

# **The national tasking, coordination and governance of the response to serious and organised crime**

An inspection of the National Crime Agency-led  
arrangements

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# 1. Summary

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is required to carry out inspections of the National Crime Agency (NCA),<sup>1</sup> and following an inspection we must report to the Home Secretary on the efficiency and effectiveness of the NCA.<sup>2</sup>

This, our fourth inspection of the NCA, examines the efficiency and effectiveness of the national tasking and coordination process and the related arrangements of the strategic governance groups.

The terms of reference were to consider, in relation to the NCA's responsibility to lead, support and co-ordinate the national law enforcement response to serious and organised crime:

- how effective are the processes for establishing a 'single authoritative intelligence picture'<sup>3</sup> on which national tasking is based?
- are the current strategic, tactical and operational tasking processes led by the NCA ensuring that activity is focused on national priorities?<sup>4</sup>
- how are the strategic governance groups led by the NCA, their related threat groups, and strategic action plans, informing and influencing national tasking?
- how are the NCA, police forces across the UK and other law enforcement agencies responding to the national priorities?

We conducted the fieldwork for our inspection between April and July 2017. This was an inspection of the NCA, not of the police and other public bodies that participate in the national tasking and coordination arrangements. However, in order to provide a comprehensive assessment, we also sought the perspectives of the police and other bodies. This additional insight informed our understanding of how the national tasking arrangements worked in practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Crime and Courts Act 2013, section 11(1).

<sup>2</sup> Crime and Courts Act 2013, section 11(3).

<sup>3</sup> *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, page 27, paragraph 4.2. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/248645/Serious\\_and\\_Organised\\_Crime\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The term 'national priorities' refers to 'national priority threats' which we explain in more detail at paragraph 2.14.

This report outlines the good work that the NCA has undertaken in leading the response to serious and organised crime. While the current arrangements are generally working well, there are areas where the NCA, in conjunction with the police and other law enforcement bodies, needs to improve.

We were concerned that more needed to be done to enhance the 'picture of threat' on which national tasking is based. We found omissions (which can easily be addressed) in the submission of intelligence from policing, and an opportunity for the NCA to enhance the production of intelligence assessments through the sequencing of intelligence submissions by the police and other law enforcement bodies.

We also established that, in the absence of the necessary technology, the NCA does not have the capacity to add certain intelligence to its intelligence system. Also, there were problems where assessment officers were unable to access sensitive intelligence. The NCA had identified plans to address this, and we will continue to monitor progress. We were surprised to find that the NCA did not have a process in place to identify criminality that involves more than one national threat. This gap needs to be filled as soon as possible.

In our examination of the national tasking and strategic governance processes, we found good participation by the police and other law enforcement bodies, but we have recommended broader representation. We were encouraged that the local priorities for all the parties involved commonly reflected those set nationally. However, we believe that the process for identifying national priority threats needs development, expectations for the response to national threats and national priority threats need to be explicit, and the value of the control strategy needs to be established as this informs the national response to serious and organised crime.

We also examined the oversight of strategic governance groups and their strategic action plans. We believe there needs to be greater clarity on how the national tactical tasking and coordination group carries out this oversight, to provide the assurance needed. We also considered the national daily briefing meeting. We would like to see more guidance for participants, and more parties represented, but we were impressed with the value of this meeting, which underpins the national tasking arrangements.

In previous reports we had identified a problem with the referring of matters to the NCA by regional organised crime units (ROCUs). Despite the efforts made to address this by the NCA, there is still confusion. We raised this again during our fieldwork, through the national tactical tasking and coordination group, and we will continue to monitor the resulting direction given by the chair of that group.

We examined the internal tasking arrangements for the NCA. We found them to be well-led, with robust arrangements in place for the prioritisation of the Agency's response to serious and organised crime. We have recognised the work of the dedicated review team, which provides the scrutiny needed to ensure the NCA

remains focused on the national threats. We also considered the development of new collaboration with the security and intelligence agencies, which showed early promise.

We conclude that the NCA has effective and efficient processes in place to support its role in the tasking, coordination and governance of the response to serious and organised crime. However, we have made eleven recommendations for action which are necessary to enhance the existing arrangements. While these are mostly directed at the NCA, some will need the support of the police and other law enforcement bodies if they are to be implemented successfully.

### **Recommendations**

- With immediate effect, the chief constable of the British Transport Police should ensure that the force's intelligence assessments for serious and organised crime are shared with the NCA.
- With immediate effect, where a regional organised crime unit (ROCU) is not providing intelligence, or the level of intelligence that would be reasonably expected to inform the national picture, the NCA should resolve this with the ROCU and, where necessary, refer this to the national tactical intelligence group (NTIG) for action.
- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should consult all law enforcement bodies which contribute to the national intelligence picture on serious and organised crime, with a view to setting a timetable for the submission of the intelligence it requires for production of the national strategic and tactical assessments. If it is determined that the setting of such a timetable is practicable, it should become part of the National Intelligence Requirement.
- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should modify the structure and working practices in the national assessment centre to ensure that matters which relate to more than one national threat are properly recognised and evaluated for inclusion in the national assessments.
- With immediate effect, the commissioner of City of London Police should make arrangements to secure the regular attendance of a representative at the national strategic tasking and coordination group (NSTCG) and other national tasking meetings.
- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should design and operate a clear process for the evaluation and prioritisation of threats which appear in the national strategic assessment.

- By 31 March 2018, the chair of the national tasking and coordination group (NTTCG) should have arrangements in place to provide assurance that the strategic governance groups are taking the necessary action and mitigating the threats within their strategic action plans.
- By 31 March 2018, the chair of the national tasking and coordination group (NTTCG) should establish that the private sector fraud group is in place and fulfilling the needs of the strategic action plan, especially in the light of the emerging prominence of the threat from fraud.
- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should consult law enforcement bodies to assess the national control strategy's value and determine whether its continued production is worthwhile. If it is decided to continue with production of the national control strategy, its accuracy should be subjected to a quality assurance process.
- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should issue guidance to all participants in the national daily briefing meeting as to what is expected of them and how the meetings are to be conducted.
- With immediate effect, the NCA's director of intelligence should review the membership of the national daily briefing meeting and ensure that the all relevant parties are invited, including British Transport Police and City of London Police.

## 2. Introduction

### Our commission

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is an independent inspectorate which is required, under the Crime and Courts Act 2013, to carry out inspections of the NCA. Following an inspection, we must report to the Home Secretary on the efficiency and effectiveness of the NCA.

This inspection was carried out as part of our inspection programme for 2017-18, which was drawn up after public consultation and approved by the Home Secretary.

### Background and context

Serious and organised crime remains one of the most significant risks to the national security of the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The NCA, police forces, and a wide range of other public bodies are charged with the responsibility of tackling it. Each body has specific obligations. Often, the bodies need to call on each other for the provision of specialist expertise, techniques, equipment and support. Furthermore, some of the information they hold is of mutual value and – collectively – represents much of the government's understanding of the full extent of serious and organised crime affecting the United Kingdom.

The Crime and Courts Act 2013 includes specific provisions for the NCA to collect information<sup>6</sup> from these other public bodies and, in certain circumstances, for the NCA to direct their activities.<sup>7</sup> If the activities of all these bodies are to be as effective as possible, they must be co-ordinated. This responsibility falls to the NCA.

