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NCA

National Crime Agency

NCA Northern Ireland Performance

Q4 2017/18 (January – March 2018)

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1. Introduction

Tackling the breadth of serious and organised crime (SOC) is beyond the capacity and capabilities of any one body and requires a national response. Agencies can no longer act in isolation to protect the public, and nor can any one agency be expected to hold all the tools required for a comprehensive response. Within Northern Ireland the National Crime Agency (NCA) works alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and other operational partners in the fight against serious and organised crime. The Agency also provides investigative and operational support to PSNI activities within Northern Ireland, across the UK and internationally, including the provision of specialist capabilities, advice and guidance. Our partnership working with law enforcement and in the public and private sectors, is an integral part of how we operate and we remain focused on building the best intelligence picture of serious and organised crime threats; using that knowledge to relentlessly pursue those that operate at the high end of high risk; and developing and delivering specialist capabilities on behalf of law enforcement and other partners. In Q4, the NCA has continued to undertake activity in or affecting Northern Ireland across a broad range of threats.

SOC has a significant impact across all areas of the UK, but its origins often stretch far beyond our borders. On a global level, the NCA works with international partners and coordinates UK law enforcement support overseas to gather and share intelligence, conduct operational activity and enhance international delivery through a variety of means. This includes capacity building, training, and joint European and International taskforces.

2. Quarter 4 Overview

UK and overseas

Overall NCA activity during Quarter 4 (Q4) 2017/18, in conjunction with its UK and international partners, led to over 400 disruptions with over 340 people being arrested and 101 convicted. During this period, 27 firearms were recovered and 540 children were safeguarded. Approximately 32 tonnes of cocaine and 14 tonnes of cannabis were seized.

As part of an ongoing drive to raise public awareness of modern slavery and how to report it, the NCA commissioned a touring photographic exhibition 'Invisible People', which was launched in London in early January 2018. The aim of the campaign was to recreate the lives of 'Invisible People', exposing the reality of modern slavery and show that while victims are sometimes hidden away, they are often working in plain sight. The exhibition displayed images capturing snapshots of life in modern slavery, describing what the viewer was seeing, and information about signs which may indicate someone is a victim. The exhibition continues to tour UK cities and was in Belfast during this quarter.

An example of our activity to counter the threat of the highly toxic synthetic opioid fentanyl was the sentencing of Kyle ENOS from Wales, who used the dark web to advertise his business selling bespoke packages of fentanyl to customers in the UK and overseas. The opioid is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. Our enquiries identified 168 customers – 92 in the UK and 76 overseas. Four people on his customer list are known to have since died from fentanyl related deaths, although it cannot be said with certainty the fentanyl they took was supplied by ENOS. After pleading guilty, ENOS was sentenced to eight years in prison in February 2018. The action taken has had a direct impact on the availability of fentanyl in the UK.

In February 2018, the NCA was the first agency to use new legislation to recover the proceeds of crime, when we successfully applied for two Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWO) to investigate a politically exposed person's assets, totalling £22 million. The orders relate to two properties, one in London and one in the South East of England. UWOs, which were introduced under the Criminal Finances Act 2017 and came into force on 31 January 2018, are an investigative order that require a person with unexplained wealth of over £50,000 in the UK to provide information as to the legitimacy of their assets. They can be obtained in relation to anyone who is a Politically Exposed Person from outside the European Economic Area, someone involved in serious crime, or an individual or entity connected to such people.

Whilst we recognise that UWOs are not currently obtainable in Northern Ireland, these examples of obtaining UWOs in England are included to highlight the types of activity we have delivered to tackle threats which could impact on any part of the UK.

Northern Ireland

During Q4, **21** disruptions were reported occurring in or impacting on Northern Ireland (one major, eleven moderate, nine minor¹).

Five of these disruptions (three moderate and two minor) were a result of activity undertaken by the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF). Six disruptions related to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA). There were four cyber crime disruptions relating to UK-wide threats and three modern slavery and human trafficking disruptions. The remaining three disruptions related to money laundering, organised immigration crime and drugs.

The 21 disruptions in Q4 brings the full year total for 2017/18 to **96**, compared with 71 in 2016/17.

This report is grouped under the headings Vulnerabilities, Prosperity and Commodities.

¹ Disruption definitions:

Major	Significant, long term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.
Moderate	Noticeable, medium- term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.
Minor	Minimal, short term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.

3. Paramilitary Crime Taskforce

The Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF) was established to investigate organised crime linked to paramilitary groups, to maximise disruption and, where possible, to disband them. The PCTF was formally launched in September 2017 and NCA officers deployed to work alongside PSNI and HMRC colleagues in November 2018.

