



Serious Organised Crime Taskforce

Progress Report 2023



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Foreword

This progress report offers an insight into some of the activity taken forward by partners to contribute to the aims of the Serious Organised Crime Strategy and to ensure we have a safer, fairer and more prosperous country free from the harm caused by serious organised crime.

Since the publication of the last report in 2020, there has been a significant amount of work undertaken by members of the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce to ensure that those engaged in organised criminal activity are detected and disrupted at every turn and held to account for the harm they cause to individuals, communities and businesses. The aim is to ensure organised criminals are deterred from targeting our public, private and third sectors, and that people are diverted away from becoming involved in serious organised crime and using its products. I want to thank Taskforce members for all their work.

The refreshed Serious Organised Crime Strategy, published in February 2022, has a focus on strengthening the links between intelligence and tasking, making better use of data and supporting efforts to improve collaboration across all sectors of society to combat the constantly evolving challenge that serious organised crime poses. Serious organised crime is everyone's business and we all have a part to play in working together to achieve the vision and aims of the refreshed Serious Organised Crime Strategy.

I am grateful to the many organisations across the public, private and third sectors who have contributed to the work of the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce and look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to eradicate serious organised crime in Scotland.



ANGELA CONSTANCE MSP

Cabinet Secretary for
Justice and Home Affairs
Chair, Serious Organised
Crime Taskforce

What does serious organised crime look like in Scotland?

Serious organised crime (SOC) is defined in Scotland’s SOC Strategy as crime which:

- involves more than one person;
- is organised, meaning that it involves control, planning and, potentially, use of specialist resources;
- causes, or has the potential to cause, significant harm; and
- involves financial or other benefit to the individuals concerned.

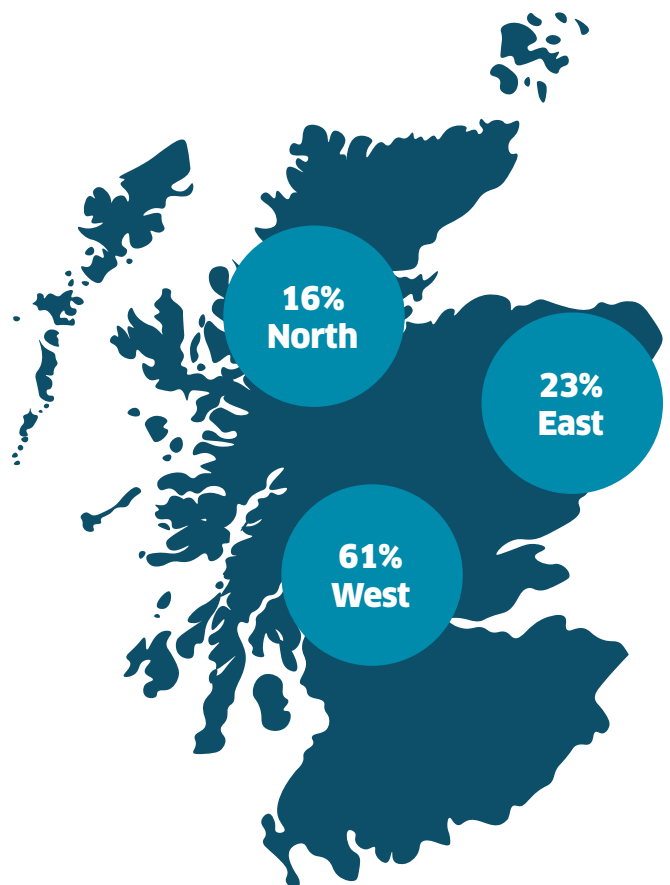
This broad definition means that SOC presents in many forms, including drugs, violence, human trafficking, child sexual abuse, cybercrime including fraud and more.

In Scotland, SOC is responsible for causing substantial economic and social harm to individuals, businesses, and communities. The aim of the SOC Strategy is to reduce SOC and the harm it causes in Scotland.

