnerability of businesses to launder criminal cash and recruiting members of the public to use their bank accounts as "money mules".

The Economic Crime (EC) Directorate forms an integral part of the HMRC Serious Fraud Strategy. Working closely across the law enforcement community, using specialist expertise and modern technology EC teams put illicit finance at the centre of operations. EC teams tackle the financial aspects of cases that will ultimately deter, disrupt, remove and recover assets from tax fraudsters. Where appropriate the teams have used their substantial insolvency powers to bankrupt those criminals owing large tax debts and to recover taxpayers money from those already made bankrupt.

Self-Assessment Fraud - EC have designed and implemented a bespoke indemnity process to recover proceeds of Self-Assessment (SA) frauds. This is a collaborative approach with the financial sector, facilitated by the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) and sits alongside HMRC's civil and criminal response to SA fraud. Such has been the success of this approach the process has been shared with partner agencies who are considering similar recovery initiatives and projects.

Cryptocurrencies - HMRC has expanded its capabilities in the area of cryptocurrencies, with specialist training and technologies, both within Northern Ireland and nationally. A dedicated EC team has been set-up in recognition of the growing popularity of such investments across all parts of society and their increased use within organised crime and money laundering. Assets have been recovered and realised using new and innovative methodology.

Digital Investigators - HMRC's FIS Northern Ireland Investigators have been at the forefront in fully utilising the Department's digital investigative capability to enhance investigations into organised crime and deliver maximum impact. Some of the key benefits of this new digital expertise are as follows:

- unpacking the web of complex corporate entities used in contrived supply chains to facilitate multi-million pound tax fraud;
- identifying the "controlling parties" in order to direct resource at emerging threats; and
- identifying and mitigating abuse of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) government schemes.

Innovative use of these sophisticated digital tools has facilitated real-time scrutiny of the highest-risks posed by OCGs, enabling investigators to disrupt fraudulent attacks across a range of organised crime threats.

Tackling illicit finance is at the centre of operations.

Missing Trader Intra Community VAT Supply Chain Fraud (MTIC VSCF)

MTIC VAT Supply Chain Fraud (VCSF) is an organised systematic attack on the VAT system involving complex domestic and international supply chains to extract VAT through defaulting and/or Missing Traders. It is run by organised criminal groups, many with links to the most serious criminality. The most recent tax gap figure for MTIC VCSF was less than £0.5 billion (2016-17).

International variants of this fraud include both 'carousel' (goods/services move multiple times across borders in and out of the UK) and 'import' (where goods are brought in from an international supplier and enter end use in the UK retail market – previously known as Acquisition Fraud).

There are numerous complex mutations of this fraud whereby VAT reclaims are hidden or tax debts are reduced and disguised by additional false or contrived trading chains across multiple traders. In some instances the commodity does not even move across a border. The key however is that the correct amount of VAT is never collected as a result of this organised fraud.

MTIC VAT supply chain fraud can be perpetrated using any standard rated goods or services. Initially synonymous with mobile phones and computer chips, the fraud has moved on and may now involve supplies as diverse as scrap metal to fast moving consumer goods (goods that are sold quickly and at relatively low cost, e.g. household goods or toiletries). Intangible commodities (goods that are not physical in nature, e.g. downloadable music or mobile apps) can and have also been used in this fraud.

HMRC has developed a proactive system to seek evidence of criminals exploiting trading rules and this includes the conditions created by EU Exit and Covid-19. However strong counter measures are already in place and HMRC remains vigilant to any signs these conditions have been exploited or levels of MTIC VCSF have escalated. This includes any attempt to exploit changes introduced by the Northern Ireland Protocol. Risks are mitigated through the use of existing and successful promote, prevent and respond compliance strategies.

For example, the successful strategic approach used to tackle MTIC fraud resulting in losses from this type of fraud fell from £3 - £4 billion in 2005/06 to less than £0.5 billion in 2016/17.

Fiscal Crime Liaison Officer (FCLO) Network

The Fiscal Crime Liaison Officer (FCLO) Network has over 40 diplomatically accredited officers posted overseas who cover a total of over 100 countries. The FCLOs act as HMRC's link to host Customs and Tax authorities, law enforcement, public prosecutors, and other partners in preventing and tackling fiscal crime. Through the Network, HMRC is able to target serious and organised crime impacting the UK at source. FCLOs initiate, coordinate, and support both HMRC and international operations to disrupt criminals operating across borders.

HMRC has a broad remit across a multitude of tax regimes and excise activity as outlined in the case studies below and this work is supplemented by HMRC's strong international relationship with law enforcement partners in the Republic of Ireland and further afield where intelligence sharing and joint working is imperative in tackling this type of criminality.

CASE STUDY

CIGARETTES, TOBACCO, CASH AND MANUFACTURING PARAPHERNALIA SEIZED

In May 2020, following a joint investigation between HMRC, Revenue Commissioners and FIOD (The Netherlands), HMRC FIS Officers, supported by PSNI, executed an arrest and search operation near the Northern Ireland/ Republic of Ireland border.

This action disrupted an OCG responsible for the transportation of commercial quantities of illicit tobacco from Europe via Dublin and Northern Ireland Ports. HMRC arrested three individuals at the scene, seized vehicles, cash and 5.6 million non-duty paid cigarettes.

Follow-up action in the Republic of Ireland led to the further seizure of 1,900 kg of counterfeit Hand Rolling Tobacco, €130,000 cash, 1000's of duty stamps and tobacco pouches, manufacturing paraphernalia and 2.5 tonnes of raw tobacco.

In February 2021 another individual was arrested and questioned in relation to the events leading up to the offences in May 2020. So far three individuals have been charged and are currently on court bail. Investigations continue.



Tobacco Fraud

The latest published tax gap figures place the loss to HM Treasury from illicit tobacco at £1.9 billion.

In 2020/21, the smuggling of counterfeit cigarettes was assessed as the main threat within tobacco fraud targeting the UK, followed by the smuggling of cheap white cigarettes, UK based counterfeit tobacco production and the smuggling of genuine but non-UK duty paid (NUKDP) tobacco products.

The volume of counterfeit production targeting the UK remains high, despite the impacts of Covid-19 on cross border travel and trade and numerous successful interdictions against illicit facilities across Europe in 2020/21. Production targeting the UK is currently concentrated in Eastern Europe (particularly Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine) and Belgium and the Netherlands on the near continent, with Eastern European OCGs the dominant producers and suppliers of products targeting the UK.

In addition to production in continental Europe, intelligence continues to identify OCGs intent on operating counterfeit cigarette and Hand Rolling Tobacco (HRT) facilities in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. However, the impact of Covid-19 related travel restrictions and lockdowns in the UK and the Republic of Ireland resulted in a reduction in actual OCG activity, due to difficulties in establishing and manning such factories.

Cheap white cigarettes manufactured in Eastern Europe, particularly in Belarus, remain the most commonly identified in the UK, although there is an increasing threat from the smuggling of cheap white cigarettes produced in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Large increases in seizures of UAE cheap white cigarettes in the second half of 2020/21 are likely a result of OCGs seeking to establish alternative supply chains due to the impacts of both Covid-19 and EU Exit on the production and smuggling of tobacco products from Europe.

Genuine NUKDP tobacco smuggling has been significantly impacted by Covid-19 over the last year, with international travel restrictions limiting criminals' ability to utilise tourist routes to smuggle to the UK.

This is reflected in increases in the street price of genuine NUKDP cigarettes and is likely to be a factor behind the increased smuggling of cheap white cigarettes. However, there continues to be specific risks from the large scale smuggling of HRT from Benelux, particularly the Turner brand, as well as the large scale smuggling of genuine cigarettes from Eastern Europe.