A number of organised crime groups (OCGs) have been prioritised as causing the greatest threat, harm and risk to the community and investigations have commenced targeting the leadership of each paramilitary-linked OCG. These cover a wide spectrum from low level crime to complex operations.

Between January and March 2018 PCTF officers conducted 57 searches linked to various paramilitary organisations, seizing a wide range of illicit commodities. NCA has also used its niche capabilities within the PCTF, for example, Civil Recovery and Tax powers have been used to identify and deny criminals the profit of their crimes which in turn has undermined their status in communities.

Case Study – PCTF Operation ATTINA

This operation is a PSNI referral relating to property associated with the alleged head of a Republican Paramilitary Group. On 11 January 2018 the High Court in Belfast granted an application for a Property Freezing Order (PFO) under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. The property frozen is subject to a civil recovery investigation and the Order prohibits anyone from dealing with or dissipating the value of the property while the investigation continues. Following service of the Order, the key subjects of the investigation were interviewed under the terms of a Disclosure Order. The investigation will now progress with a view to recovering the frozen property, which is suspected of having been purchased with the proceeds of crime. The property is valued at around £150,000 (gross).

4. Vulnerabilities

The Vulnerabilities threats are child sexual exploitation and abuse, modern slavery and human trafficking; and organised immigration crime.

4.1 Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA)

Operation JARRA is a significant joint PSNI/NCA investigation into the accessing, sharing and distributing of indecent images of children (IIOC) by 33 individuals within Northern Ireland. The total number of offenders sentenced so far is 23. The following result was achieved in this quarter:

- After a Crown Court hearing at Antrim in March 2018, Jason WOODROW` s application to vacate his previous guilty plea was rejected by the Judge as he had “substantial and critical concerns” about the evidence given to the hearing by both WOODROW and his mother. His guilty plea to 21 counts

of making indecent images of children therefore stood and on 1 May 2018 WOODROW was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment, placed on the Sex Offenders' Register for ten years, banned from working with children and subject to a Sex Offender Prevention Order (SOPO) for five years.

Operation SORAGE: On 6 March 2018 an individual in a position of trust was arrested on suspicion of indecent images of children offences, including via the Dark Web. He was bailed with strict conditions until July 2018.

Operation FLUTY is a joint investigation by the NCA (CEOP Command and NI Branch) and PSNI targeting those possessing and distributing IIOC. During Q4 2017-18 operational activity continued against a number of suspects:

- A 17 year old male from Holywood, Belfast received a two year Probation Order, 100 hours' Community Service and is subject to Sex Offender Notification requirements for five years; and
- A 47 year old man from Downpatrick received a two year Probation Order, 100 hours' Community Service, subject to a Sex Offender Prevention Order (SOPO) for five years and subject to Sex Offender Notification requirements for five years.

In addition a 70 year old male from Ballyclare was charged with IIOC offences and appeared at Antrim Crown Court on 20 April. He was sentenced to two years and six months' Probation Order, subject to a SOPO for five years and Sex Offender Notification requirements for five years.

NCA CSE Referrals Bureau (CSE RB) - The CSE RB is the central point within the NCA for receipt of referrals of information relating to online child sexual exploitation from industry, predominantly via the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the USA. NCMEC provides a centralised mechanism for public and electronic service providers to report suspected IIOC. NCMEC sends all referrals relating to UK suspects to the CSE RB. Based upon referrals from NCMEC and others, during Q4 the CSE RB made 48 disseminations to PSNI.

NCA CEOP Education Team - The NCA-CEOP Education Team represents NCA at the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) E-Safety Forum. This forum discusses latest developments, member activity, research and trends within NI on the theme of online safety. Feedback from the group is incorporated into the development of Thinkuknow resources and NCA-CEOP Education work.

An NCA-CEOP Education Coordinator delivered two workshops focusing on live streaming at a cross-border Digital Resilience conference in Londonderry in February 2018. The new Thinkuknow #LiveSkills resources were also promoted.

The number of trained CEOP Ambassadors in Northern Ireland to date is around 140. Seven schools have signed up for the Parent Info service during this quarter.

4.2 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT)

The NCA's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU), through the NCA Belfast office, is actively involved with the Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI) Organised Crime Task Force - Organised Immigration Crime and Human Trafficking quarterly sub-group and provides input into the Modern Slavery expert group.

Project AIDANT - PSNI participated in the latest phase of Project AIDANT, the NCA-led operational intensifications against MSHT. Phase 10 focused on building intelligence around Western Balkans criminality involved in MSHT.