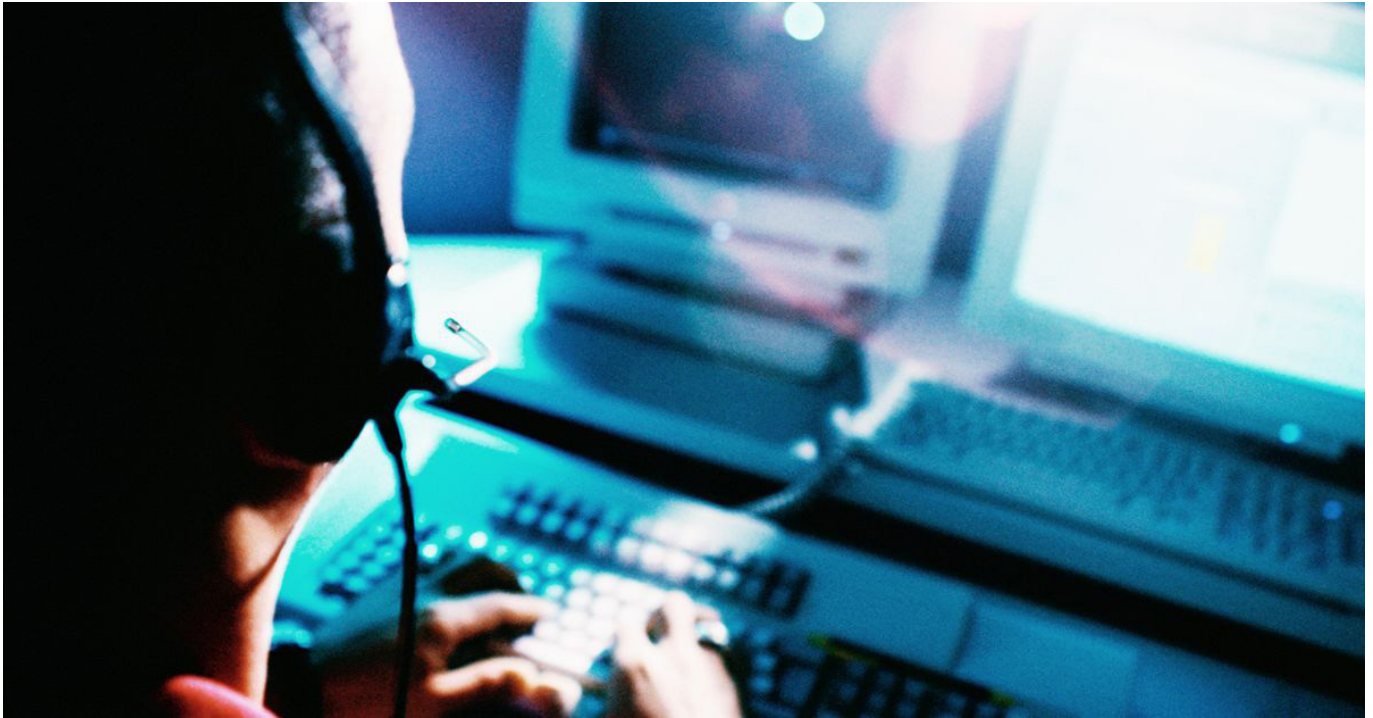
- At the end of March 2023, there were a total of 101 Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs) recorded as operating in Scotland, made up of 1,726 individuals.
- 61% of SOCGs are located in the West of Scotland, 23% in the East and 16% in the North.
- 65% of SOCGs are involved in drug crime; cocaine and cannabis are the most popular commodities.

- 72% of SOCGs are involved in the use of seemingly legitimate businesses. Property development remains the most common business sector for SOCGs. This is closely followed by retail, vehicle maintenance, taxis, restaurants and environmental sectors.

As at end of March 2023, there were 165 SOC nominals incarcerated within 12 of the 15 prison establishments in Scotland. These individuals are linked to 51 separate crime groups.