### National tasking, strategic governance groups and strategic action plans

The NCA's responsibility is also reflected in its document setting out how it will work with other bodies. The *NCA Commitment to Working in Partnership with UK Operational Partners* says that "[part of the NCA's mission is to ensure] that the UK's

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<sup>5</sup> *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, HM Government, November 2015, page 87. Serious and organised crime affecting the UK appears as a tier two risk. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/478933/52309\\_Cm\\_9161\\_NS\\_S\\_SD\\_Review\\_web\\_only.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NS_S_SD_Review_web_only.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Crime and Courts Act 2013, section 1(5).

<sup>7</sup> Crime and Courts Act 2013, section 5.

response to serious and organised crime is joined up by coordinating and tasking the national response ...".<sup>8</sup>

Another document, the *NCA Blueprint*, envisaged the creation of multi-agency 'strategic governance groups' and a role for them which would "...involve working with partners to develop new operations against agreed multi-agency priorities and commissioning new activity through requests to [national tasking and coordination]."<sup>9</sup>

The NCA describes these strategic governance groups as sub-groups to the national tactical tasking and coordination group (NTTCG), which "...are tasked to develop Strategic Action Plans for mitigating the threats contained within the National Strategic Assessment and to coordinate the multi-agency response to those threats. SGGs may delegate specific threats to individual Threat Groups, reporting up to the SGG, as necessary."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the national tasking and coordination process and the strategic governance groups are two discrete enterprises that represent the arrangements by which the NCA seeks to discharge its statutory leadership responsibility. Each involves a routine series of national meetings, most of which are chaired by the NCA, attended by senior representatives from the NCA, police and other law enforcement bodies.

We have provided a more detailed description of the national tasking and coordination meetings and strategic governance groups at annex A.

This, our fourth inspection of the NCA, examines the efficiency and effectiveness of the national tasking and coordination process and the related arrangements of the strategic governance groups. Our inspection in 2014<sup>11</sup> and a review of progress since the first inspection in 2015<sup>12</sup> included commentary on those arrangements.

In our 2015 inspection report, we acknowledged that "tasking processes had continued to evolve since the 2014 inspection report"<sup>13</sup> and that progress had been

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<sup>8</sup> *The NCA Commitment to Working in Partnership with UK Operational Partners*, NCA, August 2015, page 4, paragraph 7. Available at: [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/178-the-nca-commitment-to-working-in-partnership-with-uk-operational-partners/file](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/178-the-nca-commitment-to-working-in-partnership-with-uk-operational-partners/file)

<sup>9</sup> *NCA Blueprint Version 3.1*, NCA, 30 September 2013, page 21, paragraph 2 (unpublished).

<sup>10</sup> *NCA terms of reference for national tasking groups*, NCA, 2017 (unpublished).

<sup>11</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency*, HMIC, March 2015. Available from: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication/an-inspection-of-the-national-crime-agency/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication/an-inspection-of-the-national-crime-agency/)

<sup>12</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency - An inspection of the National Crime Agency's progress against outstanding recommendations made by HMIC and areas for improvement*, HMIC, July 2016. Available from: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, page 50, paragraph 4



made to improve those arrangements as a whole. In 2015, we also said that "while the intelligence picture continues to improve, there are further improvements that can be made to reduce gaps and improve the intelligence picture."<sup>14</sup> This referred specifically to the lack of a consistent response by other law enforcement bodies to national intelligence requirements.<sup>15</sup> With two years having elapsed since the fieldwork for that inspection, we were interested to see whether improvements had been made.

## Our terms of reference

In drawing up the terms of reference for our inspection, we consulted the directors general of the NCA and the Office for Security and Counter-terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

Our terms of reference were to consider, in relation to the NCA's responsibility to lead, support and co-ordinate the national law enforcement response to serious and organised crime:

- how effective are the processes for establishing a 'single authoritative intelligence picture'<sup>17</sup> on which national tasking is based?
- are the current strategic, tactical and operational tasking processes led by the NCA ensuring that activity is focused on national priorities?<sup>18</sup>
- how are the strategic governance groups led by the NCA, their related threat groups, and strategic action plans, informing and influencing national tasking?
- how are the NCA, police forces across the UK and other law enforcement agencies responding to the national priorities?

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, page 53, paragraph 3

<sup>15</sup> The priorities for the collection of intelligence are agreed by the NCA and the main UK law enforcement bodies, and form a part of the 'official sensitive' version of the national strategic assessment.

<sup>16</sup> The Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, part of the Home Office, works to counter the threats from terrorism and serious and organised crime. Its work is covered in the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, known as the "CONTEST" strategy, and in the *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*.

<sup>17</sup> *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, page 27, paragraph 4.2. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/248645/Serious\\_and\\_Organised\\_Crime\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The term 'national priorities' refers to 'national priority threats' which we explain in more detail at paragraph 2.14.

## Terminology

During this inspection we found that the NCA, and the other participating bodies, tend to use various terms to describe the national priorities. To provide clarity of meaning we have used the following terms:

- national threats – each of the threats identified within the national strategic assessment;
- national priority threats – those national threats, determined by the national strategic tasking and coordination group, which require the highest priority for the law enforcement response;
- national vulnerabilities – areas identified within the national strategic assessment which are not specific to one national threat, for example border corruption; and
- local priorities – set locally by bodies that participate in the national tasking arrangements, for example, the priorities which appear in police and crime plans.<sup>19</sup>

## Methodology

The full details of the methodology are set out in annex B. We conducted the fieldwork for our inspection between April and July 2017. We carried out a series of observations and interviews, and we analysed relevant data and documents.

This was an inspection of the NCA, not of the police and other public bodies that participate in the national tasking and coordination arrangements. However, in order to provide a comprehensive assessment, we also sought the perspectives of the police and other bodies. To do so, we were also invited to observe the tasking processes of some law enforcement bodies where HMICFRS does not have a statutory oversight role, and we are grateful for the access we were given.

This additional insight informed our understanding of how the national tasking arrangements worked in practice. In particular, it told us whether the national priority threats set by the NCA-led national strategic tasking and coordination group were reflected in the local priorities set by the NCA, police and other bodies. It did not tell us the extent or effect of their subsequent efforts to tackle national priority threats (performance is discussed later, on page 30).

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<sup>19</sup> A plan which sets out the police and crime objectives set by the police and crime commissioner for a police area.

### 3. Understanding the serious and organised crime threat picture

#### Introduction

This chapter deals with the first question in our terms of reference:

- how effective are the processes for establishing a 'single authoritative intelligence picture' on which national tasking is based?

The importance of such a picture as a basis for launching an effective response to serious and organised crime cannot be overstated. This is reflected in the prominence of the issue – and the NCA's responsibility – in the Government's *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, which says:

"[The NCA] will develop a single authoritative intelligence picture of serious and organised crime in the UK, assuming for these issues the role that the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) has successfully performed for the terrorist threat. It will then coordinate the law enforcement response, ensuring that action against criminals and organised criminal groups is prioritised according to the threat they present."<sup>20</sup>

#### The NCA's information technology

As we have reported in our previous NCA inspections, when it was created in 2013 the NCA inherited outdated computer systems from its precursor organisations. These systems are now being upgraded. However, in most cases, automated intelligence-gathering processes are still not in place for the NCA's information, let alone for the exponentially greater volume of relevant information held by the police and other bodies.