- PSNI conducted a series of safeguarding and proactive visits to car washes across Northern Ireland. This activity increased their intelligence picture on Western Balkans organised crime links to modern slavery, and resulted in one arrest for non-MSHT offences. PSNI worked closely with a number of partners including HMRC to investigate related unpaid tax bills and bankruptcy petitions, and also worked with the Department of Communities Fraud Unit in respect of concerns relating to false companies, false pay slips and potential fraud involving National Insurance numbers.

Case Study: Operation FOG

MSHTU provided tactical advice to PSNI and on 28 February 2018 two offenders were convicted of trafficking females for sexual exploitation at Belfast Crown Court. They were sentenced to four and three years' imprisonment, with Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders imposed for ten and seven years respectively. This was as a result of a 'victimless' prosecution – the victims did not recognise themselves as such and did not agree to testify. The case is being used as an exemplar in the development of NCA/CPS guidance on this subject. One remaining female suspect was arrested on 3 February 2018. She has been charged with two counts of human trafficking, controlling prostitution and money laundering offences.

MSHTU Tactical Advisors have provided initial advice and assistance to the PSNI Trafficking Unit on their Operation 'I' into Nigerian domestic servitude; NCA support is also taking place in Nigeria. Tactical Advisor support to PSNI has also continued on Operation 'F', a joint investigation into the trafficking of Romanian females for sexual exploitation by a Romanian OCG.

4.3 Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)

The threat posed by Organised Immigration Crime and its impact on Northern Ireland continues to be assessed and actively investigated by NCA Project INVIGOR. The following activity features links to Northern Ireland.

NT-17-080325: Project INVIGOR provided intelligence support to an international operation focusing on an Organised Crime Group (OCG) which arranges the movement of Albanians into the UK via the Common Travel Area (CTA). The OCG is involved in large scale people smuggling via the Irish Republic, through Northern Ireland and onward into the UK, and also smuggling of people into North America and Australia. A coordinated day of action in March 2018 involving Albanian, Macedonian and Bulgarian authorities led to the arrest of 37 subjects in Albania believed to be using false documents to smuggle migrants to the UK via the Irish Republic. In excess of 100 passports, 800 identity cards and forgery equipment were also seized, significantly disrupting the OCG.

Project INVIGOR continues to explore ways in which a collaborative law enforcement response to OIC and borders can be bolstered, in particular around the abuse of the CTA. A workshop to highlight vulnerabilities and responses to CTA abuse is in the planning stages and an initial meeting with partners including PSNI, Police Scotland, HMRC and the Home Office took place in Belfast this quarter.

Project INVIGOR continued to provide intelligence development support to Immigration Enforcement Operation TRIFOLIUM, an operation targeting another OCG abusing the CTA through the use of false documents.

4.4 Vulnerabilities – General

NCA Missing Persons Unit (MPU) – The MPU received 13 missing person reports (seven high, four medium and two low risk) from PSNI during Q4. Of the 13 reports, nine remain open; one of the high-risk open cases relates to a 28 year old woman missing since May 2017. Work is ongoing on this missing person's case which is being treated as suspicious and may be linked to the disappearance of another woman in February 2017. A second high-risk case involves a 33 year old male who was reported to police as missing following a threat of suicide. There were no incidents of unidentified remains.

Four of the 13 reports were closed; one of these involved a 20 year old man from Lisburn who suffered from mental ill-health and who was heavily intoxicated at the time he went missing. He was located, deceased.

The NCA UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU) identified nine Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) relating to suspected vulnerable persons and 18 SARs relating to suspected human trafficking for fast-tracking to PSNI.

5. Prosperity

The Prosperity threats are cyber, money laundering, bribery, corruption and sanctions evasion, fraud and other economic crime.

5.1 Money Laundering

Operation PUMPLESS is an NCA-led investigation into allegations of financial irregularities and corruption arising from the sale of the Republic of Ireland's National Asset Management Agency's Northern Ireland loan book. To date the NCA has interviewed nine people under criminal caution and nine remain under criminal investigation. The NCA has interviewed 62 witnesses (some on more than one occasion) and obtained a number of Court Orders to gather material from public and private institutions nationally and internationally. The investigation continues to receive large amounts of digital material and expects to receive further significant amounts in forthcoming months. This material will require a considerable amount of investigative effort in the months ahead.

Of particular note this quarter was the submission by the NCA of a file to the Public Prosecution Service for charging decisions in respect of two suspects in this complex investigation. This investigation, with an international scope, remains one of the highest priority operations on the NCA serious and organised crime grid.

During Q4, 30 requests for a Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) received under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA 2002) were allocated to PSNI by the **NCA's UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU)** for advice, based on the location of the suspect, victim or other geographical factors. (This figure is out of a total 6,957 DAML requests handled by the UKFIU during this period.) The UKFIU exercised its power under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to refuse five and grant 22 of these requests. The **UKFIU** issued an international request on behalf of PSNI relating to money laundering.