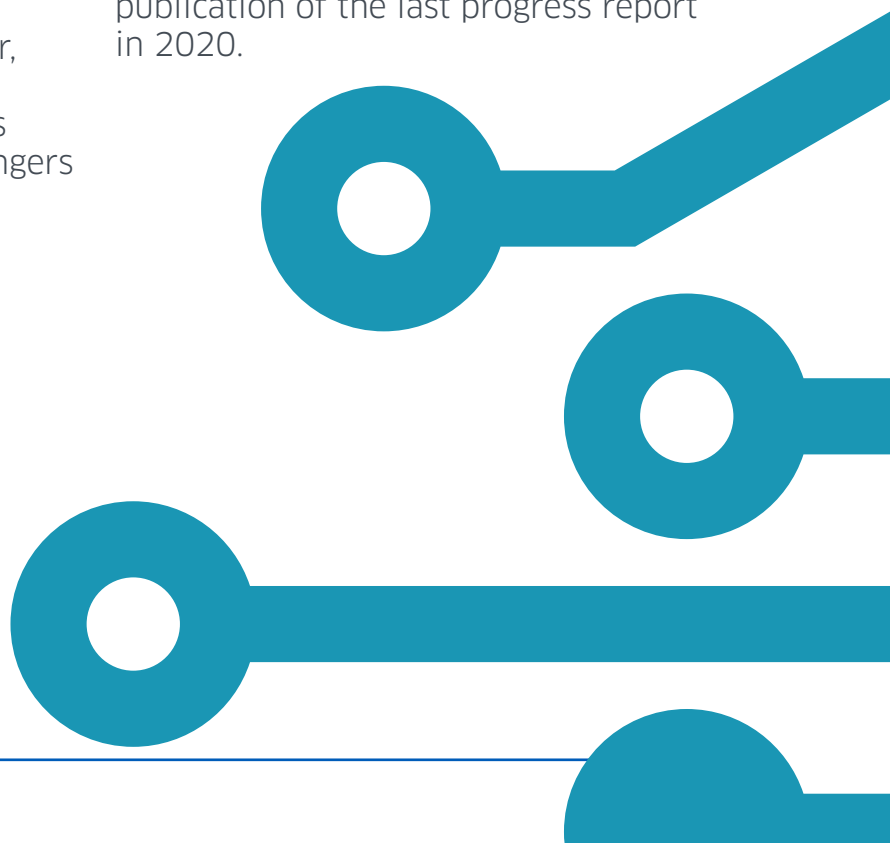


What we are doing to reduce the harm caused by serious organised crime



Achieving the vision and aim of the SOC Strategy requires the efforts of the SOC Taskforce partners, and organisations, people and communities working together across the country. As well as the Strategy's four strands of Divert, Deter, Detect and Disrupt, there is ongoing communications work through various partners to raise awareness of the dangers posed by SOC and highlight the work of the SOC Taskforce.

This report details some of the progress made by the SOC Taskforce and its partners across the four strands, working groups and communications since the publication of the last progress report in 2020.

