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NCA

National Crime Agency

NCA Northern Ireland Performance

Q3 2018/19 (October – December 2018 inclusive)

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1. Introduction

The NCA leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC), which costs the UK at least £37 billion annually. SOC threatens our critical national infrastructure and economic wellbeing; harms and exploits children and vulnerable adults; brings illicit commodities to our streets; and blights our communities.

The NCA works with partners across all sectors, nationally and internationally, to protect the public by delivering a whole system response, targeting the highest harm offenders and networks, disrupting their activities, bringing them to justice and denying them access to their assets.

In Northern Ireland the NCA undertakes the full range of operational activity and provides access to partners, in particular PSNI, to its specialist capabilities and functions. NCA activity is not limited to the PSNI force area, but extends to operations outside Northern Ireland, where organised crime groups (OCGs) have an impact that spreads beyond national boundaries.

2. Quarter 3 Overview

UK and overseas

Overall NCA activity during Quarter 3 (Q3) 2018/19 led to a total of 252 disruptions (combined "lead" and "support/coordinate") with 238 people arrested and 78 people convicted. During this period, 26 firearms were recovered and 663 children were safeguarded. Approximately four tonnes of cocaine and 13 tonnes of cannabis were seized.

The following are recent examples of activity carried out by the NCA to tackle threats that could impact on communities in any part of the UK.

Project VIZARDLIKE was an investigation into a Czech Republic company identified as selling s5 Firearms Act prohibited items online to UK citizens. A day of action took place on 7 November, coordinated by the NCA and involving 25 police forces and Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs) throughout the UK. As a result, 61 firearms were seized¹ and 12 individuals were arrested. Successful "Cease and Desist" activity was also taken against the company in the Czech Republic. Activity under Project VIZARDLIKE has underlined the challenge of preventing the online purchase of convertible handguns from vendors in mainland Europe by UK customers.

The first National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) week of intensification against the County Lines threat took place in October 2018. Led jointly by the NCA and the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), the NCLCC was officially launched in September 2018. Substantial operational and safeguarding outcomes included 505 arrests, 320 people engaged for safeguarding, 51 National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals, 182 cuckooed addresses² identified and visited, 95 County Lines targeted and £300,000 cash seized, as well as the recovery of numerous weapons and a large quantity of County Lines-related

¹ Some of these firearms seizures will have been recorded by ROCUs and police forces

² The homes of vulnerable people are taken over by criminals to deal drugs and commit other serious crimes.

Class A drugs. Another week of intensification activity is scheduled for late-January 2019.

The English Channel has become the focus of general maritime (GM) efforts at illegal entry this quarter, with significant increases in the number of facilitations attempted in small boats. This has led to an enhanced response from the NCA. The agency is working proactively with UK and overseas partners to develop a full intelligence picture of the GM organised immigration crime threat to the UK and to disrupt and dismantle the OCGs responsible. The Project INVIGOR Taskforce is actively attacking the "smugglers business model", targeting key enablers, such as the use of social media and criminal financial flows.

Northern Ireland - Overview

During Q3 2018/19, **21** disruptions were reported by the NCA as occurring in or impacting on Northern Ireland (one moderate and 20 minor³). 17 of the disruptions related to activity to mitigate against UK-wide cyber crime threats, two concerned drug seizures at Belfast airports (one representing the largest seizure of cocaine in Northern Ireland for several years), one related to a cash seizure and the remaining disruption related to activity carried out by the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF).

This brings the year-to-date (April – December 2018 inclusive) total to **39** (one major, four moderate and 34 minor) disruptions recorded.

3. Paramilitary Crime Taskforce

The PCTF was established to investigate organised crime linked to paramilitary groups, to maximise disruption, and, where possible, to disband them.

NCA officers within the PCTF are focused on delivering NCA niche capabilities to support PCTF partners. The NCA team is leading a criminal investigation into an OCG importing Class A and B drugs into Northern Ireland from mainland Europe. One of the principal paramilitary groups targeted by the PCTF is part funded as a result of the illicit finance secured in this endeavour.

On 12 October, an individual linked to this OCG was arrested for drug possession offences and concealing criminal property, following the seizure of an amount of herbal cannabis and associated cash from their home address. On 9 November, NCA officers arrested one of the principals of the OCG for the importation of Class A drugs, following the seizure of a quantity of Class A drugs from the Parcelforce depot in Belfast. Follow up searches resulted in the seizure of approximately £5,000.

³ 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.

4. Vulnerabilities

The Vulnerabilities threats comprise child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE), modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), and organised immigration crime (OIC).

4.1 Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Operation FLUTY is a joint investigation by NCA and PSNI targeting individuals possessing and distributing indecent images of children (IIOC). The final defendant, originally arrested in June 2016, appeared at Belfast Crown Court on 21 November 2018, where he entered guilty pleas to four offences. He was sentenced to a three-year Probation Order, a five-year Sexual Offences Prevention Order managing his use of the internet, a five-year Sex Offender Notification requirement, and forfeiture of all devices which contain illegal images.