Transport methods used for large scale smuggling have remained consistent, with roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) freight being the most prevalent followed by containerised smuggling. However, Covid-19 and EU Exit have had impacts on the modus operandi used by OCGs. Fast parcel and postal seizures increased in 2020/21, probably as a result of the large downturn in tourist movements due to travel restrictions. RoRo methodologies for smuggling to the UK have been impacted by EU Exit-related changes to customs rules and checks. Some movements have been displaced to alternative methods such as container and air freight, while OCGs are also increasingly smuggling smaller loads concealed inside genuine freight movements or within the body of vehicles, rather than full illicit loads with fake paperwork.

The introduction of new direct maritime freight services from continental Europe to Republic of Ireland present an emerging risk, with the potential for OCGs to utilise these in order to smuggle illicit tobacco on intra-EU movements into the Republic of Ireland before smuggling it into Northern Ireland via the land border and into GB via ferry routes into west coast ports.

The latest published tax gap figures place the loss to HM Treasury from illicit tobacco at £1.9 billion.

CASE STUDY

3,000,000 CIGARETTES FOUND IN COVER LOAD OF PEAS

In December 2020, a Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) investigation into an OCG, believed to be involved in the procurement of large-scale quantities of tobacco products in Dubai for onward sale and distribution in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, led to a seizure preventing the loss of £1.3 million in lost duty and taxes.

Following a joint operation with the Irish Revenue Commissioners, HMRC Officers supported by PSNI colleagues, entered premises in the Enniskillen area where they intercepted four foreign nationals unloading a container filled with over 3,000,000 NUKDP cigarettes, as well as a cover load of green peas. The container had originally arrived in Dublin Port from Dubai via Rotterdam and was then transported to the delivery address in Enniskillen for onward distribution into the UK black market. The individuals were arrested on site and the container and its contents were seized.

Once the bona fides of the cover load of peas had been established they were donated to charity.

**Organised Labour Fraud**

Organised Labour Fraud (OLF) is the deliberate abuse of the supply of labour through contrived supply chains, where OCGs steal VAT, Income Tax and National Insurance and/or use labour supply chains to exploit government initiatives. HMRC does not have a Northern Ireland-specific picture of OLF; in general, OLF consists of 3 strands: Labour Fraud in Construction (LFiC), Payroll Company Fraud (PCF) and Mini Umbrella Company Fraud (MUCs):

- LFiC OCGs create convoluted supply chains where tax liabilities are pushed down through layers of companies with the final company in the chain going 'missing' and defaulting on its tax liabilities. This is facilitated through abuse of the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS), Gross Payment Status (GPS) and VAT.
- PCF is the outsourcing of payroll and labour relating to genuine employees to fraudulent companies that either do not declare or pay, in full, the correct taxes owed to HMRC (Income Tax, National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and VAT.
- MUCs fraud is the unnecessary disaggregation of a workforce into separate companies to abuse government initiatives for small businesses, such as the Employment Allowance and the VAT Flat Rate Scheme.

EU Exit has had little to no impact on OLF in the first six months, post transition. However, OCGs have historically proved adaptable to change, so it is possible that if there are any longer-term impacts of EU Exit on the UK labour market, those engaging in criminal behaviour could seek to diversify their practices.

Covid-19 has provided new opportunities for fraudulent behaviour, where a minority have sought to abuse the Covid19 support schemes. HMRC is monitoring claims and investigating suspect fraud, using criminal and civil powers to tackle such frauds where appropriate.

The VAT Domestic Reverse Charge (DRC) for building and construction services came into force on 1st March 2021. It requires contractors to pay VAT directly to HMRC instead of it being paid in a lump sum to the subcontractor for labour, materials, and VAT.

This measure will prevent perpetrators of LFIC from charging VAT and failing to pay it to HMRC. HMRC is monitoring how OLF OCGs will react to the DRC.

One case involved an investigation into an established OCG orchestrating Organised Labour Fraud in the UK Construction Sector. Over £30 million per annum of VAT, Income Tax and National Insurance Contributions was being stolen through a complex network of companies controlled by the OCG.

HMRC's approach was co-ordinated from Northern Ireland but drew on the collaborative efforts of a wide range of teams and skills from across the UK to deliver a successful disruption strategy. Using cyber expertise to map out the full reach of the OCG's corporate structures ensured that available resource could be focussed to maximize impact. This targeted approach was enhanced through robust use of Proceeds of Crime recovery tools alongside a proactive insolvency approach.

As a result, over 200 companies have been targeted to date; tax assessments of over £60M have been issued covering VAT, PAYE and NIC's alongside the transfer of the associated penalties to the culpable individuals behind the fraud. Recovery has been secured through use of account freezing orders, securing charges over assets and pursuing directors through insolvency and bankruptcy action.

This collaborative effort has resulted in real impact safeguarding losses to the exchequer of £30 million VAT, PAYE and NIC's per annum.

Alcohol Fraud

Alcohol fraud carried out by OCGs is a serious problem although estimated losses on a UK wide basis have reduced to £0.9 billion from their peak of £1.9 billion in 2014/15. A major part of tackling fraud is working with trade sectors to improve their knowledge and to identify and counter fraudulent activity across their trades.

In the alcohol sector, as part of the Tackling Alcohol Fraud at Source HMRC initiative, contact has been made with a number of large producers with interests in the Republic of Ireland to help them understand the potential risks in alcohol supply chains.

In terms of wider alcohol fraud goods travelling to/from continental Europe are diverted to the UK market. Alcohol can be brought into the UK untaxed (duty suspended), if certain conditions are met. These include ensuring duty is paid when the alcohol is sold in the UK, recording movements of duty suspended alcohol, and storing it in approved premises. Criminals circumvent these controls, using duplicate documents to bring consignments of alcohol into the UK (known as 'mirror loads') and diverting them into wholesale and retail supply chains without payment of duty. The profits to be made are considerable; the duty differential between a lorry-load of beer (roughly 2,000 cases) duty paid in the UK and France is approximately £18,000.

The contribution of other modes of fraud such as counterfeiting, or abuse of the excise duty repayment systems, are thought to be less significant. The Alcohol Wholesaler Registration Scheme (AWRS) was launched on 1st January 2016 to prevent criminals from introducing illicit goods into retail supply chains via wholesalers. UK wholesale alcohol transactions are now subject to supply chain verification via an online look-up service. AWRS has introduced strict compliance requirements in this previously unregulated sector but has been generally well-received by the trade. HMRC activity on alcohol fraud in 2019/2020 protected £772.5 million. This reflects the increasing focus on tackling the profitability of the crime, including through disruption activity such as revocation of approvals.

Alcohol fraud carried out by OCGs is a serious problem.

Fuel Fraud

Faced with a persistent rebated fuel laundering problem, in 2015 the UK and Irish authorities introduced an additional rebated fuel marker, Accutrace S10. Chosen as the most resistant marker to all known laundering methods Accutrace S10 is a colourless hidden marker which HMRC's mobile enforcement teams can identify when present in fuel using Gas Chromatography analysers. While the period since the introduction of Accutrace S10 has seen a sustained fall in the number of laundering plants, and also in the amount of resultant waste which has been a blight on the countryside, both jurisdictions are aware of some OCGs who attempt to launder all of the markers including Accutrace S10 by heating rebated fuel in purpose built equipment. Using what has ranged from crudely built tanks to machine engineered heating vessels this process is extremely volatile, endangering both life and property. HMRC's response to what is effectively an illegal distillation process has been a multi-agency one involving PSNI, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and NIEA.

