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NCA

National Crime Agency

NCA Performance in Northern Ireland

Q1 2019/20 (April – June)

Date: 2nd October 2019

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The performance figures in this report reflect NCA activity that has occurred in, or impacted upon, Northern Ireland during Q1 2019/20.

1. Q1 NATIONAL OVERVIEW

The NCA works with partners across all sectors, nationally and internationally, to protect the public by leading 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.

During this period, the NCA has recovered 70 firearms across the UK and seized 37 tonnes of cocaine and 18 tonnes of cannabis in the UK and upstream. By preventing these significant numbers of firearms, and large amounts of drugs, from falling into the hands of the UK's organised crime groups the NCA protects communities right across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

We also protected the most vulnerable in these communities, safeguarding 599 children in the UK. In tackling cyber crime, a threat that cuts across borders and is largely hidden online, we made 28 disruptions against UK cyber offenders.

Recent examples of activity carried out by the NCA to tackle the threat of serious and organised crime impacting on communities across the UK include:

- Following an investigation into the distribution of law enforcement-branded ransomware via infected web adverts on adult pornography websites, a UK-based individual was sentenced to six years and five months' imprisonment after being convicted of money laundering, blackmail, and offences under the Computer Misuse Act 1990. His criminality affected millions of victims across multiple jurisdictions worldwide. His group owned and operated the Angler Exploit Kit, a highly sophisticated piece of malicious software.
- We continue to pursue the offenders who target the most vulnerable in our society: two men were sentenced to a total of four years four months imprisonment for hosting an online conferencing room where they shared sexual abuse material with likeminded offenders; a music teacher was sentenced to five years imprisonment after live streaming child sexual abuse over the internet and plotting to abuse young girls in the Philippines; and a former lieutenant colonel in the British Army was sentenced to over three years imprisonment after paying to direct the sexual abuse of a child in the Philippines over the internet.
- A national operation coordinated by the NCA and involving police forces and Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) throughout the UK, as well as the Spanish National Police, led to one-hundred firearms being seized and 27 people being arrested. Those arrested had purchased forward venting blank firing guns from sellers across Europe. While these weapons can be purchased with limited restrictions in many countries, they are illegal in the UK. As they can be readily converted to fire live ammunition – using household tools and requiring no special skills – they represent a

significant criminal risk in the UK and are an established part of the European criminal market. One of those arrested by the NCA was found to be carrying a loaded, converted revolver.

- A major international organised immigration crime group was disrupted when Turkish authorities, acting on intelligence provided by NCA, arrested 25 subjects, 20 of whom were subsequently charged with people smuggling offences. This was the culmination of an investigation commenced by NCA Project Invigor in 2016. The group were involved in smuggling migrants by sea from Syria and Iraq, via Turkey to Greece, Italy, the UK and other countries in the EU. A total of 569 migrants were detained by Turkish authorities. This result highlights the strength of the NCA's international network and our commitment to tackle organised immigration crime in source, transit and destination countries.

2. EXPLOITATION OF THE VULNERABLE

2.1 Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE)

- The NCA Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Referrals Bureau – a central point for the receipt of industry referrals relating to online CSAE – made 51 disseminations to PSNI. These intelligence reports contain detailed intelligence leads from which PSNI can initiate investigations. In Q1, PSNI made 18 arrests and safeguarded 25 children in response to NCA referrals.

2.2 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT)

- The NCA identified 17 financial suspicious activity reports (SARs) relating to suspected vulnerable persons, eight SARs relating to potential child exploitation and two relating to suspected human trafficking – all of which were fast-tracked to PSNI.

3. IMPACT OF SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME ON COMMUNITIES

3.1 Firearms

- The NCA continues to work with partners to address systematic vulnerabilities related to the threat to the UK posed by the criminal use of firearms. There has been no notable operational activity or disruptions in Northern Ireland this quarter.

3.2 Drugs

- On 5 June 2019 the last of five suspects from Operation ITALICI (reported in Q4 2018-19) was found guilty of conspiracy to import steroids in bulk quantities, with sentencing adjourned until November 2019. Operation ITALICI was an investigation into the importation and manufacture of Anabolic Androgenic Steroids (AAS) triggered by the Border Force interception of a 632kg consignment of AAS at Heathrow Airport destined for Belfast. This crime group with a global supply network had been operating for eight years and trafficked over 100 tonnes of AAS.