The **NCA CSE Referrals Bureau (CSE RB)** is the central point for the receipt of referrals from industry of information relating to online child sexual exploitation, predominantly via the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Based upon referrals from NCMEC and other industry partners, during Q3 2018/19, the CSE RB made 41 disseminations to PSNI.

The **NCA CEOP Education Team** attended the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) e-Safety Forum on 8 November. This forum discusses the latest developments, research, member activity and trends within Northern Ireland regarding online safety. A current work stream of the e-Safety Forum is the development of a Northern Ireland version of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCIS) *Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people*. The CEOP Education Team plays an advisory role in this development and is the liaison between the SBNI e-Safety Forum and the UKCIS Education Working Group, responsible for creating the original version for England and Wales. This role will remain until the document is signed off by UKCIS and published.

One school signed up for the Parent Information Service⁴ during this quarter. To date, there are approximately 160 trained CEOP ambassadors in Northern Ireland.

4.2 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT)

There were no requests from PSNI for tactical advice from the NCA Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) in Q3 2018/19.

The MSHTU continues to have a seat on the Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI) Organised Crime Task Force – a sub-group focusing on the MSHT threat and convening on a quarterly basis.

In Q3 2018/19, PSNI participated in phase 14 of Project AIDANT, the NCA-led operational intensification tackling MSHT, which focused on criminal exploitation. A multi-agency deployment including PSNI officers, PSNI Dog Section and

⁴ The Parent Information Service is part of ThinkuKnow - an education programme developed by the CEOP Command, providing high quality education about sex, relationships and the internet aimed at reducing the vulnerability of children and young people to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Border Force took place at both Belfast airports targeting cash being taken on outbound flights. No seizures were made.

Following a number of reports relating to forced begging received via the Modern Slavery Helpline, PSNI also deployed Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) officers to parts of Belfast to identify potential victims and raise public awareness.

PSNI liaised with Derry City and Strabane district, who had identified a forced begging issue within their regions, in order to conduct activity within Project AIDANT phase 14. As part of this collaborative exercise, PSNI officers deployed alongside NPT officers and screened six individuals suspected of being potential victims. However, all declined assistance and support.

4.3 Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)

The OIC threat and its impact on Northern Ireland continues to be assessed and actively investigated by NCA Project INVIGOR. The project continues to explore ways in which a collaborative law enforcement response to OIC and borders can be bolstered, particularly in relation to the abuse of the Common Travel Area (CTA). The NCA is leading the development of a workshop to be delivered in the next quarter to acquire a consolidated view of all partner activity in the CTA.

4.4 Vulnerabilities – General

The **NCA UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)** received three missing person reports from PSNI during Q3 2018/19. One case remains open and concerns a 79-year-old male from Fermanagh, missing since May 2018, and deemed to be low-risk. His vehicle was last seen crossing the border at a toll station Dublin-bound, but all efforts to contact him since have failed. The UKMPU has carried out a variety of open-source checks and offered support to PSNI with this case.

Of the two closed reports, both were deemed to be medium-risk. One was considered to be a trafficking case involving a 52-year-old female, who disappeared from a women's refuge in November 2018. In December she was located in Newcastle after being arrested. The UKMPU provided advice concerning the taking of DNA and in relation to the NRM.

The **NCA UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU)** identified 16 suspicious activity reports (SARs) relating to suspected vulnerable persons, three relating to suspected child exploitation and two relating to suspected human trafficking for fast-tracking to PSNI.

5. Prosperity

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

5.1 Money Laundering

Operation PUMPLESS is the NCA-led investigation into allegations of fraud, bribery and corruption arising from the sale of the Republic of Ireland's National Asset Management Agency's Northern Ireland loan book. To date witness interviews have been conducted and a significant amount of evidential material has been collected, on a voluntary basis, via Production Order, or through

searches under warrant. An evidential file was submitted to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) in March 2018 concerning two suspects. One of the two was included in the second file provided in January 2019 which concerned a total number of eight suspects. An initial PPS direction could be available in three to eight months and this will initiate a charging decision. Engagement with PSNI continues in relation to any forthcoming prosecutions.

On 18 July 2018, Border Force officers challenged a passenger at Belfast International Airport as he was about to board a flight for Amsterdam. He was questioned about his journey and found to be in possession of approximately €4,000 in cash. The cash was initially seized by Border Force as it was believed to be derived from or intended for use in criminal conduct. NCA officers submitted a cash forfeiture order on the 18th October 2018 at Ballymena Magistrates Court for €3,900 under Section 294 (1) of the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002.

During Q3 2018/19, there were a total of 81 Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) requests under POCA legislation allocated to the PSNI by the UKFIU for advice, based on the location of the suspect, victim, or other geographical factors. They constituted part of a total of 9,063 DAML requests handled by the UKFIU during this period. The UKFIU exercised its power under POCA to refuse one and grant 45 of these requests to allow PSNI to take action (£31,395 was restrained and forfeited.) The UKFIU issued 13 international requests on behalf of PSNI relating to drugs/money laundering and fraud investigations.