Despite Covid-19 restrictions FIS Northern Ireland teams, supported by intelligence colleagues and multi-agency partners seized 44 vehicles and 35,000 litres of illicit fuel.

CASE STUDY

FUEL LAUNDERING JOINT OPERATION

An investigation involving the production and supply of laundered fuel, using a highly dangerous unregulated distillation process, led to a joint agency intervention in December 2020 in collaboration with PSNI, Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána. Two individuals were arrested in the vicinity of a suspect storage facility in Northern Ireland and follow-up searches at the site resulted in the seizure of a tanker and a vehicle containing over €44,000 and £10,000 in cash. A third individual was arrested at a fuel retail site.

At the same time, the Revenue Commissioners executed a search warrant at suspect premises in the Republic of Ireland. This operation lasted a number of days due to the detection of a significant heat source and the associated health and safety implications. The result was the discovery of the first operational distillation plant in Republic of Ireland. Items seized included:

- 33,000 litres of mineral oil at various stages of the laundering process;
- a lorry with an 18,000 litre tank, connected to the suspect storage facility in Northern Ireland;
- a generator, pumps, hoses and a filtering system; and
- 10,000 litres of mineral oil sludge, a by-product of the laundering process.

All fuel, vehicles and associated equipment were seized and the laundering plant dismantled. Investigations are continuing with a view to prosecutions.

CASE STUDY

PARALLEL INVESTIGATION

This investigation showcases the benefits of parallel civil and criminal approaches to tackle organised criminality and was instigated following the discovery of an underground fuel laundering plant in the yard of a car dealer by HMRC FIS staff. Two sets of business records were discovered in the sales office and seized by the FIS investigation team which led to a concurrent civil investigation into the individual concerned. One set of records were marked “for my eyes only” and the other marked “Accountant”. Sales between both sets of records differed by over £200,000 covering a period of seven months, therefore turnover and profits were grossly understated.

The FIS investigation identified a large prestigious property including substantial outbuildings purchased several years previously with no mortgage. The returned business profits were clearly insufficient to fund this extravagant purchase and documents and mobile phones seized by the FIS criminal investigation team revealed further luxurious improvements had also been added to the property.

The consequent challenge to the source of funds resulted in a voluntary disclosure relating to under declaration of VAT over several years with another trader settling the civil case for just under £1 million, cash due to the Exchequer.

The car dealer received a six month custodial sentence suspended for two years for his involvement in the fuel laundering plant.

RESULTS

During the period of this report, despite the pressures on courts as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, 16 individuals reported to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) by FIS Northern Ireland were successfully prosecuted.

FORWARD LOOK

Criminal Finances Act 2017 (CFA 2017)

The addition of new powers in Northern Ireland under the Criminal Finance Act (CFA) will increase the recovery and investigation options and effectiveness in the proceeds of crime arena. HMRC is working ever more closely with private sector financial institutions in an effort to identify, prevent and reverse the damage caused by financial crime to the public and the economy.

Cash seizure powers remain an effective resource for taking criminal cash from offenders and the new powers, as enacted by CFA 2017, allow the seizure of criminal funds directly from bank accounts where a court is satisfied that they are recoverable property or intended to be used in unlawful conduct. It is envisaged that these non-conviction based powers will be employed in similar fashion and success to that achieved by colleagues in other parts of the UK.

An example in this reporting period was the granting of Asset Freezing Orders which resulted in £26.02 million frozen with £10.8 million forfeited, which included an individual seven figure forfeiture.

Similarly, Listed Asset seizures will be a key consideration in operational deployments. A notable Listed Asset seizure comprised of 20+ kgs of gold bars and a selection of high value watches. Forfeiture was granted and the onward sale realised circa £750,000.

Unexplained Wealth Orders will also be a key tool in selected Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002 Part V investigations whereby the property is presumed to be recoverable for the purposes of any proceedings taken in respect of the property unless the contrary is shown.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have concerns or suspicions, call:

HMRC HOTLINE
0800 788 887

2.10 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

THE THREAT

Environmental crime, in particular waste crime, continues to pose a significant threat to our environment, public health and well-being. Unlike other forms of criminality the damage caused by this illegal activity is often not immediately apparent and in most cases cannot be easily undone.

The impact of environmental crime on society and the environment is far reaching. The decomposition of illegally deposited waste can have immediate and long term affects through the release of dangerous chemicals into the environment. This has the potential to contaminate ground water and soil which can adversely impact bio-diversity, cause disease and contaminate food supplies. These impacts pose a significant threat to public health and substantially reduce the value of our natural amenity for present and future generations.

As with most other criminality, the driving factor is the significant financial benefit generated through the avoidance of costs associated with legitimate waste disposal. The risk to reward ratio has proven to be attractive to organised criminals who seek to profit from such activity.

In recent years the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has noted a rise in the level of sophistication adopted by criminals to evade detection including the utilisation of complex company structures to illegally move and dispose of controlled waste whilst concealing the proceeds gained from their criminality. By creating a façade of legitimacy, organised criminals have been able to infiltrate all aspects of the waste industry and exploit weaknesses in the sector.

The driving factor in waste crime is the avoidance of costs associated with legitimate disposal.

Unfortunately the significant profits which can be generated has created a black market which undercuts honest competitors through the avoidance of legitimate landfill taxes and associated costs.

The NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) leads the fight against environmental crime. Its enforcement strategy is underpinned by education, prevention and partnership working with agencies, including the OCTF and other UK and International partners. This is in recognition of the evolving complexity of such illegal activity and the links between this and other forms of serious and organised criminality.

To tackle environmental crime the ECU adopts a risk-based approach focusing its resource on cases which present the most significant risk to the environment and public health. In addition to criminal convictions the ECU's financial investigators pursue Confiscation Orders (under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002) which aims to deprive those convicted of the monies generated from their environmental crimes. The targeting and confiscation of criminally obtained assets carries a strong crime prevention message, discouraging further offending and serves to remove the means by which offenders might re-offend whilst supporting the 'polluter pays principle'.

Although the unit has in-house investigative expertise it recognises that it cannot tackle this issue in isolation; the complexity of these investigations demands a multi-agency approach. By developing close working relationships with other law enforcement agencies the Unit has been able to foster collaborative working to target those who seek to benefit from environmental crime.

The OCTF is central to providing that collaborative environment through which the NIEA has seen its working relationships with other government departments go from strength to strength. ECU now has a number of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with various agencies/government departments which has led to the sharing of resources and expertise aimed at disrupting and dismantling organised crime in the waste sector.

The 2020/21 reporting year has presented many challenges to the NIEA in its response to environmental crime, in particular the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement to adhere to new regulations and guidance to protect staff and the public from the spread of the virus whilst maintaining effective enforcement capability.

As the pandemic spread and the nation entered lockdown many public services were suspended, including the closure of house waste recycling centres by district councils. This, coupled with workforce resourcing shortages in the waste sector, disrupted the waste management chain, creating opportunities for organised criminals to exploit the situation for personal gain.

During this time the NIEA experienced an unprecedented increase in the volume of reported crime by central and local government agencies which revealed the presence of new illegal waste sites which presented a significant risk to public health and attracted significant political and media attention. These sites were primarily created from waste produced from Northern Ireland households over the lockdown period. Subsequent investigations revealed a number of these sites were connected to serious and organised criminality.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Through effective partnership working with PSNI, HMRC and local councils the NIEA was able to apprehend the suspected perpetrators, and reduce the threat to the public through the removal of controlled waste. Whilst the pandemic and the resultant restrictions were unprecedented, adopting new working models meant that the Unit was able to overcome the challenges presented and maintain its services to the public.