Consequently, the NCA generally relies on manual intelligence-collection processes, by which we mean other bodies sending the NCA their data in a form that the NCA can handle. In the light of such limitations, for this aspect of the inspection we have concentrated on the operation and applicability of the NCA's present systems for gathering and analysing intelligence, rather than an analysis of the gap between the capability of those systems and what is technologically and economically feasible.

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<sup>20</sup> *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, page 27, paragraph 4.2. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/248645/Serious\\_and\\_Organised\\_Crime\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf)

## Findings

Although matters had improved since our previous commentary on this area (see page 9), there were still significant weaknesses in some internal processes. There were important omissions in the intelligence submissions from other bodies. While the NCA continues to provide and refine useful documents in the form of the national strategic and tactical intelligence assessments, these do not represent the single authoritative threat picture that the *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy* envisages; the NCA was continuing to build and refine the intelligence systems required, but a convincing realisation of the ambition set out in the strategy remained a long way off.

### **The national strategic and tactical assessments**

The national strategic and tactical assessments are the documents that inform the setting of national threats and national priority threats for the law enforcement response. We therefore examined whether the NCA was gathering all the relevant intelligence for the production of these documents from the police and other bodies, and whether it was doing so as efficiently as could be expected, given the limitations in its information technology.

We found that while most of the participating bodies provided the NCA with intelligence to inform the national picture, the provision of intelligence by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, British Transport Police and the police-led multi-agency regional organised crime units (ROCUs) needed to improve.

### **The Police Service of Northern Ireland**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was not routinely sharing its intelligence assessments with the NCA, but we established in our interviews and observations that there was a commitment from PSNI's senior leadership for the force to do so, and for it to participate more closely in the national tasking arrangements. We were encouraged by this because intelligence from PSNI is likely to significantly add to the overall picture, and also because *the Revised Framework document for the National Crime Agency* commits the NCA to being "an active member of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Revised Framework document for the National Crime Agency*, Home Office, May 2015, page 8, paragraph 7.2. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/426101/6\\_610\\_HO\\_NCA\\_Framework\\_070515\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426101/6_610_HO_NCA_Framework_070515_2_.pdf)

## **British Transport Police**

British Transport Police is responsible for policing the rail network across England, Wales and Scotland. During our fieldwork we found that the force was not providing its intelligence assessments to the NCA, which undermines the NCA's ability to provide the single authoritative picture of threat. In particular, there is a form of criminality that adversely affects communities in various parts of the UK, where provision of British Transport Police intelligence could have enhanced the picture.

This is the criminality known within law enforcement as 'county lines', whereby city-based drugs gangs travel from the metropolitan environment into county areas to sell illicit drugs. Young and vulnerable people are often exploited, and there can be significant associated violence. We raised the lack of intelligence sharing with British Transport Police and the NCA, and, at the time of writing this report, we had established that British Transport Police was engaged in work to tackle this type of criminality. However, the NCA confirmed that the force was still not routinely sharing its intelligence assessments. We therefore raised this again with British Transport Police who confirmed that it had put a process in place to improve intelligence sharing.

### **Recommendation 1**

- With immediate effect, the chief constable of the British Transport Police should ensure that the force's intelligence assessments for serious and organised crime are shared with the NCA.

## **ROCU intelligence submission timetable**

Before our visit, we were made aware of a timetable, created by the NCA, that was designed to schedule the provision to the NCA of intelligence assessments by the nine ROCUs. The timetable included a series of clear deadlines for submission of relevant intelligence from ROCUs, so as to ensure its inclusion in the production process for the national strategic and tactical assessments. However, despite the clarity of the timetable, not all ROCUs were submitting intelligence in accordance with the timetable, or through the correct channels.

According to NCA records there were distinct variances in the level of submissions made by ROCUs. One ROCU had not submitted any intelligence assessments for more than twelve months, and we established that another was unaware of the requirement to submit tactical assessments. We also became aware of a ROCU that was submitting its assessments in accordance with the timetable but via its NCA regional organised crime coordinator<sup>22</sup> rather than to the correct email address for

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<sup>22</sup> The regional organised crime co-ordinator role manages the relationship between the NCA and regional organised crime units.

the appropriate recipient – the national assessment centre. In addition to the nominated NCA email address for the submission of intelligence, various other NCA email addresses were being used for this purpose, which may have resulted in some intelligence not finding its way to the national assessment centre.

We spoke with the ROCUs about what had been submitted but none of them held complete records of what they had sent to the NCA. The ROCUs play a vital role in providing the aggregated intelligence picture in each region; incomplete or irregular submission of their intelligence to the NCA should not be accepted.

### **Recommendation 2**

- With immediate effect, where a regional organised crime unit (ROCU) is not providing intelligence, or the level of intelligence that would be reasonably expected to inform the national picture, the NCA should resolve this with the ROCU and, where necessary, refer this to the national tactical intelligence group (NTIG) for action.

### **Timetable for intelligence submissions from other bodies**

ROCUs have a deadline for their intelligence submissions but other bodies do not. The provision of a timetable for ROCUs is sensible, and we think that a similar approach might be beneficial for the intelligence submissions from other bodies. We understand that each body will have different timescales for the production of intelligence assessments, and these will often focus on matters broader than serious and organised crime threats. However, it appears to us that there may be scope to explore the sequencing of intelligence assessment production by each body.

In their current form, the national intelligence requirements list all the national threats for which the NCA requires further intelligence, and each threat is prioritised based on the nature of the threat and the gaps in the intelligence. However, the national intelligence requirements make no requirement for scheduled intelligence submissions to support the compilation of the national strategic and tactical assessments. Consequently, the NCA, when preparing these assessments, cannot be certain that it is in timely possession of all the relevant intelligence from other bodies.

### Recommendation 3

- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should consult all law enforcement bodies which contribute to the national intelligence picture on serious and organised crime, with a view to setting a timetable for the submission of the intelligence it requires for production of the national strategic and tactical assessments. If it is determined that the setting of such a timetable is practicable, it should become part of the National Intelligence Requirement.

### Capacity problems

As we set out earlier, the inherent weaknesses in the NCA's computer systems mean it has to rely on human intervention (see page 11). The current approach taken by NCA officers is to make written notes on the relevant content from the intelligence assessments submitted by the police and other bodies. These notes are then used in the creation of the national threat assessments specific to each threat. In our discussions with officers in the national assessment centre we were told that there is insufficient capacity to add the detailed information from those intelligence assessments to the NCA's intelligence system.

We found a similar problem in the NCA's modern slavery and human trafficking unit during some unrelated fieldwork earlier in 2017. Intelligence reports were being reviewed, but only those destined for further development were added to the NCA's intelligence system.

The risk created by these working practices in the national assessment centre and the modern slavery and human trafficking unit (and in other NCA units) is that the NCA holds intelligence that cannot be searched and therefore the NCA does not know what intelligence it holds. The NCA fully understands this problem; the five-year strategy<sup>23</sup> is driving the creation of a new 'intelligence operating model'. This model is intended to modernise the NCA and thereby address the capacity problem, but will not do so in the short term. The NCA is managing the risk while developing its user requirement for the technology upgrades it seeks to implement in the future.

The design process for those technology upgrades has been under way for some time, as a core part of the NCA's transformation programme. The NCA's 'IT Strategy 2020', which we covered in a previous report,<sup>24</sup> was launched in 2015. It has resulted

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<sup>23</sup> NCA Five-Year Agency Strategy, NCA, 2017, page 5, paragraph 1 (unpublished)

<sup>24</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency's progress against outstanding recommendation made by HMIC and areas for improvement*, HMIC, July 2016, page 31. Available from:

[www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/)

in improvements in some other areas, such as internet access for staff and mobile working, but it has not yet resulted in major improvements in the automation of intelligence collection and analysis processes.