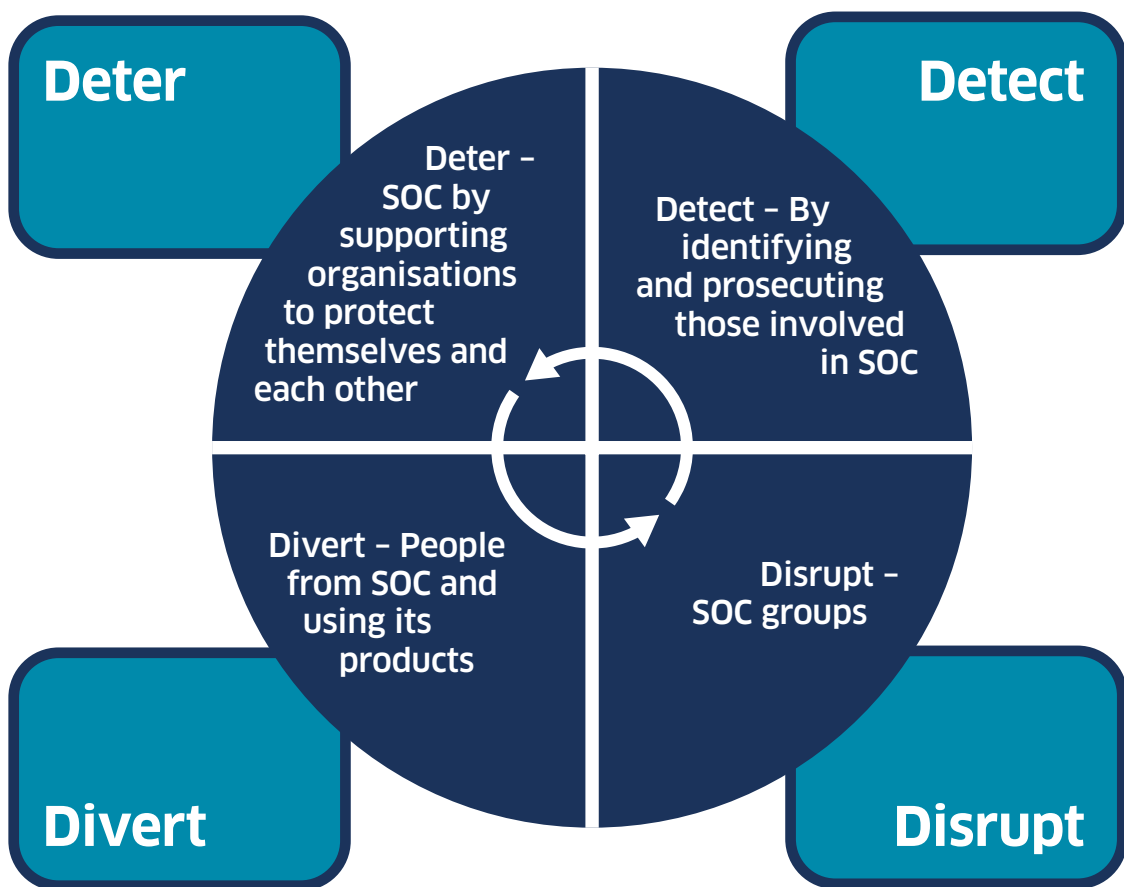


The Serious Organised Crime Taskforce

The SOC Taskforce is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and drives activity across the four strands. A range of public, private and third sector organisations are represented on the SOC Taskforce and membership can be supplemented with individuals to take account of key priorities, where appropriate.

Following publication of the refreshed [SOC Strategy](#) in February 2022, a Steering Group was set up comprising of individuals from a number of key organisations including Police Scotland, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, local authorities, and the third sector to analyse the available data and make recommendations to the SOC Taskforce about emerging priorities.

The Steering Group plays a pivotal role in coordinating the work of the SOC Taskforce and in strengthening links and communication both at a tactical level with theme leads and between the taskforce itself and other partners.



The Scottish Multi-Agency Strategic Threat Assessment

Partners located at The Scottish Crime Campus produce the Scottish Multi-Agency Strategic Threat Assessment (SMASTA), a report that presents a comprehensive picture of the scale and nature of SOC threats, identifies vulnerabilities, and sets strategic priorities to inform operational work and decision-making. Through case studies, the SMASTA highlights the success of the multi-agency approach in reducing the harm SOC causes to individuals and communities.

The SOC Taskforce uses the SMASTA to identify priority areas for action. A public facing version of the [SMASTA](#) was published by Police Scotland in October 2022.



Communications

Communications and awareness-raising remain essential to delivering the safer, fairer, more prosperous Scotland, free from the harm caused by SOC, which we all want to see. People cannot protect themselves or their families from SOC if they don't know how it operates. Organisations need to understand this in order to assess where they are most vulnerable.

A key priority of the SOC Taskforce Communications Subgroup is to increase media output on SOC-related activity. To maximise coverage and reach, the group use information from partners including:

- case studies;
- innovative ways to disrupt activity;
- information on arrests, prosecutions and convictions;
- asset recoveries;
- ministerial and partner statements;
- conferences and events; and
- CashBack projects.

The SOC Taskforce is active on X, formerly known as Twitter, as @SOCTaskforce and is the main means for the SOC Taskforce to communicate appropriate messaging to support the work of partners in delivering the ambition of the SOC Strategy.



The Four Strands – Divert, Deter, Detect, and Disrupt

Divert

The Divert Strand aims to divert people from becoming involved in Serious Organised Crime and using its products. The Strand Lead is Paul Carberry, Action for Children's Chief Executive.

There are three themes within Divert:

- individuals and communities;
- products of serious organised crime; and
- people on the cusp of serious organised crime.

Examples of progress within the Divert strand is provided below.



CashBack for Communities

CashBack for Communities is a Scottish Government programme which uses money recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act to provide opportunities for young people across Scotland. Since 2008, £130 million has been committed to supporting community initiatives to improve the quality of life for young people across Scotland. Over 2.5 million activities for young people have been delivered so far. CashBack funds a wide range of projects to help divert young people away from anti-social behaviour, crime and reoffending.

During Phase 5 of the CashBack programme (2020-23), 30,475 young people felt less inclined to participate in anti-social behaviour across the 24 projects. Additionally, 86% of stakeholders reported a reduction in risk taking behaviours amongst young people they observed. The full evaluation on Phase 5 achievements is due to be published towards the end of 2023.



Access to Industry – Passport CashBack

Access to Industry’s Passport CashBack is delivered in HMP YOI Polmont. The employability programme offers education, training and employment support, assisting young offenders aged 16-25 to overcome difficulties that might hinder their development. Young people engage with Passport CashBack while they are serving their sentence and continue to access support in the community after their release.

The project helps young people to build confidence and resilience, participate in activities which improve their learning and personal skills, and gives them opportunities to contribute to the local community.