In 2020/21 the impact of the pandemic resulted in delays in the criminal justice system, meaning that the NIEA was unable to secure any convictions in this reporting year.

RESULTS

Despite the pressures placed on it, the Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) successfully processed 1,225 complaints in relation to suspected waste crime. Inspections conducted by the unit in response to those complaints resulted in the issuing of 12 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) totalling £4,000 and 73 notices to individuals for breaches of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. This is in contrast to eight convictions relating to waste offending secured in the previous reporting year which produced fines ranging between £300 and £4,000.

During the same period the ECU secured one Confiscation Order under POCA totalling £235,460. This sum represents the avoidance by a defendant of payment of gate fee landfill tax and a VAT at a licensed waste facility (a loss to the revenue and to legitimate licensed waste facilities). ECU's success demonstrates the added value of confiscation proceedings taken against offenders in environmental cases compared to the imposition of 12 FPN cases instigated by the unit in the last financial year.

The agency pursues convictions and Confiscation Orders although in some cases prosecutions may not be possible. To ensure maximum impact ECU continues to refer cases to HMRC for consideration of environmental tax avoidance. During this reporting period a total of 16 referrals were made to HMRC concerning a combined environmental tax avoidance in the region of £8.25 million.

FORWARD LOOK

Partnership working is key to the success of ECU's ability to confront and dismantle organised crime within the waste sector. To strengthen its enforcement capabilities the NIEA is currently developing further partnerships with other government agencies. In the coming months it is anticipated that the NIEA will agree a Service Level Agreement between members of the OCTF Criminal Finance Group and Land and Property Services for Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that this agreement will contribute to all OCTF members' ability to recover proceeds of crime through professional valuations of both private and commercial assets.

In the forthcoming year the NIEA also intends to strengthen its relationships with other environmental regulators throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland through its membership of the Joint Unit for Waste Crime (JUWC) which was established by the Environment Agency in England and Wales. This Unit brings together all UK environmental agencies and major law enforcement bodies including HMRC, NCA, Policing Authorities and Border Force at a strategic and tactical level. Adopting a coordinated UK approach to waste crime directly enhances ECU's ability to disrupt the organised transport and illegal disposal of waste which crosses national and international boundaries. This cross jurisdictional work is vital and plays a key role in understanding and tackling waste crime throughout the UK.

In spite of the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been an increase in public awareness of the beauty and importance of our natural environment and the role this natural resource plays in the health and well-being of society. Its protection and enhancement must be a priority for all of us to ensure its enjoyment for future generations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The NIEA needs the assistance of the public.

If you have any information which would help with the detection and prevention of environmental waste crime this can be reported to the NIEA's incident hotline:

Tel 0800 807 060.

Alternatively you can contact the NIEA's Enforcement Branch by email at:
enviromentalcrime@daera-ni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 90569453

You may also report environmental crime through CrimeStoppers hotline:

Tel 0800 555 111

2.11 NATIONAL SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

THE THREAT

The NCA is responsible for leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime and its mission is to protect the public and communities affected by this corrosive, yet ever-changing and increasing threat.

Serious and organised crime (SOC) continues to impact more on UK citizens than any other national security threat; affecting all parts of the UK and having a daily impact on individuals, communities, businesses, public services and national infrastructure. The latest estimated social and economic cost of SOC to the UK economy is £37 billion¹⁴ a year and is assessed to be a significant underestimate of the true cost.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The NCA remains committed to ensuring that its activity in Northern Ireland takes account of the specific and differing legislative, operational and political requirements; respecting the primacy of the PSNI whilst maximising its ability to operate with police and other partners to tackle SOC threats impacting Northern Ireland.

The Agency works closely with PSNI to better understand how SOC affects communities in Northern Ireland and develop opportunities for closer collaboration. Together, targeted activity ensures the greatest impact on the SOC threat in Northern Ireland.

The NCA continued to play an active role in the Organised Crime Task Force at all levels, as well as the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) and the Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force. NCA is focused on strengthening its relationship with all of the participating stakeholders.

Internationally, NCA uses its footprint, reach and established collaboration with partners to secure the most effective upstream activity and tackle the threats before they reach the UK.

RESULTS

The Agency achieved significant operational success in 2020/21. With the agreement of partners, NCA focussed on criminals operating at the high-end of high-end harm and those areas where the Agency could add unique value. This led to a greater number of moderate and major disruptions, relative to the previous year.

Major disruptions included:

Operation SUBMEDIAN

A long running investigation into Northern Ireland based hauliers and their criminal associates involved in the importation of Class A and Class B drugs from Europe and in serious and organised immigration crime, which began in February 2019.

- In April 2020, NCA made three arrests after a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) was stopped in Dover Port by Border Force, having travelled from Rotterdam via Calais. A search of the vehicle, which was transporting a legitimate delivery of fruit, uncovered a sophisticated hide with 36 kg of cocaine (worth nearly £3 million if sold on the streets). The arrests included a Northern Ireland based lorry driver (who was later acquitted). It is believed the drugs were destined for the Northern Ireland market. In October, a man from Kent, believed to have organised the importation, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for conspiracy to smuggle the cocaine into the UK.

Serious and organised crime continues to impact more on UK citizens than any other national security threat.

¹⁴ Home Office, 'Understanding Organised Crime: Estimating the Scale and the Social and Economic Costs', November 2018.

- In the largest NCA-led operation in Northern Ireland to date, and working in partnership with PSNI, three arrests were made in Northern Ireland following the search of an HGV associated with a key OCG member. The search uncovered 600 kg cannabis (street value £12 million) secreted in a load of vegetables. A number of house searches were carried out following the seizure. This was a significant quantity of drugs destined for the Northern Ireland market. The seizure and the subsequent arrests of criminal hauliers is assessed to have had a significant impact on the drugs market in Northern Ireland.
- This Operation also uncovered three cases of organised immigration crime, which resulted in 37 migrant rescues; all of the main people involved were from Northern Ireland. Most of these interdictions have been followed up with search activity and investigative actions in Northern Ireland.

Operation LABRADOREAN

One of the most significant investigations impacting on Northern Ireland as a result of Operation VENETIC. An NCA investigation was launched after its analysis of messages shared on EncroChat, which was suspected of containing details of drug importations and cash movements linked to a Northern Ireland-based OCG. As a consequence:

- three individuals have been charged with offences relating to the supply of Class A and Class B drugs and money laundering, with one also being charged with conspiracy to import a prohibited weapon and ammunition. The fourth individual was released on police bail pending further investigation;
- a fourth individual handed himself in to the PSNI; he was arrested and questioned by NCA investigators and was later charged with Conspiring to Supply Class A and Class B Drugs, as well as being concerned in the Supply of Class A, Class B and Class C drugs; and,
- a fifth individual has been charged with seven offences including two money laundering offences, being concerned in the Supply of Class A, B and C drugs and Conspiracy to Supply Class A and B drugs.

These arrests should be regarded as a significant disruption to a high profile OCG operating in Northern Ireland.

Operation TANDEMER

In September 2021, NCA Belfast officers interdicted three HGV lorries and trailers in England and Wales belonging to the same Northern Ireland haulage company. Five people were arrested for drugs importation offences and 21 kg of cocaine was recovered from a sophisticated hide in one of the trailers; investigations continue.

Operation LUCRIFIC

In February 2021, NCA Belfast officers interdicted a commercial van as it left Belfast Sea Port. A search of the vehicle and three fuel tanks and pumping systems within the cargo area revealed 20 kg of cocaine concealed within one of the tanks. The driver was arrested and charged; investigations continue.