### **Demand, risk and resource process**

Before our fieldwork, the NCA underwent a process to consider the demands and risks it faced against the resources available to deal with them. We have been told that this process identified officers, other than those working under the director of intelligence, who are also performing intelligence analysis, for instance the officers in the border policing command who produce the national border security assessment. The NCA intends to bring such officers under the director of intelligence's control, in order to create a more resilient pool of resources. This appears sensible to us.

### **Limitation in the national assessment centre's structure**

We were told that the national assessment centre was created at the end of 2016, to focus the NCA's effort on the strategic assessment of intelligence. The centre has two distinct teams: the 'thematic' team has 23 officers, each of whom is responsible for producing intelligence assessments on a specific threat (for example cyber); and the 'central' team has 12 officers, who collectively perform a quality-control function for the intelligence assessments on specific threats as well as aggregating these assessments to create the national strategic and tactical assessments.

Interviewees told us that no-one was responsible for looking across all threats and assessments to identify recurring themes (which the NCA refers to as 'cross-cutting' threats). Instead, each assessment officer is responsible for a specific threat. While there is a degree of interaction between such officers, the structure creates silo working,<sup>25</sup> the impact of which needs to be mitigated. 'County lines', which we described earlier (see page 13), is a good example of a failure to recognise a cross-cutting threat.

'County lines' was not included in the first draft of the 2017 national strategic assessment (produced in February 2017). This was despite it featuring as a priority in eight of the nine ROCUs, and the NCA having produced two annual assessments on this particular threat to inform the Home Office's 'ending gang and youth violence' programme.<sup>26</sup> 'County lines' became a later insertion in the national strategic assessment as a result of feedback to the NCA from police and other contributors.

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<sup>25</sup> A system, process or department that operates in isolation from others.

<sup>26</sup> The most recent was: *County Lines Gang Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply*, NCA, November 2016. This report showed that over 71 percent of forces were reporting this type of activity and in addition 12 percent were seeing emerging activity. Available at: [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file)



#### **Recommendation 4**

- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should modify the structure and working practices in the national assessment centre to ensure that matters which relate to more than one national threat are properly recognised and evaluated for inclusion in the national assessments.

#### **Access to sensitive material**

We consider that the intelligence picture can only become sufficiently authoritative if those responsible for its compilation have access to all the relevant intelligence. Consequently, a small number of NCA officers who – subject to the appropriate safeguards – need to have access to the most sensitive material, such as that from covert human intelligence sources and the interception of communications.

As we previously reported,<sup>27</sup> the NCA's 'modernised desktop' enables officers to access sensitive material from single desktop computers (rather than separate computers for different classes of material). Notwithstanding this, officers responsible for the compilation of intelligence assessments reported that the NCA's procedures for gaining access to such material were unnecessarily bureaucratic – a view which was shared by the newly-appointed director of intelligence. We agree, and were reassured that measures to remove the unnecessary bureaucracy were being given a high priority. We will monitor their implementation.

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<sup>27</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency*, HMIC, March 2015, page 9. Available from: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/an-inspection-of-the-national-crime-agency/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/an-inspection-of-the-national-crime-agency/)

## 4. National priority threats and the law enforcement response

### Introduction

This chapter deals with the remaining questions in our terms of reference:

- are the current strategic, tactical and operational tasking processes led by the NCA ensuring that activity is focused on national priorities?
- how are the strategic governance groups led by the NCA, their related threat groups, and strategic action plans, informing and influencing national tasking?
- how are the NCA, police forces, and other law enforcement agencies responding to national priorities?

### Findings

We found the national tasking and strategic governance processes to be well-led by the NCA and well-supported by the police and other law enforcement bodies, whose local priorities commonly reflected those set nationally. That said, the process for identifying national priority threats needs development, the assurance arrangements for the work of the strategic governance groups and their strategic action plans need further attention, there is a question mark over the value of the national control strategy,<sup>28</sup> and some aspects of the national tasking process would benefit from broader representation and improved guidance for participants.

#### National strategic tasking and coordination group

HMICFRS is usually represented at the national strategic tasking and coordination group (NSTCG). We attended the NSTCG in March 2017. The meeting was chaired by the director general of the NCA. This meeting (and the other national tasking meetings we attended), had good representation from the police and other law enforcement representatives, but British Transport Police and City of London Police were notable absentees.<sup>29</sup> We have observed the attendance of British Transport Police at national tactical tasking meetings since, but not any attendance by City of London Police. Although City of London Police is a comparatively small police force,

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<sup>28</sup> A document agreed by the NCA and the main UK law enforcement bodies to prioritise the response against the main threats from serious and organised crime.

<sup>29</sup> This situation has arisen because of the London ROCU's disbandment; when the London ROCU was operational, British Transport Police and City of London Police would have been represented at the NSTCG by the chief officer from the Metropolitan Police Service with responsibility for the London ROCU.

with responsibility for policing only a very small geographic area, it also carries significant national responsibilities concerning the police response to economic crime. Consequently, we believe City of London Police should be represented at the NSTCG and other national tasking meetings.

### **Recommendation 5**

- With immediate effect, the commissioner of City of London Police should make arrangements to secure the regular attendance of a representative at the national strategic tasking and coordination group (NSTCG) and other national tasking meetings.

There was an in-depth debate at the NSTCG regarding the challenges presented by the many demands on the law enforcement bodies. A short discussion on national threats was led by the NCA's director of intelligence. This was followed by a quick summary by the director general of the six national priority threats suggested for adoption: child sexual exploitation and abuse; modern slavery and human trafficking; organised immigration crime; high-end money laundering (although this is shown as a sub-threat of money laundering in the national control strategy); firearms; and cyber threats. These six national threats were suggested for adoption as national priority threats, above other national threats that featured in the national strategic assessment, such as drug trafficking, organised acquisitive crime, fraud, and other economic crime.

Most<sup>30</sup> of the six had been agreed national priority threats in the preceding six months, and it was evident to HMICFRS that certain threats – such as child sexual exploitation, cyber, and modern slavery and human trafficking – might carry particular weight.<sup>31</sup> However, the arguments for and against adoption of each of the six proposed national priority threats were not explored to any appreciable degree at the meeting.

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<sup>30</sup> With the exception of modern slavery and human trafficking, the national priority threats suggested at the March 2017 NSTCG were the same as those from the November 2016 NSTCG. At the November 2016 NSTCG there had been some confusion: at that meeting, modern slavery and human trafficking was made a priority for intelligence collection; some participants misinterpreted this decision as modern slavery and human trafficking being made a national priority threat.

<sup>31</sup> The very large scale of child sexual exploitation has become a matter of significant public concern in recent years: in 2015 it was added to the Strategic Policing Requirement as a national threat; and it is now the subject of a public inquiry. The risk of cyber-attacks affecting the UK is categorised as a tier one risk (the highest level of risk) in the National Security Risk Assessment. The extent of modern slavery and human trafficking has led to new legislation and, in 2016, the creation of a task force led by the Prime Minister.

As the NSTCG's determination of the national threats and national priority threats is intended to have a major influence on law enforcement activity for at least the next six months, the process needs developing. The national strategic intelligence group should play an important role here, but we found that it was not functioning as intended.