Youth Scotland – Generation CashBack

Generation CashBack is a youth work project that is delivered by a partnership consortium of four of the largest volunteer-led youth work organisations in Scotland: Scouts Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, the Boys’ Brigade and Youth Scotland.

Youth groups are supported to increase their focus on tackling anti-social behaviour, delivering diversionary activity, and other issue-based work such as Adverse Childhood Experiences awareness and climate action. The project offers leadership and peer-mentoring opportunities across a variety of themes including physical activity, climate action, youth participation and positive mental health. Young people are supported to put skills into practice in their communities and gain a range of youth awards to help improve education and employability options.

Further information about the impact of the programme and the projects it funds can be found on the CashBack for Communities [website](#).



Action for Children – SOC Early Intervention Service

Action for Children's SOC Early Intervention Service is delivered in Glasgow, and also in Edinburgh and Dundee as part of a National Lottery Community Fund project. The service was developed to work with young people aged 12 to 18 to help divert them from becoming involved in SOC, and includes a combination of assertive outreach, behavioural change techniques, intensive one-to-one support, group work, diversionary activities and access to skills, training, education and employment.

Since 2020, 153 young people and 32 family members have been supported to reduce the harm and impact of SOC on their safety and wellbeing across the sites in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee.

A three-year evaluation of the service found that over half of the 144 young people who engaged with the service between 2018 and 2021 reported they had increased confidence to re-engage with education and take part in pro-social activities.



In 2020, the service worked closely with Glasgow Life, Govan High School and local community organisations to support “Kick The Silence”, a mental health project set up in response to increasing suicides amongst young people in the target areas. Action for Children was a key delivery and funding partner, with a staff member taking the lead on the partnership and providing resources and marketing materials. The project provided around 1,600 health and wellbeing support packs for young people in Glasgow and delivered a football tournament for 56 young people.



SOC Early Intervention Service – Dundee



In June 2022, as part of a public event launch, a roundtable discussion was hosted to highlight the SOC Early Intervention Service. Action for Children staff, Dundee City Council, Police Scotland and the National Lottery Community Fund Scotland were all represented. Keith Brown MSP, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice & Veterans also attended.

The event highlighted the success of the service and how it works in practice to support young people on the cusp of SOC.

Road to Change

Police Scotland worked in collaboration with G20 Youth Group in Glasgow to support young people who were at risk of becoming involved in SOC. The project used the medium of film production to challenge young peoples' beliefs and perceptions of authority whilst giving them confidence and sense of worth through creating a film they developed.

The project adopted an approach to try and break down the barriers between young people and police officers to support relationships, and allow young people to understand the role of police officers.

Initially the project was planned to engage with a selected group of 10-15 youths, ranging from age 12-15, from an area in Glasgow who are involved in lower-level drug dealing, serious assaults and robberies, which makes them vulnerable to a life of SOC, however, the interest and engagement was so high, more young people attended the sessions than was originally planned.

This project - for most of the young people - resulted in a shift of perspective, with 59% saying that they had an improved understanding of the difficult job police officers do, and 68% agreed that police officers are here to serve all members of the community including participants and their families.