NCA NORTHERN IRELAND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

NCA Belfast has investigated a number of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases including:

Operation SOARABLE

This operation relates to NCA's strategic work with international partners under OP ISOGRAFT, on the downloading and viewing of child sexual abuse material. A sharing account was being used to transfer files identified as IIOC (Indecent Images of Children). A subject was arrested in May 2020. A forensic search of five electronic devices seized at his address was undertaken. 96 videos containing IIOC were found on his phone, and 56 Category A IIOC identified. The individual has been charged with IIOC possession and pleaded guilty at court in October. In November the subject was given a Sex Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) for two years and placed on the Sex Offenders Register (SOR) for five years. Two children have been safeguarded.

Operation LUGGAGELESS

This is an investigation relating to NCA intelligence obtained through its operational response to Dark Web CSA. A user associated to an IP address accessed a website linked to CSA material. A subject was identified and arrested during October 2020 on suspicion of IIOC offences. Two properties were searched. Three children have been safeguarded and 12 electronic devices seized. Forensic examination of the seized devices identified a Category A video. The subject was charged and pleaded guilty at court; he was sentenced to four months in custody, suspended for three years, placed on the SOR for seven years and subject to a seven year SOPO.

Operation SOARINGLY

A sharing account was identified as being used to transfer files identified as IIOC. A subject was identified and arrested in September 2020. One property search was conducted several electronic devices seized. An examination of the seized devices recovered several Category B images. The subject is currently on bail. One child has been safeguarded. The subject was cautioned in Feb 2021 and placed on the SOR for 2 years.

Operation NIGHTLESS

A subject was identified and arrested during March 2021. One property search was conducted and four electronic devices were seized. Examination of the seized devices recovered a Category A image. A file is being prepared for the PPS.

OTHER NCA OPERATIONS**Operation SURNAMER**

A Border Force (BF) referral relating to the interception of a parcel destined for Northern Ireland by BF officers at Stansted. The parcel that arrived from the USA contained a firearm, component parts and 52 rounds of ammunition hidden within computer parts. PSNI conducted a controlled delivery to the property, where NCA officers, supported by the PSNI, arrested a man.

A quantity of Class C drugs was also recovered during the operation. One man was charged with attempting to import a firearm, two charges relating to the attempted possession of a firearm, and possessing class C drugs with intent to supply.

WHAT YOU CAN DO**Report crimes or suspicious activity to:**

PSNI Telephone 101

Via the PSNI website

www.psni.police.uk/makeareport

Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel: **0800 555 111**

If a child has been a victim of sexual abuse online or you are worried this is happening to a child you know, report it safely and securely via the Online reporting portal at www.ceop.police.uk

For general online safety advice please visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Beware of fraud – Verifying a NCA officer

If some has contacted you claiming to be an NCA officer and you are in any doubt as to their identity, you can verify their identity by calling:

NCA Control Centre Tel 0370 496 7622

Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040

An NCA officer will NEVER:

- Ask for remote access to your computer via phone, email or online
- Ask you to verify your personal details such as passwords, account numbers or card details via phone, email or online.
- Ask you to transfer or hand over money via phone. Email or online.
- Speak or act in a threatening manner.

2.12 SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT FRAUD

THE THREAT

The Department for Communities (DfC) is responsible for a total benefit spend of £6,819 million and maintains a long term commitment to minimising loss resulting from benefit fraud. The Department's Benefit Security Division (BSD) is responsible for all counter fraud and error activity including criminal investigations for suspected frauds. Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within BSD is responsible for undertaking investigations into allegations of potential organised criminality against the benefit and National Insurance Number (NINO) systems.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic led to changes in the delivery of social security benefits. The sudden surge in demand coupled with the public health advice restricted the initial ability to undertake the full range of checks designed to prevent fraud and error, for example, face to face verification interviews. As a result of these changes, OFU has seen a surge in cyber related attacks on benefit systems, with hijacked identities and false identities accounting for the majority of cyber related frauds being detected. Benefit frauds range from a single suspect to organised crime groups operating throughout the UK.

As a result of investigations of new fraud trends, BSD identified areas of concern within the Universal Credit (UC) system and established an Enhanced Verification Team to conduct additional checks on UC claims with potentially exaggerated circumstances. The Enhanced Verification Team triaged 3,414 cases and took action in 2,048 cases which resulted in monetary savings of £11.5 million.

RESULTS

Throughout 2020/21, OFU's focus has remained the same with continued investigations into serious and complex fraud allegations. These include:

- Examination of false employment documents provided as evidence to support claims to Social Security Benefits either as proof of low income for Housing Benefit and Tax Credits or to satisfy the Habitual Residence Test.
- Issuing Intelligence Reports to other law enforcement agencies in order to detect and prevent criminality.
- Multi-agency collaboration and investigations with partners aimed at disrupting criminals who seek to exploit the NINO Gateway and the Social Security system through hijacked identities, counterfeit documents and identity fraud.
- Joint collaboration with partner law enforcement organisations to identify individuals in receipt of benefit under an assumed identity, or those who have circumvented the NINO Gateway with a false identity in order to avoid prosecution or deportation.

OFU continues to build and maintain strong working relationships with other law enforcement agencies to target not only those who seek to defraud social security benefit systems but who are engaged in wider criminality.

In addition, during 2020/21, Benefit Security Division referred 42 cases to the Department's Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) for consideration. During the year the FIU secured seven Confiscation Orders to the value of £94,403, and received voluntary repayments amounting to £31,466, giving a total recovery of £125,869.

CASE STUDY

IDENTITY FRAUD

OFU detected potential identity frauds within a number of UC claims. An investigation was initially conducted into hijacked identities being used to claim UC Advance Payments. However, as the investigation progressed it was discovered attacks had also occurred within five other benefit areas. The investigation uncovered 45 attempted hijacked identities leading to 19 fraudulent claims and potential overpayments of over £28,000.

OFU conducted the benefit fraud stages of the investigation and then approached the PSNI's Economic Crime Unit (ECU) who agreed to take the case forward as a joint investigation. Collaboration between OFU and ECU resulted in the suspect being arrested in December 2020 and interviewed under social security legislation. At a second interview, the suspect was charged with Fraud by False Representation, Possessing Criminal Property, and Transferring Criminal Property. The case is ongoing at Crown Court.

CASE STUDY

CONFISCATION ORDER FOR £30,000

The Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) obtained a Confiscation Order for £30,151 against a woman who failed to declare that she owned a holiday apartment in Spain, whilst claiming means tested social security benefits. The woman claimed benefits on the basis she was unemployed, declaring that she had no capital or other source of income.

Following her conviction, the defendant indicated that she intended to declare herself bankrupt and relinquish her interest in the Spanish property. The FIU obtained a Restraint Order in respect of the property, and the equity held in the property was subsequently included within the defendant's Available Amount.

2.13 PROSECUTION DECISIONS

One function of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is to apply to the High Court for a Restraint Order under section 190 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) to prohibit any specified person from dealing with any realisable property held by them, provided that a criminal investigation has been started in Northern Ireland. PPS has provided an example of such a case:

CASE STUDY

MAJOR SUPPLIER OF ANABOLIC STEROIDS - CONFISCATION ORDER

The defendant was convicted of offences relating to the Supply of Class C Drugs after police raided two properties linked to him. During the search of one of these properties a substantial amount of cash was discovered in a shoe box located in the attic. A mobile phone and an iPad were also seized and later examined. The examination of these devices provided evidence of hundreds of conversations regarding the sale and supply of anabolic steroids in contravention of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

From the examination of these messages it became evident that the defendant was a major supplier of anabolic steroids in the Greater Belfast area and the money found during the search of his property was the proceeds of this illegal activity. During interview the defendant denied that he was involved in the supply of controlled drugs and claimed that the cash recovered by police was legitimately obtained profit from his business. However, at the arraignment the defendant pleaded guilty to supplying a Class C Drug and Possession of Criminal Property.