5.2 Asset Denial

The **NCA Proceeds of Crime Centre (POCC)** has statutory functions under POCA 2002 to train, accredit and monitor Financial Investigators (FI) and Financial Intelligence Officers (FIO) across UK law enforcement. It is also responsible for the management of the Joint Asset Recovery Database (JARD), containing all the financial data relating to asset recovery. During Q4, POCC supported various PSNI financial investigation and intelligence training events, including the Counter Terrorist Intelligence Department. POCC continues to provide regulator advice and guidance on diverse PoCA matters to all law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland.

5.3 Fraud and Other Economic Crime

The **NCA UK National Central Office for Counterfeit Currency (UKNCO)** provided significant support to a PSNI investigation regarding banknote counterfeiting equipment found during a search of premises in March 2015. The UKNCO continues to provide assistance to PSNI in relation to the provision of evidence for a potential prosecution, including coordination of expert evidence.

The UKNCO worked with the Bank of Ireland and Hampshire Police to agree a press release about counterfeit Bank of Ireland £50 notes and how to distinguish them from genuine notes.

During Q4, the PSNI submitted 99 counterfeit currency seizures (non-witness statement requests) and 10 seizures where witness statements were required, to the UKNCO for processing and analysis.

5.4 Cyber Crime

NCA National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU)

Operation MANGONA is an investigation by PSNI into the suspected creation and operation of the 'Satori botnet' by the subject. NCCU and PSNI officers executed a search warrant at the subject's home address and arrested him for multiple Computer Misuse Act 1990 (CMA) offences. NCCU provided assistance in identifying and evidencing the infrastructure for the botnet and online links to the subject. NCCU has also coordinated the sharing of intelligence between the FBI and PSNI.

6. Commodities

The Commodities threats are firearms and drugs.

NCA Investigations have a mandated responsibility to investigate the importation of illicit goods such as drugs, weapons and firearms to the UK, as set out in the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 (CEMA). The NCA collaborates with PSNI to ensure that associated intelligence and investigative opportunities are developed and exploited where the importations are identified as being destined for Northern Ireland.

6.1 Firearms and offensive weapons

On 6 February 2018, Henry CAHOON pleaded guilty at Antrim Magistrates' Court to the importation of one knuckle duster and two extendable batons on 10 June 2016. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, suspended for 12 months.

6.2 Drugs

Operation ITALICI is an investigation into a Danish national, Jacob SPORON FIEDLER who was charged with conspiracy to fraudulently evade the prohibition on the importation and export of a Class C controlled drug imposed by Section 3(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA), in contravention of section 170 CECA. The imported anabolic steroids have a street value of approx £30 million. SPORON-FIEDLER was charged on 26 March 2018 and released on bail to attend Central Criminal Court on 28 April 2018. Bail conditions include residing in the UK, daily reporting, surrender of passport and lodgement of £600,000. On 6 April 2018, SPORON-FIEDLER was re-arrested for a breach of his bail conditions and subsequently remanded in custody.

Case Study – Drugs & Firearms

Two members of an international OCG under investigation for the distribution of firearms and Class A drugs, and associated money laundering were sentenced in the Republic of Ireland on 30 January 2018. They received ten years' and nine years' imprisonment respectively for their part in the importation of firearms and ammunition into Dublin in January 2017.

On 17 January 2018 Catherine REYNOLDS was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for four years. She had previously pleaded guilty to possession with intent to supply Class C drugs after 24,000 Zopiclone tablets (sleeping pills) were found in her luggage when stopped at Belfast International Airport arriving on a flight from Alicante. PoCA confiscation proceedings are now ongoing.

7. Other Activity

NCA Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) provided advice and support to PSNI on 37 instances this quarter and deployed on three occasions, providing a National SIO Adviser, National Family Liaison Adviser and a National Interview Advisor.

There were three kidnap cases relating to Northern Ireland reported to the **NCA Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit** during Q4. Twelve blackmail cases were notified in the period; eleven of these related to sextortion.

The **UKFIU** disseminated nine counter terrorism related SARs to PSNI in the quarter.

The NCA Central Services Unit provides, as a part of the **UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS)**, operational support to the PSNI Protected Persons Unit which is 'aligned' to the UKPPS. Support concerning new protection arrangements was provided on eight instances and ongoing assistance in relation to 91 individuals was undertaken.

The Fugitives Unit within the **NCA UK International Crime Bureau** processes European Arrest Warrants for law enforcement agencies within the UK and EU. During the reporting period there were eleven arrests and four surrenders made by PSNI for persons sought by EU partners on a European Arrest Warrant (EAW). Nineteen new cases were received for persons wanted by PSNI, with four arrests and two surrenders.