Preventative drugs messaging for university students in lockdown



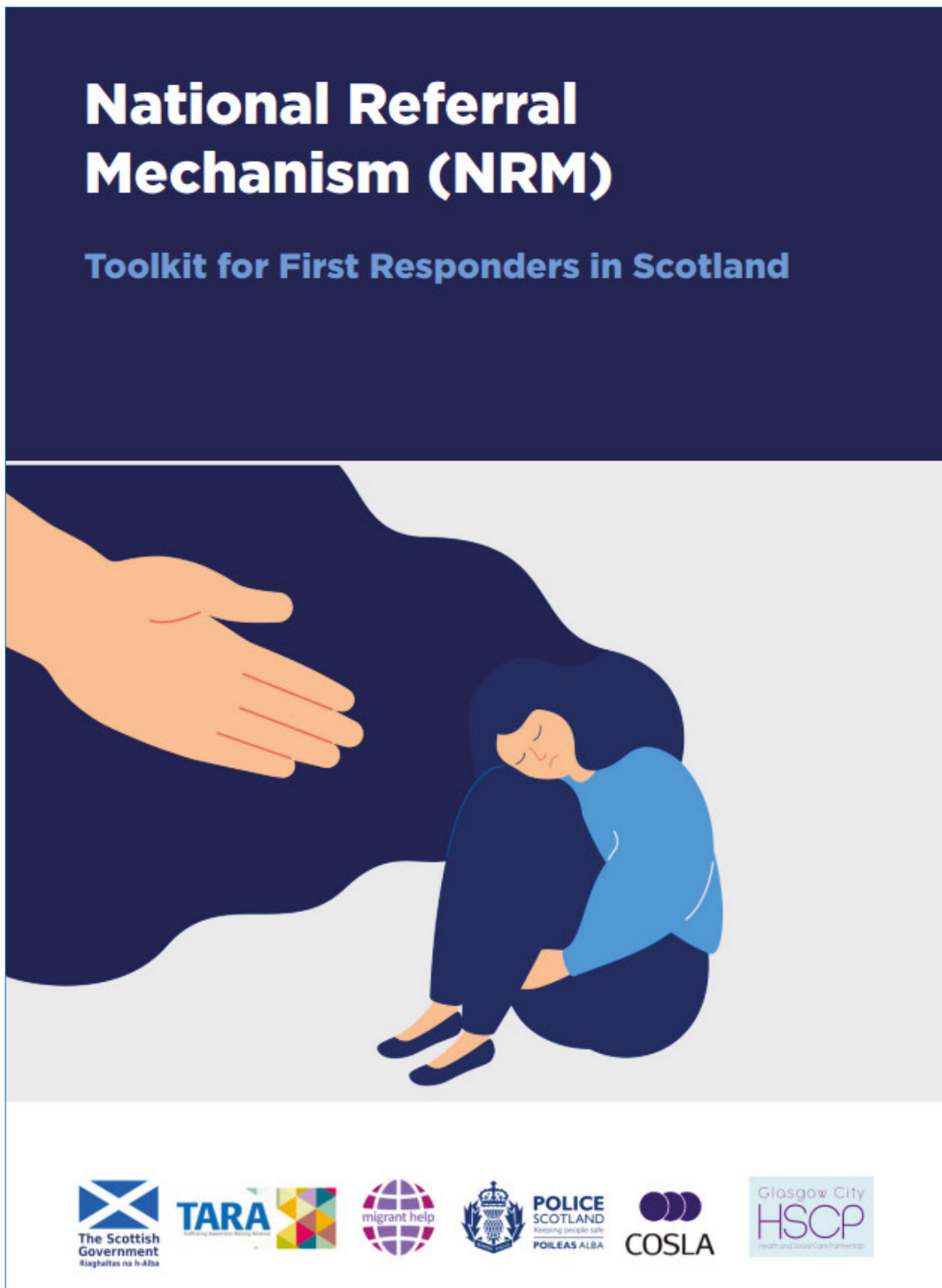
In Autumn 2020, an emerging threat was identified following media articles highlighting the death of young students in some English and Welsh universities, following consumption of drugs. Initial enquiries revealed that students in lockdown presented a potential market to be exploited by drug suppliers, with the situation compounded by concerns over an increase in student mental health issues.

Police Scotland worked in collaboration with the SOC Taskforce and engaged with Scottish Universities to consider SOC intervention opportunities to avoid similar tragedies in Scotland. This resulted in the development of an e-poster and e-leaflet campaign, which conveyed messages aimed at students highlighting the dangers of being targeted by unscrupulous drug dealers during lockdown. This information was complemented with personal safety advice and mental health support. The campaign was circulated via university web pages to help facilitate messaging to all universities in Scotland and their students.

National Referral Mechanism Toolkit

In 2021, an NRM toolkit was launched to provide First Responder organisations and their frontline teams with the local and global human trafficking and exploitation context, the legislative framework, the purpose of the NRM, guidance on how to best complete an NRM referral and advice on what to expect once a referral is submitted.

The toolkit also takes a trauma-informed approach to identifying vulnerable adults and children, and provides helpful advice on how to provide a safe environment to encourage potential victims to disclose their experiences. With the support of Glasgow City Council, the toolkit was developed in an interactive format, with a key focus on ease of use and being able to support frontline teams at their point of need.



Deter

The Deter Strand aims to deter Serious Organised Crime Groups by supporting private, public and third sector organisations to protect themselves and each other. The Strand Lead for Deter is Amanda Hatton, Executive Director for Children, Education and Justice Services at City of Edinburgh Council. There are four themes within Deter:

- businesses;
- public and third sector organisations;
- licensing, regulation and enforcement; and
- procurement and commissioning of services.

Some of the progress within the Deter Strand is provided below.