### **National strategic intelligence group**

The sequencing of the national strategic intelligence group (NSIG) meeting before the NSTCG meeting, is supposed to provide assurance that the identified national threats and proposed national priority threats have been arrived at through a process of thorough examination, involving an evaluation of each threat's characteristics and relevant trends. However, the most recent NSIG meeting, on 30 November 2016, sat too late to inform the NSTCG earlier that month, and the NSIG that should have met in February 2017, before the NSTCG in March 2017, was cancelled. Consequently, the NSTCG was faced with having to make a decision, but without the detailed discussion that should have preceded it having taken place.

As we understand it, the information provided to the NSIG (if it had sat) would have incorporated organised crime group mapping and the use of a risk assessment process called MoRILE<sup>32</sup> to support the decision making. These are both useful, but the differentiation between national threats and national priority threats that is necessary to inform the NSTCG still appears to rely heavily on professional judgment.

In an environment of competing demands, a diverse group of public bodies participating in the national tasking and strategic governance arrangements, a wide range of national threats to consider, and an incomplete intelligence picture, there are particular challenges associated with prioritising the law enforcement response. Even given these constraints the prioritisation process we witnessed was not well-conceived. The NCA should give more thought to how best to prioritise the national response.

#### **Recommendation 6**

- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should design and operate a clear process for the evaluation and prioritisation of threats which appear in the national strategic assessment.

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<sup>32</sup> Management of Risk in Law Enforcement, a risk prioritisation programme used widely by police and other law enforcement bodies.

## National tactical tasking and coordination group

There has been criticism in the past, including by HMICFRS,<sup>33</sup> that the national tactical tasking and coordination group (NTTCG) meetings predominantly consisted of operational updates and the exchange of information, rather than 'tasking'. We observed the May 2017 and July 2017 NTTCG meetings and saw a marked improvement in the second: in this there was a greater emphasis on the allocation of tasks which arose from the relevant updates provided by participants. For example, there were specific tasks allocated to the NCA and a ROCU to tackle websites linked to modern slavery and human trafficking.

Because of concerns that we have raised previously over the quality of the strategic action plans,<sup>34</sup> we were interested in the NTTCG's oversight role in relation to strategic governance groups and the strategic action plans. The NTTCG's terms of reference, which include three specific points on this, state that the group should:

1. "...ensure the overall national law enforcement tasking and coordination decision making and allocation of resources aligns with the requirements set by the SGGs and is prioritised against the National Control Strategy";
2. "...identifying crossovers between SAPs and working closely with SGGs, ensuring alignment"<sup>35</sup>; and
3. "[m]onitor and provide assurance that the SGGs and SAPs are providing mitigation and action against the priority risks."

In relation to the first point, we were satisfied that the NTTCG's decision-making was aligned with the requirements of the strategic governance groups, as set out in the strategic action plans.

In relation to the second and third points, the position was less clear. The NCA – to its credit – had responded to concerns in our previous reports, by creating a small team to improve the quality of the strategic action plans, reporting direct to the deputy director general. However, an unintended consequence of this reporting arrangement was that, despite its terms of reference, the NTTCG did not receive routine reports from the relevant team and therefore was not in a position to perform its oversight role.

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<sup>33</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency - An inspection of the National Crime Agency's progress against outstanding recommendations made by HMIC and areas for improvement*, HMIC, July 2016, page 50, paragraph 10. Available from: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, page 24.

<sup>35</sup> NCA terms of reference for national tasking groups, NCA, 2017 (unpublished)

### **Recommendation 7**

- By 31 March 2018, the chair of the national tasking and coordination group (NTTCG) should have arrangements in place to provide assurance that the strategic governance groups are taking the necessary action and mitigating the threats within their strategic action plans.

We observed strategic governance and threat group meetings that took place during our fieldwork. We were not able to observe the private sector fraud group. We were told that a great deal of the work of this group was duplicated by the Home Office-led joint fraud task force, and because of this it had not met for a considerable period of time. We are concerned about this.

We acknowledge that a new chair was appointed to the private sector fraud group during our fieldwork, and work was underway to refresh the strategic action plan for this area. Nonetheless we cannot see, in these circumstances, how the NTTCG could be confident that the work of another group, for instance the Home Office-led joint task force, was fulfilling the needs of the strategic action plan for the private sector fraud group.

### **Recommendation 8**

- By 31 March 2018, the chair of the national tasking and coordination group (NTTCG) should establish that the private sector fraud group is in place and fulfilling the needs of the strategic action plan, especially in the light of the emerging prominence of the threat from fraud.

The NSTCG, in March 2017, approved the national strategic assessment and asked the NTTCG to review and approve the national control strategy. The NTTCG did so at its May 2017 meeting. In its current form, the national control strategy is a single-page document that lists each of the national threats that are covered in more detail in the national strategic assessment. The NCA Annual Plan states that the national control strategy "...allows UK law enforcement to prioritise its response against the highest risks." <sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> NCA Annual Plan 2017-18, NCA, April 2017, page 10, paragraph 1. Available at: [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/790-nca-annual-plan-2017-18/file](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/790-nca-annual-plan-2017-18/file)

The National Intelligence Model states that a control strategy "establishes the intelligence requirement and sets the agenda for intelligence, prevention and enforcement priorities."<sup>37</sup> Therefore the national control strategy ought to be useful to any practitioner seeking quickly to identify the national threats. However, we found three problems with the document:

1. a distinct lack of clarity concerning the levels of priority ascribed to each national threat (see page 19) and therefore the expected intelligence, prevention and enforcement response;<sup>38</sup>
2. the unexplained omission of a particular national threat (organised acquisitive crime);<sup>39</sup> and
3. an anomaly whereby the description of a specific national vulnerability was amended despite not being referred to in the national strategic assessment.<sup>40</sup>

Because of the existence of the strategic governance groups and their associated strategic action plans (the quality of which is now scrutinised more closely), the need for a detailed national control strategy – which would be very likely to duplicate the content of the strategic action plans – is in doubt.

In its current form, the national control strategy is at best a redundant document and, at worst, an inaccurate description of the national threats and priority threats. We also consider that the expectation of what should be done in response to those threats is implicit rather than explicit, which is especially unhelpful to those bodies seeking to tackle them. The NCA should rethink the value of the national control strategy.

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<sup>37</sup> *Code of Practice: National Intelligence Model*, Home Office, National Centre for Policing Excellence and Centrex, 2005, page 6, paragraph 3.12. Available at: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/npia/NIM-Code-of-Practice.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> The six priority threats as agreed by the NSTCG in March 2017 were not differentiated among the wider group of threats; and a separate system of 'priority banding' was in use whereby each sub-threat (one of which – high end money laundering – was also a priority threat) was placed in one of three priority bands. The origins of the priority banding were not clear.

<sup>39</sup> The 'organised acquisitive crime' threat area featured in the national strategic assessment, and was included in the national intelligence requirement. However, it did not appear on the national control strategy.

<sup>40</sup> The anomaly arose because, at the May NTTCG, at the request of Police Scotland, the 'criminal use of internet technology' vulnerability area which featured in the national strategic assessment was broadened in the national control strategy to 'criminal use of technology'. A specific concern in relation to the use of encrypted devices, which led to the request and subsequent revision, was not evident in the national strategic assessment.

## **Recommendation 9**

- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should consult law enforcement bodies to assess the national control strategy's value and determine whether its continued production is worthwhile. If it is decided to continue with production of the national control strategy, its accuracy should be subjected to a quality assurance process.