4 HARM TO THE UK'S ECONOMY AND INSTITUTIONS

4.1 Money Laundering

- The UK Financial Intelligence Unit allocated PSNI with 83 Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) requests, and issued two international requests relating to theft, money laundering and fraud. In addition, 14 terrorist finance-related SARs were disseminated by the NCA to PSNI.

4.2 Asset Recovery

- On 24 June, the NCA, working with partners as part of the PCTF, obtained a Recovery Order by Consent from the High Court in Belfast against a residential property located in East Belfast. The NCA alleged that the property was funded from unidentified sources of income and mortgage fraud.

4.3 Counterfeit Currency

- The NCA analysed 34 counterfeit currency seizures for PSNI with the aim of identifying common currency printers and ultimately the crime groups responsible. The NCA also provided witness statements in relation to 13 counterfeit currency seizures.

4.4 Cyber Crime

- The NCA is assisting PSNI with a number of cyber investigations including in relation to:
 - A ransomware attack on a Belfast-based IT company. The NCA National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) provided intelligence development and is supporting ongoing coordination between the PSNI case and a linked investigation on the mainland.
 - A network intrusion on a company's IT systems. The NCCU carried out de-confliction checks and utilised industry partnership relationships to support risk-mitigation.

4.5 Borders Threat

- The NCA is among a number of agencies staffing the new Causeway Multi-Agency Hub (MAH), designed to tackle the full range of threats and risks on Republic of Ireland-UK-Crown Dependencies routes, including the Common Travel Area. Causeway has actively liaised with PSNI colleagues with a view to finalising an agreement for PSNI staff to be embedded into the hub.

5. SPECIALIST CAPABILITIES

- The UK Protected Persons Service provided 358 instances of support on behalf of PSNI.
- NCA Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) provided advice and support to PSNI on 13 instances, and deployed officers into force on eleven occasions. The cases related to murder, sexual offences, suspicious deaths and missing persons. Cases of note include:
 - A 55 year old male who was last seen in Comber, County Down entering a flat. The investigation suspected he had been murdered within these premises and removed to another location. An MCIS specialist advised on possible deposition sites, search strategy and use of digital media opportunities to support the proposed searches. A body was subsequently recovered in a nearby lake.
 - The PSNI investigation into Muckamore Abbey focuses on 1500 different crimes within one ward of the hospital which is occupied by patients with severe learning disabilities. An MCIS National Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) Adviser has met with the SIO and gave advice which provided a clear, defined and achievable structure for progressing this complex and large scale investigation, which continues to attract national media attention.
- The NCA Anti-Kidnap and Extortion Unit (AKEU) is the national repository of sextortion (blackmail) complaints. The details of those suspected to be behind the sextortion are checked against reports from other forces and, where possible, linked and disseminated to the countries in which they reside. PSNI reported nine sextortion cases to the AKEU during Q1.
- The UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU) assisted PSNI with two missing person reports: the most significant was the report that related to a 55-year-old father-of-four from Newtownards who was reported missing in May after calling the police to ask for help to enter his girlfriend's property. The UKMPU liaised closely with MCIS as there were suspicious elements to this case and specialist advisors from the NCA met with the SIO to offer advice with regards to opportunities of communications analysis. Police subsequently found the individual's body in July. Four suspects were arrested and have been released on bail.
- The NCA UK International Crime Bureau processes European Arrest Warrants (EAWs) for UK and EU law enforcement agencies. PSNI made five arrests and five surrenders for persons sought on an EAW during the quarter. In the opposite direction, PSNI sent six cases to the NCA for onward dissemination, resulting in four arrests and three surrenders.

6. PARAMILITARY CRIME TASKFORCE

- The NCA in Northern Ireland works in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

(HMRC) as part of a Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF), with the aim of tackling organised crime linked to paramilitary activity. The NCA's focus within the PCTF is on activity delivering the most impactful results in terms of harm reduction, disruption and dislocation.

- Officers from the NCA, working as part of the PCTF, obtained a Property Freezing Order in relation to nine residential properties in County Down and County Antrim under the Proceeds of Crime Act. The properties have a combined estimated value of around £2 million. The NCA alleged that the underlying criminality was drug dealing, money laundering and mortgage fraud. The next step will be to interview the defendant and determine whether or not the threshold is met to proceed to claim in the High Court.