Tackling illegal waste disposal highlights other criminality

Since 2020, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has utilised a multi-agency approach to disrupt illegal waste management activities. Partner agencies including Police Scotland, HMRC, Revenue Scotland, Office of the Traffic Commissioner and Scottish Power Networks, work alongside SEPA to ensure a co-ordinated response and to use a variety of powers to tackle a range of criminal behaviours.

Key outcomes to date include:

- detailed SEPA audit of a licensed site which identified significant non-compliance with licence conditions, resulting in the site being cleared of waste materials.
 - Fixed Monetary Penalty issued for failure to comply with SEPA requirements associated with the investigation into illegal waste deposits.
 - HMRC seized and restored three plant machines found to be illegally running on red diesel and the individuals on site were fined over £1,000.
 - Scottish Power Networks disconnected illegal electricity supply with an associated £10,000 fee for any future reconnection to a legitimate supply.
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Scotland Excel: Defending Public Procurement

Scotland Excel is the Centre of Procurement Expertise for the local government sector and is funded by Scotland's 32 local authorities with the remit to carry out a range of procurement related functions decided by its member councils.

In 2021, the "Serious Organised Crime: Defending Public Procurement" training programme was created for the public sector with support from the SOC Taskforce' Small Community Grant Scheme. The training was designed to assist organisations with responsibility for procuring contracts in ensuring that they consider the risks of SOC, were aware of the tools available to prevent their organisations falling victim to the appointment of contractors that may appear legitimate but on closer inspection have links to SOC, and helped to ensure that their organisation is protected as much as possible.

A wide-reaching and diverse selection of public sector organisations have benefited from taking part in this training course, with three sessions for 34 individuals delivered between April 2022 and March 2023.

An example of feedback sought from attendees following completion of the course, both to evidence effectiveness of the course and also identify any areas for refinement included the following:

"I now have a better understanding of SOC and how it can affect procurement in many different ways with it being present throughout the supply chain. I also understand in more depth how SOC groups are structured and the current approach to combatting SOC."

Banking Protocol

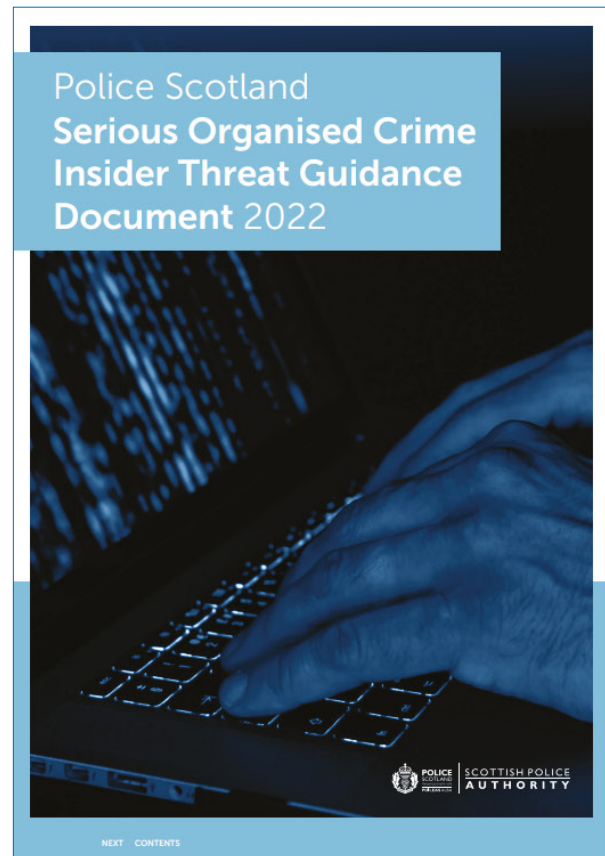
The Banking Protocol launched in March 2018 is a multi-agency UK scheme, launched by UK Finance, National Trading Standards and local police forces, which aims to identify vulnerable victims who are in the process of being defrauded of funds from their bank accounts. Branch staff are trained to spot the warning signs that suggest a customer may be falling victim to such activity, before alerting police to quickly intervene and investigate.

Since its launch, the Banking Protocol has been a success in Scotland, with 5,569 incidents reported and a potential loss of £29 million prevented.

An elderly female was recently the victim of bogus workmen and attended her local Bank of Scotland branch in Ayrshire to withdraw £2,000 for gardening work. Bank staff became suspicious and implemented the banking protocol. Police attended and obtained details from staff and the elderly female.