## **National Tactical Intelligence Group**

We attended two meetings of the national tactical intelligence group (NTIG), in April 2017 and July 2017. Both were well run and we saw how the outcomes from these meetings informed the agenda of the subsequent NTTCGs. At the July 2017 NTTCG, at which we observed the greater emphasis on 'tasking' (see page 7), we also saw a greater input from the NTIG chair.

## **Operational tasking**

Although the NCA has certain statutory powers of direction (see page 21), it does not normally take responsibility for the operational tasking processes operated by the police and other law enforcement bodies. There are some exceptions to this – child sexual exploitation and abuse, border vulnerabilities, and cyber – where the NCA has direct involvement via the relevant strategic governance groups. We found that these processes operate in conjunction with national tasking.

## **National daily briefing meeting**

On weekdays, the NCA chairs a daily conference call, known as the 'national daily briefing meeting' (NDBM). Police representatives from across the UK, and a wide range of law enforcement representatives, take part. Over a two-week period in May 2017, we observed these meetings.

We were told by the NCA that the meeting is intended to provide a forum for participants to share timely information concerning the national priority threats. The main updates from representatives were mostly related to those threats,<sup>41</sup> however, not all representatives were clear on what was expected of them. We established from interviews with some participants, that they would welcome some clear guidance from the NCA – in particular, to set out the types of information that any participant should seek to impart during the conference calls.

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<sup>41</sup> One of the updates was about clandestine entry to the UK, which is not a national priority threat in its own right but an activity associated with the national priority threat of modern slavery and human trafficking.



### **Recommendation 10**

- By 31 March 2018, the NCA's director of intelligence should issue guidance to all participants in the national daily briefing meeting as to what is expected of them and how the meetings are to be conducted.

Generally, there was good, consistent representation from the bodies the NCA had invited to participate. However, representatives from the National Prison Intelligence Coordination Centre, the National Ports Analysis Centre and the Ministry of Defence Police were included on the list of meeting members but did not dial in. The NCA needs to determine if these organisations are actually required and consider if there are others that should be included. In particular, because of their national responsibilities, we believe that British Transport Police and City of London Police should be invited to participate.

### **Recommendation 11**

- With immediate effect, the NCA's director of intelligence should review the membership of the national daily briefing meeting and ensure that the all relevant parties are invited, including British Transport Police and City of London Police.

### **Escalation of regional matters for tasking purposes**

Another issue relevant to tasking was the need for greater clarity about how police regions were expected to refer investigations upwards, including how they should seek to access NCA support when they needed it, and the role of the NCA's regional organised crime co-ordinators (ROCCs) in this process. This is a persistent problem, on which HMICFRS has reported before.<sup>42</sup>

When we spoke with ROCU leads, it was still a commonly-held belief that, for a region to refer an investigation to the NCA, the request should go to the NTIG and – if supported there – to the NTTCCG. Most respondents could not recount much success in referring work upward in this way, so had lost faith in this process. The NTIG and NTTCCG only sit quarterly so we do not consider their frequency to be sufficient to deal with such requests.

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<sup>42</sup> *An inspection of the National Crime Agency – An inspection of the National Crime Agency's progress against outstanding recommendations made by HMIC and areas for improvement*, HMIC, July 2016, page 50, paragraph 3. Available from:

[www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/national-crime-agency-a-progress-report/)

We raised this with the head of NCA tasking who stated that any request for NCA specialist support to a police investigation, or for the NCA to adopt an investigation, should be raised by the relevant ROCC at the NCA's intelligence tasking group (ITG) or, in urgent cases, immediately to him.

The issue was discussed at the July 2017 NTTCCG, and the NCA agreed to circulate guidance on the functions of the ROCCs and how the NCA would work with ROCUs. We will monitor progress.

### **The NCA's approach to internal prioritisation**

We observed the NCA's intelligence development meeting (IDM), the covert intelligence tasking group (CITG), the overt intelligence tasking group (ITG), the NCA tactical meeting and the NCA operations committee.

In the IDM, we observed a meeting that showed good management of intelligence development cases. The chair ensured (with one justifiable exception)<sup>43</sup> that all cases were linked to the national threats and priority threats before submission to the ITG/CITG for the allocation of resources. In the CITG and ITG, we found further positive evidence. The chair was well informed about work under way and the bids for new work that were evaluated at the meetings.

The NCA board has created a review team, as part of the 'prioritisation tasking performance and review' theme of NCA's transformation programme.

Earlier in 2017, and partly as a result of the review team's efforts, the NCA closed 333 operations which had become unproductive. This was done to free up some of the NCA's capacity for a focus on more worthwhile activity against national priority threats.

The review team also informs the decisions taken at the NCA tactical meeting, highlighting operations that are not linked to national priority threats, operations where no NCA activity or disruptions have been reported, including operations where a covert authority is in place and not used.

The efforts of the review team, the ITG/CITG and NCA Tactical meeting have been worthwhile. The NCA reported that, in February 2017, 51 percent of its activity was against national priority threats, whereas by July 2017 this had increased to 73

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<sup>43</sup> The exception concerned intelligence support for an operation to tackle paramilitary criminality in Northern Ireland, which was not a national threat. However, by virtue of the NCA Framework Agreement, the NCA is obliged to support the work of the Northern Ireland organised crime task force.

percent (with the remaining effort aligned with the other national threats within the national control strategy).<sup>44</sup> The methodology by which the NCA arrived at these figures appeared sound to us.

All this operational activity is overseen by the NCA's operations committee, a meeting of which we attended. There was good representation at the meeting from all director leads, and clear oversight of the decisions being taken at the NCA tactical meeting.

We also observed a meeting where the NCA engaged the support of the security and intelligence agencies<sup>45</sup> to enhance the law enforcement response to national priority threats. This was an embryonic process whereby the contribution by the security and intelligence agencies was being assessed by the NCA. Based on what we saw, we consider it to be a worthwhile and developing process.

We are satisfied that the NCA's approach to internal prioritisation is effective.

### **Police approach to prioritisation (England and Wales)**

The effectiveness of the response to serious and organised crime by police forces and their regional organised crime units (ROCU) in England and Wales is already scrutinised by our PEEL inspection programme. Our most recent report, in March 2017, concluded that the majority of forces are good at tackling serious and organised crime.<sup>46</sup>

Building on this earlier work, we looked at a sample of relevant<sup>47</sup> documents from the 43 forces and the nine ROCUs in England and Wales to see whether the national priority threats had also been adopted as force and ROCU priorities. In the absence of the NCA using its statutory powers of direction over chief officers, it is open to chief constables to determine their local priorities, taking account of their local police and crime plan.

We found that three of the six national priority threats (child sexual abuse and exploitation, cyber and modern slavery and human trafficking) had been adopted by the vast majority of forces. Two of the six national priority threats (firearms and

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<sup>44</sup> Figures presented to the NCA tactical meeting on 12 July 2017.