The PPS applied to commence confiscation proceedings under Section 156 of the POCA. As a result of the financial investigation police discovered significant cash lodgements into a number of bank accounts, along with evidence of a lifestyle not in keeping with the defendant's declared income to HMRC. The defendant did not contest the application for a Confiscation Order when presented with this evidence and an order with a recoverable amount of £144,820 was granted. This was paid immediately by the defendant.

RESULTS

RESTRAINTS: 22 cases received

CONFISCATIONS: 4 Confiscation Orders totalling £1,254,224

Files Received with a complaint relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Files Received between 1/04/2020 and 31/03/2021)

Offence Group	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
Money Laundering	242	332
Controlling Prostitution	6	8
Child Prostitution	-	-
Drugs	4,715	5,184
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	949	1,166
Human Trafficking	5	8

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

See 'Offences' tab for list of offences considered for the purposes of this query.

Files Received from NIEA or HMRC

(based on Files Received between 01/04/2020 and 31/03/2021)

File Source	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
NIEA	28	42
HMRC	11	24

See 'Offences' tab for list of offences considered for the purposes of this query.

Decisions Issued for offences relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Most Serious Decision Issued between 01/04/2020 and 31/03/2021)

Offence Group	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
Money Laundering	151	81	-	57	#
Controlling Prostitution	-	-	0	5	#
Child Prostitution	3	0	0	-	#
Drugs	340	3,395	737	529	5,001
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	287	324	50	225	886
Human Trafficking	-	0	0	5	#

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

"#" refers to a number >=3 which has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

See 'Offences' tab for list of offences considered for the purposes of this query.

Decisions Issued on Files from NIEA or HRMC

File Source	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
NIEA	12	18	0	-	#
HMRC	10	5	-	4	#

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

"#" refers to a number >=3 which has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

See 'Offences' tab for list of offences considered for the purposes of this query.



**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

ASSETS RECOVERY

ARIS AND ARCS FUNDING



CHAPTER 3 ASSETS RECOVERY – ARIS AND ARCS FUNDING

One of the most common incentives that drives the activities of organised crime groups is the desire to make a profit and accumulate wealth. Law enforcement agencies respond to this by pursuing the proceeds of crime using asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). Under this legislation, the proceeds of crime can be recovered with criminal confiscation, or by civil recovery, cash seizure and taxation powers. Taking profits that fund crime is a key disruption tool, breaking the cycle of criminal activity to prevent further offences occurring. Removing the ill-gotten gains from organised crime sends out a clear message that crime does not pay.

Criminal confiscation is the most commonly used power under POCA. Confiscation proceedings can be brought following a criminal conviction involving financial gain or the laundering of criminal assets. Any criminal financial gain will be calculated during proceedings and the Court may make a confiscation order. In Northern Ireland, money surrendered to the courts under confiscation orders is allocated to the Northern Ireland Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (NI ARIS Scheme).

WHAT HAPPENS WITH CONFISCATION ORDER PAYMENTS?

Payment against Northern Ireland confiscation orders are transferred to the Department of Justice under the NI ARIS Scheme. These funds are split 50-50 on an annual basis.

50% of the total NI ARIS pot is shared between the agencies responsible for investigating, prosecuting and administering successful confiscation cases (see the table below) and is used to invest in measures to support the recovery of criminal assets and proceeds of crime, to disrupt criminal activity and the further funding of crime and to deprive criminals of their proceeds of crime.

50% is allocated to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) to provide funding for projects often delivered in community settings, with the aim of **preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime.**

ARCS funding is allocated under a grant application process run by the Department of Justice.

The total value of criminal recovery receipts paid under confiscation orders during the 2020/21 financial year in Northern Ireland was approx. £780k. This figure is down on previous years as a result of the impact that Covid-19 restrictions have had on confiscation investigations and hearings held at Court.

ASSETS RECOVERY INCENTIVISATION SCHEME

The Table below sets out the value returned to each law enforcement agency, the PPS and Courts Service under the ARIS scheme in 2020/21.

Agency	ARIS Payments 2020/21
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	£92,279
HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)	£10,350
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)	£58,603
Department for Communities (DfC)	£14,124
Public Prosecution Service (PPS)	£175,357
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS)	£38,968
Total Paid	£389,681

NB - An additional £68,529 was received from the Courts within the reporting period, but related to payments made in the 2019/20 financial year and was not referred to in last year's annual report.

During 2020/21 the agencies used their incentivisation allocations for a number of purposes including:



PSNI

ARIS funding was used to support Financial Investigator and Forensic Accountancy provision within the PSNI.

Additionally, funds were allocated for the purchase of analytical and technical equipment to assist in investigations, a community youth project, passive police dogs, an animation to assist in the prevention of crime and participation in the Scamwise fraud prevention programme.



HMRC

HMRC nationally utilised POCA, including new asset recovery powers under the Criminal Finances Act 2017, to recover proceeds of crime totalling just over £43 million. This enabled ARIS funding of £18 million to be allocated to support multiple projects on a UK wide basis, notably:

- working with financial institutions to respond to the fraud threats associated with the Covid 19 relief schemes;
- procurement and fitting of Public Warning Equipment (PWE) to FIS vehicles;
- mobile Phone Forensic Kiosks to enable front line forensics;
- improving asset recovery capabilities through further staff training to become NCA accredited regulators and financial investigators; and
- supporting international collaboration by funding FCLOs in East Africa, UAE and South East Asia and the deployment of a technical attaché to the World Customs Organisation.



NIEA

Monies generated from ARIS bolsters the agency's ability to tackle organised crime. Monies received were used to procure specialist investigative training for officers both within ECU and the wider NIEA family. This training not only enhanced the capability of those officers it also directly assists the unit in driving up asset recovery.



DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES (DfC)

These incentivisation monies were used to part-fund the position of Financial Intelligence Officer within the unit.



PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE

The funding was directed towards staff and operational costs to support the conduct of prosecutions and restraint and confiscation proceedings in organised crime cases.



NI COURTS AND TRIBUNAL SERVICE (NICTS)

This money was used by NICTS to provide administrative support for Northern Ireland's courts and tribunals and to support an independent Judiciary.

ASSETS RECOVERY COMMUNITY SCHEME (ARCS)

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) seeks to re-invest in projects to prevent crime or reduce the fear of crime. Projects supported through ARCS need to demonstrate how they will benefit (one or more of) victims, communities and the environment.

Since the call for applications in August 2018 funding was made available for short-term projects and longer term strategic justice projects for a period up to the end of March 2021.

Following an Assessment Panel's review of all 187 applications, 50 projects were offered funding, ranging from one year to three years in duration. The majority of projects concluded after one or two years, although 23 projects continued to be funded in this, the final year, at a total allocation of £611,417. In total, for the period April 2020 to March 2021, DoJ made payments to projects totalling £423,394.

Whilst many of these projects were able to adapt how they deliver services, the Covid-19 pandemic has proved challenging for others. In light of this the Minister for Justice agreed, on an exceptional basis,

to provide funding into 2021/22 to those ARCS projects that could not, due to the impact of Covid-19, be fully delivered in line with the 2020/21 grant. This allowed projects the opportunity to complete their approved work in the next financial year whilst remaining within the previously agreed funding allocations.

ARCS has funded and continues to fund a range of activities, including drug support projects, awareness and diversionary projects for young people and restorative justice initiatives. Examples of some of the projects supported during 2020/21 are set out below, as is a comprehensive list of the projects funded across the three year period.