5.2 Fraud and Other Economic Crime

During Q3 2018/19, the PSNI submitted 57 counterfeit currency seizures to the **NCA UK National Central Office for Counterfeit Currency (UKNCO)** for processing and analysis. Witness statements were provided by UKNCO to support police investigations or prosecutions for 22 counterfeit currency seizures.

5.3 Cyber Crime

The **NCA National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU)** provided support to PSNI in the following cases:

Operation 'M' is an ongoing investigation in response to the DYN Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS⁵) attack in October 2016, which affected internet access for much of the United States. The principal suspect of this investigation is a UK national, resident in Northern Ireland. The case file for this investigation continues to be developed and prepared for the PPS to consider charges against the individual, which will be submitted in early February 2019. This case file relates to alleged offences of conspiracy to launch DDoS attacks as part of an online group in December 2016, and an offence of failing to comply with a Section 49 Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Notice.

Under Operation 'J', the PSNI Cyber Team is investigating a number of DDoS attacks against multiple websites worldwide, including attacks on several law

⁵A Distributed Denial of Service cyber attack seeks to make a machine or network unavailable to its intended users.

enforcement websites. The investigation established that the attacks were launched from an associated webstresser site. The NCA has worked with law enforcement partners and used its international network of liaison officers to assist with enquiries. In October 2018, PSNI identified and arrested an 'actor' associated with the attacks. The individual was found to be running several remote servers, all of which were subject to live acquisition, and subsequently preserved through collaborative working with the NCA. Subsequently, forensic downloads of the suspect's seized media were reviewed in November 2018, enabling PSNI to continue to identify possible victims of DDoS attacks and engage with them to pursue complaints. In December 2018, PSNI identified an additional possible actor and disseminated intelligence to the NCA Triage, Incident Coordination and Tasking (TICAT) team for assistance. The ongoing review of the seized media has also identified significant carding activities, the details of which have been shared with the NCA via TICAT.

There have been eight taskings and significant updates from TICAT in this period, including:

- Intelligence packages relating to users of the webstresser.org service believed to be in Northern Ireland have been prepared by the NCCU Threat Response team. TICAT disseminated the packages for ROCUs to action, with preparation of coordinated press release activity in line with other ROCUs.
- NCCU Tactical Research and Development team provided specialist cyber support to PSNI in furtherance of an investigation into a number of IRA suspects.
- Councils in Northern Ireland were experiencing a high volume of targeted spear phishing⁶ attacks, together with brute force attacks⁷ on user accounts. TICAT coordinated intelligence support to ROCUs investigating similar council system attacks.

6. Commodities

The Commodities threats comprise firearms and drugs. The NCA has 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 (CEMA) 1979. 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 Drugs

On 23 December, a Brazilian national residing in Northern Ireland was arrested at Belfast City Airport after arriving on a flight from Sao Paulo, Brazil, via London Heathrow. Border Force officers had found a hidden compartment within his luggage containing 3.7kg of a white powder, which tested positive for cocaine. NCA officers charged the passenger with importation and possession of Class A drugs. He appeared at Belfast Magistrates Court on 26 December and was remanded in custody until 23 January.

⁶ Fraudulent practice of sending emails from an apparently known or trusted sender to seek confidential information.

⁷ An attacker submitting many passwords or passphrases with the hope of eventually guessing correctly.

On 12 May 2017, Border Force officers seized a quantity of Oxycontin (opioid) Class A and Class C tablets at Belfast International Airport. The various controlled prescription medicines were found in a passenger's luggage. On 4 December 2018, the individual was sentenced to a total of three years and four months' imprisonment at Antrim Crown Court for six counts of importation, possession and intent to supply offences. The sentence was suspended for three years.

7. Other Activity

Asset Denial - The **NCA Proceeds of Crime Centre (POCC)** has provided regulatory guidance on diverse POCA matters arising from operational cases, such as civil recovery, and advice on accreditation.

The **NCA Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS)** provided advice and support to PSNI on 31 instances during Q3 2018/19, in cases including suspicious deaths, sexual offences, physical and mental abuse, and murder.

PSNI reported one kidnap case relating to Northern Ireland to the **NCA Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit** during Q3 2018/19, involving a female kidnapped in Turkey. The incident was believed to be domestic-related and the Turkish National Police is investigating relevant offences. The released hostage is being managed by consular colleagues in-country. Additionally, 23 blackmail cases involving sextortion were notified during the reporting period.

The **UKFIU** disseminated six terrorist finance-related SARs to PSNI in Q3 2018/19.

The **NCA Central Services Unit** provides, as part of the UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS), operational support to the PSNI Protected Persons Unit. In this quarter, the UKPPS provided 227 new instances of support on behalf of PSNI.

The **NCA UK International Crime Bureau** processes European Arrest Warrants (EAWs) for law enforcement agencies within the UK and EU. During the reporting period there were 15 arrests and five surrenders made by PSNI for persons sought by EU partners on an EAW. One new case was received for persons wanted by PSNI, with four arrests and seven surrenders.

A subject wanted by PSNI for grievous bodily harm dating back to September 2014 was arrested in Lithuania following the circulation of an EAW in October 2018. The subject was arrested on 20 November and successfully extradited on 6 December.