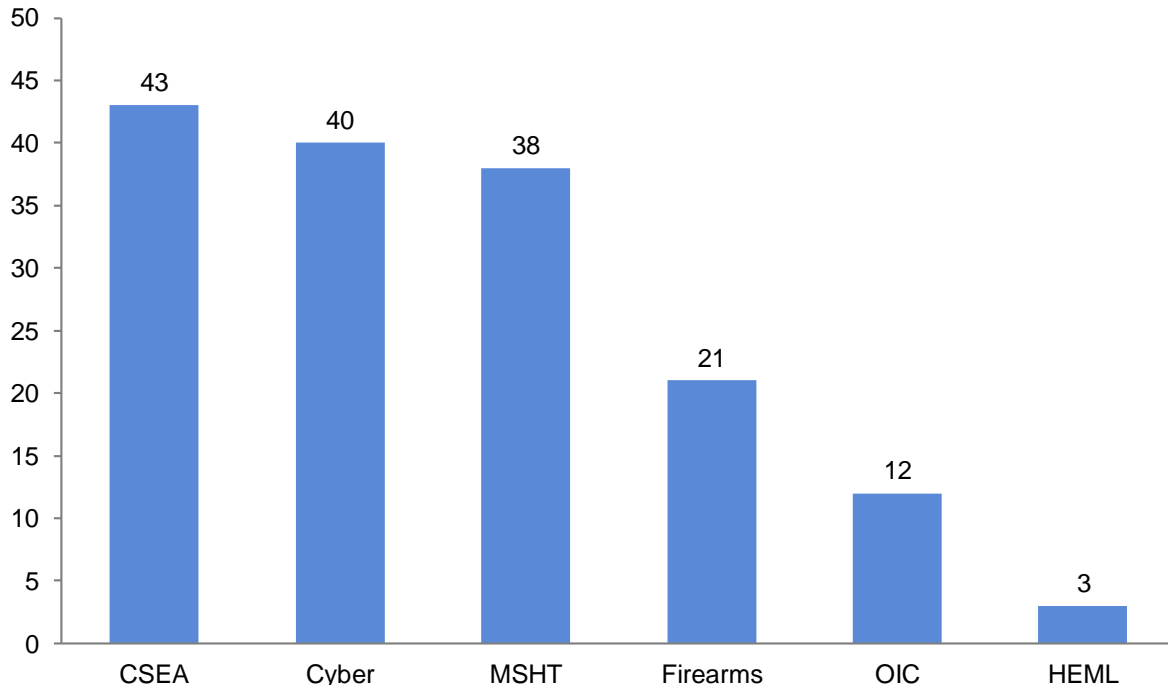
<sup>45</sup> The security and intelligence agencies are: the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6); Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ); and the Security Service (MI5).

<sup>46</sup> *PEEL: Police effectiveness 2016 – A national overview*, HMIC, March 2017, page 19, paragraph 5. Available from: [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-2016/)

<sup>47</sup> Strategic threat assessments, control strategies and minutes of tasking meetings; most documents related to the 2016/17 period.

organised immigration crime) had been adopted by at least a quarter of forces, and the remaining national priority threat (high-end money laundering) had been adopted by three (see figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: National priority threats adopted by England and Wales police forces**



**Source: HMICFRS data collection**

Although clearly not all the six national priority threats had been adopted as local priorities by all 43 forces, the picture was nevertheless encouraging. This was for two reasons.

First, there was generally a correlation between the particular policing challenges encountered by each force and its adoption of national priority threats. For example, the Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester Police, West Yorkshire Police and Merseyside Police, all of which frequently encounter firearms criminality, had adopted the firearms national priority threat. Conversely, forces such as Wiltshire Police, which does not often encounter such criminality, had not.

Secondly, there tended to be a further correlation between the adoption of national priority threats and policing activity to deal with them.

Turning to the ROCUs, the picture was similarly encouraging. Six of the nine regions had adopted all six national priority threats, and the remaining three ROCUs had adopted five of the six national priority threats. Again, there tended to be a correlation between policing challenges encountered by each region and the ROCUs adoption of national priority threats that were especially relevant to them. For example, the high-end money laundering national priority threat was not prevalent in the south west region, where 'county lines' was considered a greater local priority.

Furthermore, as we would expect, we also saw a correlation between the adoption of national priority threats and ROCU activity to deal with them.

### **Police approach to prioritisation (Scotland and Northern Ireland)**

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, policing is a devolved matter.<sup>48</sup> The NCA's activities in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and its relationships with the relevant policing bodies there, are set out in the *Revised Framework document for the National Crime Agency*.<sup>49</sup>

We observed strategic tasking meetings in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and spoke with relevant chief officers and other senior staff.

We found that Police Scotland reflected the national priority threats in its tasking processes. Two of the chief officers with whom we spoke questioned why, given the number of drug-related deaths and other associated criminality, drugs were not a national priority threat. We have already said that the process for determining national priority threats needs more development (see page 20).

The Police Service of Northern Ireland also reflected the national priority threats in its tasking processes, and work was under way by the force to be more in line with national tasking arrangements.

### **British Transport Police's approach to prioritisation**

We found that British Transport Police considered all the national priority threats when preparing its control strategy, albeit not all were a natural 'fit' with the force's responsibilities. Cyber and modern slavery and human trafficking featured in the control strategy, but child sexual exploitation and abuse, firearms, organised immigration crime and high-end money laundering did not.

### **Other law enforcement bodies' approaches to prioritisation**

We found that all the bodies mentioned in this section had a close working relationship with the NCA. Border Force works with the NCA and co-writes the national border strategic assessment, which provides detail on border-related national vulnerabilities. These feature in the national strategic assessment. We found that most national priority threats were reflected in Border Force's tasking priorities.

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<sup>48</sup> In England and Wales, the United Kingdom Government, through the Home Office, is responsible for policing. In Scotland, the responsibility is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. In Northern Ireland, the responsibility is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

<sup>49</sup> *Revised Framework document for the National Crime Agency*, Home Office, May 2015, page 7, paragraphs 6.7-7.4. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/426101/6\\_610\\_HO\\_NCA\\_Framework\\_070515\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426101/6_610_HO_NCA_Framework_070515_2_.pdf)

The only national priority threats not reflected were cyber and high-end money laundering, neither of which we would have expected to see.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) has well-established links with the NCA in relation to economic crime. The main priorities for HMRC are tax evasion and revenue recovery. It was evident, however, that HMRC supported the NCA and other bodies working on the national priority threats, often through provision of intelligence.

As is to be expected, Home Office Immigration Enforcement had a strong emphasis on organised immigration crime, modern slavery and child sexual exploitation and abuse. The remaining national priority threats (cyber, firearms and high-end money laundering) were understandably not evident as priorities.

HM Prison and Probation Service does not have an investigative or law enforcement role akin to those held by the police or other bodies. It is, however, a significant contributor of intelligence, and has disruption opportunities at its disposal that can benefit the law enforcement response. We understand that HM Prison and Probation Service is examining ways in which it can provide further support against the national priority threats.

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) is one of the lead bodies for tackling modern slavery and human trafficking as it relates to labour exploitation. The themed activity described within the GLAA control strategy demonstrated a clear link to tackling organised immigration crime and modern slavery and human trafficking.

### **National performance**

The NCA is leading a programme of work, with the Home Office, to produce a new national serious and organised crime performance framework. The shared aspiration is that this will provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the cross-government impact and response to tackling serious and organised crime. Engagement with the NCA, police and law enforcement bodies, is the first in a series of stages to achieve this. We also reviewed the first and second iterations of the national serious and organised crime performance report presented at the two NTTCCG meetings we attended.