Barnardo's "Families Matter...Beyond The Gate" (BTG)

The 'Beyond the Gate' (BTG) project was allocated ARCS funding totalling £99,162 over a two year period. The project supports parents returning home having served a custodial sentence. The focus is on helping a parent transition back into the life of their child. The project works with parents to identify the needs of their child and how the family may have changed during the period of separation; it offers support to the parent both inside and outside of custody and to their family. The service is offered to both parties in the final few months of sentence.

COVID 19 had an impact on delivery of this service, however, despite the restrictions and prison establishments being closed to the project, it has made significant progress by adapting its provision to include Zoom or video calls directly to the prison and with the relevant family members in the community. The latest progress report shows that by the end of the intervention 74% of participants reported an improvement in their "knowledge of parenting"; and 70% reported an improvement in their "ability to understand the impact of their own behaviour/choices on children and family".

Although release from prison and the return home is a joyful occasion many families are challenged by the transition from custody to home. For some people the end of a prison sentence can result in fears and anxieties about the changes the family unit will go through and COVID restrictions have

added to the stress for some families during this period due to increased isolation, family illness/ bereavement, children at home for longer periods of time etc. Having someone to help facilitate these discussions around the changes has allowed many parents to be open and honest about concerns for themselves and especially for their children.

On the Streets

The On The Street Community Youth City Centre project has been support by ARCS, over a three year period, to the value of £57,627 to provide detached youth services in and around the Derry/ Londonderry city centre. The Project sees trained youth workers engaging with young people at evenings and weekends, by providing a listening ear and support to help educate and inform them about positive community behaviour and to signpost them to additional youth and support programmes that may be of interest to them.

The project has developed close working relationships with other community partners including the local City Centre Initiative, local Neighbourhood Teams, Council Community Safety Wardens, Foyle Search and Rescue and other local youth providers. The staff are highly visible and well known in the city with their trademark red coats and have been a welcome addition to the support structures offered in the city. Young people can be vulnerable at weekends and the "On the Street" staff are available to support them and contribute to a safer city centre. This has proven a vital service throughout the year but especially during local festivals and events, such as Halloween and St Patrick's Day.





SOS Bus

The “SOS Supporting a Safer City” project was allocated ARCS funding over a three year period, starting in 2019, totalling £62,604. This particular source of funding covered volunteer training and provision of costs associated with running SOS Bus in Belfast, in support of crisis interventions for people who become vulnerable, and working towards safer communities in partnership with PSNI, Belfast Health Trust, Belfast City Council and other third sector organisations. The programme supports people in crisis and aims to reduce pressure on A&E and the PSNI.

SOS Bus, which also receives funding from other sources, creates Safe Spaces on the streets of Belfast each weekend, on weekdays from 2-6pm and at large concerts and events. 200 trained SOS Volunteers provided crisis intervention support to 4,000+ people, across the total project period up to 31st March 2021.

During Covid-19 restrictions, additional training was provided to volunteers, including courses on addiction and substance misuse; Naloxone administration and harm reduction for problem substance use; basic life support; and JAM Card (Just a Minute training to support people with learning difficulties, autism and communication barriers).

The season was a busy time for SOS Volunteers as their roles have adapted to continue to provide crisis interventions on the streets of Belfast. The focus has been on meeting immediate needs though the Food Response Hub, signposting clients to vital services and training volunteers. With reduced opportunity for face to face engagement with people due to Covid-19, a new e-mail chat was launched to provide signposting and welfare advice. SOS continues to use social media as a platform for signposting services.

ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2020/21

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	Total ARCS awarded for duration of project £
1st Rathfriland Boys Brigade	Safety in Numbers	Educational/information events for young people vulnerable to becoming involved in crime with parent / family / community interventions.	12,584
Barnardo's	Families Matter - Beyond The Gate	Support for families as a parent moves towards pre-release from prison with a focus on the needs of the child.	49,161
Belfast Community Sports Development Network	Community Sports Support Hub	Establish a post-prison Community Sports Support Hub, with the aim of reducing re-offending and supporting rehabilitation.	85,117
Children's Law Centre	Support for young people in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre	Training, information and advice to support young people in the Juvenile Justice Centre.	31,391
Community Intercultural Programme	Empowered to be Free	Interventions to support vulnerable individuals who are at risk of being exploited or in fear of being controlled in the labour market.	58,000
Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJ)	South & East Belfast CRJ Engagement Project	Develop full-time presence in the local area to help empower and support local communities to actively participate within the justice family.	182,402
Dialogue For Diversity	Support and Encouragement for Ex-Prisoners Through Mentoring	Mentor ex-prisoners to encourage and support them and refer to other support agencies, post release interventions to reduce re-offending.	15,033
Edgarstown Residents Association	Rising of Edgarstown	Community relations project with young people including personal development, health and well-being interventions and social development.	32,038

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	Total ARCS awarded for duration of project £
Life Change Changes Lives	No Lost Cause	Reduce offending, through inter-generational diversionary and therapeutic community programme, including counselling for addictions and working with offenders and victims of crime.	144,920
Mid & East Antrim Agewell Partnership (MEAAP)	MEAAP Friends Against Scams Campaign	Create local business SCAM champions and identify and support older people at risk of falling victim to scams.	21,844
Northern Ireland Alternatives	PACE Project (Policing and Community Engagement)	Empower local people to problem solve creatively and build partnerships within local communities through training, forums, volunteerism and advocacy.	120,346
North West Play Resource Centre	Listen To Use (Crime Prevention Films)	A film-making project engaging 'at risk' young people, to encourage improved relationships with the PSNI and understanding around issues of stop and search and reduce fear and intimidation and the influence of paramilitaries in the long term.	66,770
Off the Streets (OTS) Community Youth Initiative	OTS City Centre Street Work Provision	Weekend youth workers will support and deliver informal learning opportunities to help reduce crime and disorder.	57,627
Parenting NI	RESPECT Parenting Project	Multi-disciplinary support project - including a Parenting Helpline and workshops and materials for parents.	83,532
Poleglass Community Association @ Sally Gardens	Safer Communities	Tackle anti-social behaviour by delivering OCN accredited qualifications and a providing a mentoring programme to "at risk" young people.	37,200
Prison Arts Foundation	Community Braille Service	Provide a low-cost Braille printing and transcribing service, staffed by ex-offenders to help prevent reoffending.	46,000

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	Total ARCS awarded for duration of project £
PSNI Older Persons Acquisition Group	Cold Calling & DNA Marking Scheme	Crime prevention advice for older people and supply of crime prevention items within high risk areas, areas with higher concentration of older people - spread over rural, urban and Border areas.	16,672
Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)	ROC Community Action Groups	Capacity-building in 8 communities with low capacity to empower residents, agencies, churches and faith groups to work together towards safer, stronger communities.	65,175
SOS NI	SOS Supporting a Safer City	First aid training and provision of costs associated with running the SOS Bus in Belfast in support of crisis intervention for vulnerable people and work towards safer communities in partnership with community/resident associations.	62,604
St. Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	Tackling Self-Harming Behaviours	Project targeting young people involved in, or likely to become involved in crime through substance abuse in the Divis area.	23,333
The Turnaround Project	Turnaround Grounds Maintenance Social Enterprise	Work experience and employment opportunities for people serving custodial or community sentences.	93,717
Top Ten Women's Drama Group	Outside In	Working with a group of young people on an anti-social behaviour project to capture community stories and produce a DVD resource.	20,828
Vineyard Compassion	Link to Work	Supervised work placements and mentoring for NI Prison Service and Probation Board NI referrals.	93,188
Total			1,419,482