The report relies on various bodies providing the NCA with data relating to disruption<sup>50</sup> activity and other performance outputs, such as criminal justice outcomes, drug and firearm seizures and asset denial.<sup>51</sup> We were pleased to see the commitment by those bodies to providing the data, which is already providing a

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<sup>50</sup> Assessing the impact of law enforcement activity against a specific organised crime group (OCG), main individual or specific vulnerability, and is achieved when intentional activity leads to an OCG or individual being unable to operate at its usual level of activity, or where the risk posed by a national control strategy threat or vulnerability is diminished, for a period of time.

<sup>51</sup> Depriving criminals from the profits of their crimes.

useful insight into how the UK's law enforcement bodies are tackling serious and organised crime. There is much more that needs to be done to produce consistent data on disruption activity, and the NCA was working closely with the police and other bodies to improve matters. This work, if properly supported, has the potential to produce a more meaningful assessment of the impact on serious and organised crime than has previously existed.

The importance of this work should not be underestimated. As we explore in our conclusions, the NSTCG's expectations for the response to the national threats and national priority threats need to be comprehensively articulated, and the performance of the NCA, police and other law enforcement bodies in meeting those expectations needs to be assessed.

## 5. Conclusion

The national tasking, coordination and governance of the response to serious and organised crime, while led by the NCA, is wholly reliant on the co-operation of the police and other law enforcement bodies. Therefore, to answer the questions posed in our terms of reference, we needed to understand how all the relevant parties were working together in this shared endeavour.

We found that the national arrangements were generally fit for purpose but that there were still gaps in the understanding of threat that needed to be addressed. This is not insurmountable, but it can only be achieved through a refinement of the NCA's information-collection processes and a more consistent contribution of intelligence by law enforcement partners. This is essential if the NCA is to achieve the single authoritative threat picture to which it aspires, and, more importantly, on the basis of which the national response to serious and organised crime is determined.

The national tasking, coordination and strategic governance processes were well led by the NCA. As a direct consequence, we were reassured to see that the national priority threats, agreed at the NSTCG, had been adopted, and were shaping the response by the police and other law enforcement bodies. However, more work needs to be done on the prioritisation of the national threats, the expectation of what response should be made, the relevance of the national control strategy, and the oversight arrangements for the strategic governance groups.

We conclude that the NCA has effective and efficient processes in place to support its role in the tasking, coordination and governance of the response to serious and organised crime. However, we have made eleven recommendations for action necessary to enhance the existing arrangements. While these recommendations are mostly directed at the NCA, some will need the support of the police and other law enforcement bodies if they are to be implemented successfully.



# Annex A – Description of national tasking and coordination meetings and strategic governance groups

## National tasking and coordination meetings

### National strategic tasking and coordination Group (NSTCG)

Usually chaired by the NCA director general and scheduled to take place six-monthly, this meeting's purpose is to review the national strategic assessment for serious and organised crime, agree the national threats and priority threats for tasking which should then feature in the national control strategy. The meeting should also consider the necessary capacity and capability to deliver the required response.

### National strategic intelligence group (NSIG)

Usually chaired by the NCA's director of intelligence, this meeting is also scheduled to take place six-monthly. Its purpose is to consider the national strategic assessment and recommend to the NSTCG the national threats<sup>52</sup> which should be adopted as national priority threats. It also has a strategic oversight role for intelligence practice, standards and products.

### National tactical tasking and coordination group (NTTCG)

Usually chaired by the deputy director general (operations) and scheduled quarterly. Its purpose is to consider the national tactical assessment for serious and organised crime and to ensure on behalf of the NSTCG that the national response is in line with the agreed national threats and priority threats. The meeting should also consider new and emerging threats and what steps need to be taken.

### National tactical intelligence group (NTIG)

Usually chaired by the deputy director responsible for the national intelligence hub and scheduled quarterly.<sup>53</sup> Its purpose is to consider the national tactical assessment for serious and organised crime and assess progress against national threats and priority threats. It should make recommendations to the NTTCG as necessary and highlight any new and emerging threats to the NTTCG for consideration.

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<sup>52</sup> The NSIG terms of reference refer to 'risks' rather than 'threats'. We established with the NCA that the terms of reference were intended to use the term 'threats'.

<sup>53</sup> The NTIG terms of reference state that the meeting will be chaired by the NCA's director of intelligence. Through our regular attendance at the NTIG, we have observed that this meeting is usually chaired by the deputy director with responsibility for the national intelligence hub; we do not consider this problematic.

## **Strategic governance groups**

We explain the purpose of the strategic governance groups on page 8. Six strategic governance groups were in existence at the time of our fieldwork, but these were being reorganised under the themes of prosperity, vulnerability and commodity.

The strategic governance groups are chaired by NCA directors or deputy directors. The threat and delivery groups that report to their relevant strategic governance groups are chaired by senior representatives from the NCA, police, law enforcement and regulatory bodies. These groups are listed below.

### **Prosperity (cyber)**

The cyber strategic governance group is supported by four threat groups covering: attacks on UK victims; UK-based organised crime groups; international organised crime groups; and the online criminal market place.

### **Prosperity (economic crime)**

The economic crime strategic governance group is supported by the criminal finance, counterfeit currency, market abuse, bribery and corruption, public sector fraud and private sector fraud threat groups.

### **Vulnerability (organised immigration crime)**

The organised immigration crime strategic governance group traditionally fell under the organised crime command but was being moved to the vulnerability thematic area. There were no threat groups.

### **Vulnerability (child sexual exploitation and abuse)**

The strategic governance group did not sit during our fieldwork. The governance group is supported by threat groups known as the 'prevent, pursue, protect and prepare' boards.

### **Vulnerability (modern slavery and human trafficking)**

The modern slavery and human trafficking governance group did not sit during our fieldwork. The group is supported by a threat and delivery group.

### **Commodity**

At the time of our fieldwork the strategic governance group for the new commodity thematic area had not been formed. The threat groups that will fall under the group are drugs, firearms, and organised acquisitive crime.

### **Cross-cutting (borders)**

The borders strategic governance group is known as the national border security group (NBSG) and is supported by the borders coordination board (BCB). We were

not clear which, if any theme, this group would fall under following the reorganisation.

The strategic governance group and threat group meetings are normally held quarterly, to ensure that the director leads can provide timely updates to the national strategic and tactical tasking and coordination groups.

## Annex B – Methodology

Before our inspection fieldwork we spoke with senior law enforcement representatives who attend the national strategic tasking and coordination group led by the NCA. These representatives provided useful insight into national tasking and helped us focus the inspection methodology under our terms of reference.

Our inspection fieldwork took place between April and July 2017. We examined the NCA-led tasking and coordination arrangements for the national law enforcement response to serious and organised crime.

HMICFRS is statutorily required, as part of any inspection of the NCA, to report on the effectiveness and efficiency of the NCA. The questions in our terms of reference also required significant engagement with the police and other law enforcement bodies as parties to this process.

In addition therefore, we observed relevant meetings of, and spoke with senior officers and managers in:

- Border Force;
- Home Office Immigration Enforcement;
- HM Revenue & Customs;
- Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority;
- Ministry of Defence Police;
- the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and
- Police Scotland.

The purpose of this activity was not to inspect the effectiveness and efficiency of the tasking processes of these organisations but to understand how each organisation supports the NCA and responds to national priority threats. We also observed how the NCA works with the security and intelligence agencies.

The role of police forces and regional organised crime units in England and Wales (in respect of serious organised crime) is already scrutinised in our annual PEEL effectiveness inspection. We did, however, speak with senior ROCU staff where some questions had not been covered under PEEL effectiveness, and examined more recent tasking documents.