NB: Award totals above are for the duration of the project (i.e., 1, 2 or 3 year periods)

APPENDIX 1

OCTF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- Allied Irish Bank
 - An Garda Síochána
 - Anti-Counterfeiting Group
 - Bank of Ireland
 - Belfast City Council
 - Border Force
 - Brand Solutions
 - Centre for Secure Information Technologies, QUB
 - CiSP
 - Citi Bank
 - Charity Commission NI
 - Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
 - Community Pharmacy NI
 - Confederation of British Industry
 - Criminal Assets Bureau
 - Cyberrisk
 - Cyphra
 - Danske Bank
 - Deloitte
 - Department for Communities
 - Department for the Economy
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Finance
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Justice
 - DIAGEO
 - Federation Against Copyright Theft
 - Federation of Small Businesses NI
 - Foods Standards Agency
 - Forensic Science Agency NI
 - Fujitsu
 - G4S
 - Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)
 - Get Safe Online
 - Health and Safety Executive NI
 - Health and Social Care Board
 - HM Revenue and Customs
 - Home Office (Immigration Enforcement and UK Visas and Immigration)
 - Imperial Tobacco
 - Intellectual Property Office
 - Invest NI
 - Japan Tobacco International
 - Law Society
 - Migrant Help
 - National Crime Agency
 - National Cyber Security Centre
 - NI Chamber of Commerce
 - NI Courts and Tribunal Service
 - NI Cyber Cluster
 - Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre
 - NI Environment Agency (DAERA)
 - NI Policing Board
 - NI Prison Service
 - NICVA
 - Philip Morris International
 - PSNI
 - Post Office Limited
 - Price Waterhouse Coopers
 - Probation Board NI
 - Public Health Agency
 - Public Prosecution Service NI
 - Queen's University Belfast
 - Retail NI
 - Revenue Commissioners
 - Royal Mail
 - Safer Cash
 - Security Industry Authority
 - Sky
 - Supergroup
 - TMA
 - Trading Standards Service
 - UK Human Trafficking Centre
 - Ulster Bank
 - Ulster University
 - Women's Aid
- (Contacts with others not listed when appropriate)

APPENDIX 2

EXECUTIVE ACTION PLAN ON TACKLING PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY, CRIMINALITY AND ORGANISED CRIME AND OPERATIONAL RESULTS

EXECUTIVE ACTION PLAN AND OPERATIONAL RESULTS

The Executive Action Plan is a series of 38 commitments from the Northern Ireland Executive aimed at tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime.

The Programme is the Executive's response to the 2016 Panel Report which was set up following the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015 to make recommendations on the disbandment of paramilitary groups.

A total of £50m was pledged over five years for Phase 1 of the Programme to support delivery of the Action Plan. The Programme involves Government Departments, law enforcement agencies, local councils and community and voluntary sector partners working together.

The focus is on robust law enforcement, implementing long term prevention measures, addressing social issues that affect communities, and building confidence in the justice system.

In July 2020 the Executive granted a three-year extension to the Programme until 31 March 2024, with funding awarded on a yearly basis from the 2021/22 year.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

For Phase 2 of the Programme the overall outcome is: "Safer Communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control".

The two over-arching objectives are:

- People and communities are safe from the harm caused by paramilitarism; and
- People and communities are more resilient to paramilitary influence and involvement in paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

Progress to date

Phase 1 of the Programme is now complete and, over that time there was substantial progress across the four main delivery approaches for that Phase: long term prevention; building capacity to support transition; strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity; and building confidence in the justice system.

Long term prevention

- Over 1200 young men aged between 16 and 30 have benefitted from new Probation Board programmes which provide intensive mentoring support and boost rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.
- 4,158 young people have been engaging in the Youth Outreach Programme, START (Steer Teenagers Away from Recurrent Trouble) which is aimed at supporting vulnerable young people in communities most impacted by paramilitarism and coercive control.
- The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) created educational resources for post primary schools aimed at encouraging Active Citizenship.

Building capacity to support transition

- More than 1,500 women, across 26 areas, completed the Women Involved in Community Transformation project (WICT) in three phases up to March 2021. This programme empowered and enabled them to become involved in community development work.
- The Communities in Transition (CIT) Project commissioned appropriate delivery partners to carry out specific interventions and deliver required outputs for each of the eight areas identified as most vulnerable to paramilitary activity and coercive control. There are 32 projects currently in delivery.

Strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity

The Paramilitary Crime Task Force, which includes PSNI, NCA and HMRC, has*:

- charged or reported 318 people to the Public Prosecution Service;
- carried out 735 searches and arrested 358 people;
- prevented a total revenue loss of £4.8m;
- seized/detained £513,305 cash and secured *£622,128 cash forfeited*;
- seized £2,251,064 of drugs;
- seized 61 vehicles; and
- seized 197 weapons.

*These statistics are from April 2016 to March 2021 and are subject to change.

Building confidence in the justice system

- Almost 3,000 people completed a training programme for police and community partners which supports new approaches to problem solving and policing with the community.
- Local policing initiatives were delivered to promote engagement, problem solving and visibility of policing, tackling issues such as drugs and anti-social behaviour.
- Local police have worked on a project to prevent vulnerable young people from becoming involved in paramilitary activity. 140,000 'Ending the Harm' leaflets were distributed to 22 specifically targeted areas at the start of 2020 to increase community awareness of the public campaign, promote a culture of lawfulness and undermine the narrative of paramilitaries.
- Improved processes have been introduced to speed up the justice system for cases involving serious assaults, serious drug offences, attempted murder and taking banned items into prison.

The average time to complete these cases has decreased significantly; as at December 2020, approximately 517 Crown Court cases had been completed through the 'Indictable Cases Pilot' with the average processing time between the date an incident is reported to police until the case is disposed of at court is estimated to be 440 days, compared to 567 days in the same period the previous year.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Programme launched the latest 'Ending the Harm' public awareness campaign which focuses on how paramilitary gangs use illegal money lending as a means to control and exploit vulnerable people. This follows on from previous 'Ending the Harm' campaigns which have highlighted the brutal nature and impact of paramilitary attacks (2018) and how buying fake and illegal goods funds organised crime (2016).

The campaign, which is running across TV, radio, on demand services, outdoor advertising, online and on social media platforms, was launched by telling the story of how a young single mother's situation deteriorates rapidly once she borrows money from an illegal lender. A second advert will explore how paramilitary gangs use illegal money lending to control vulnerable victims.

This is often a hidden crime, and a practice that is sometimes perceived as normal. By showing how paramilitary gangs use illegal money lending to exploit and control vulnerable people in communities, we are showing them for the criminals that they are. We also hope that by highlighting support that is available for victims, we can encourage them to come forward and get the help they need.

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE TACKLING PARAMILITARISM PROGRAMME?

You can find out more about the programme by visiting the Northern Ireland Executive website:

www.northernireland.gov.uk/articles/executive-programme-tackling-paramilitary-activity-and-organised-crime-0

There is a bespoke website linked to the campaign (www.endingtheharm.com) which has a number of sections including some anonymised real-life case stories and signposting information on where people can go for help and support.

www.endingtheharm.com

You can also follow us on Twitter [@endingtheharm](https://twitter.com/endingtheharm)



APPENDIX 3

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Organised Crime Task Force

www.octf.gov.uk

PSNI

www.psnipolice.uk

CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland

www.crimestoppers-uk.org/in-your-area/northern-ireland

Border Force

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/border-force

Department for Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Department of Justice

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

www.hmrc.gov.uk

Immigration Enforcement

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/immigration-enforcement

www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime

National Crime Agency www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Trading Standards Service

www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service



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