Upon inspection, Trading Standards Scotland stated that the work carried out was sub-standard and charges were over-inflated. Due to the banking protocol and multi-agency working, the £2,000 transaction was stopped and the three males were arrested and charged with fraud offences.

Insider Threat Guidance



Public, private and third sector organisations manage a number of risks to their assets and data from a number of sources, which includes SOC groups.

Police Scotland developed Insider Threat guidance and a checklist to help reduce the risk and impact of SOC on organisations. The guidance was created to help ensure organisations are equipped to proactively mitigate risk, improve resilience and create a hostile environment for those who would corrupt public services for their own financial gain.

The checklist is designed to support organisations self-assess their response to Insider Threat. The checklist may also support Counter Terrorism responses and will complement “workshops to raise awareness of Prevent” (WRAP) training.

Cyber and Fraud Centre

The Cyber and Fraud Centre – Scotland is a not-for-profit, employee-first organisation that exists to ensure Scottish organisations are as resilient as they can be against cyber and fraud crime. In the eventuality of a cyber or fraud attack, the centre and its partners can support organisations and help resume operations.

Some key highlights since 2020 include:

- 3,500+ organisations completed the Cyber Essentials Pre-Assessment, which is a stepping stone to achieving Cyber Essentials, a government-backed scheme that helps individuals guard against the most common cyber threats and demonstrate commitment to cyber security.
 - 1,000+ organisations taken through National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) Exercise in a Box, an online tool which helps organisations find out how resilient they are to cyber attacks and practise their response in a safe environment.
 - 400+ calls to the Incident Response Helpline. In collaboration with the Scottish Government and Police Scotland, this helpline serves as a place to help and guide those who have suffered a cyber or fraud attack and are unsure about what to do.
 - 150 senior leaders from Scotland's leading organisations have taken a two-day cyber training course called Cyber Executive Education. This course is delivered by former NCSC CEO, Ciaran Martin, and features case studies, along with guest speakers retelling their cyber and fraud incidents.
- creation of a fraud threat sharing working group that joins up all the major financial institutions in Scotland, along with Police Scotland and Scottish Government. This group shares threat intel in an effort to disrupt criminal activity and make Scotland a safer place to live and work.
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The CyberScotland Partnership

The CyberScotland Partnership was formed in 2021 as a collaboration of national partners to proactively work together to raise awareness of cyber risks and build cyber resilience across communities and businesses in Scotland.

Scotland's second strategy '[Cyber Resilient Scotland: strategic framework](#)' was published in February 2021, alongside the announcement of the CyberScotland Partnership (CSP) and cyberscotland.com – the online portal for all aspects of cyber resilience for Scotland.

The CSP started to firm up communications and messaging during the pandemic in response to the increase in the cyber threats arising from cyber criminals and SOC groups taking advantage of the rapid mass adoption of new digital technologies for e-commerce, remote working and learning.

An online bulletin was created by the CSP to inform organisations and individuals of emerging cyber threats and scams, and provide guidance from trusted sources on best practices for working from home. It is now a regular product on the CyberScotland Portal and comes in non-technical and technical versions.

Further information about CyberScotland, and resources from Partners can be found on the CyberScotland Portal. A progress report on the delivery of the Strategic Framework for a Cyber Resilient Scotland is available on the Scottish Government [website](#).

Human trafficking

Police Scotland's National Human Trafficking Unit (NHTU) provides an overview of human trafficking and manages National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) allocated for investigation in Scotland. The unit supports divisional activity, engages regularly with partners in terms of the Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy, and develops policy and strategy in this area.

Police Scotland continues to assist the Scottish Government in relation to the implementation of a national Duty to Notify process that places a duty on specified public bodies to notify the Chief Constable of Police Scotland about a person who is, or appears to be, the victim of human trafficking or slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. This process will allow the collation and processing of wider information about trafficking activity in Scotland not currently collected through the NRM or the criminal justice system. The Scottish Government remains committed to implementing Duty to Notify and will look to make progress on this over the course of 2023-24.

Police Scotland "Break the Chain" media campaign

Developing public awareness of modern slavery is an ongoing process and media campaigns have been delivered by the Scottish Government and Police Scotland in previous years.

In March 2021, Police Scotland launched a national campaign "Break the Chain" through a webinar hosted by the then Scottish Business Resilience Centre (SBRC). The event featured speakers from the Modern Slavery Organised Immigration Crime Unit, Police Scotland, SBRC and Brightwork Recruitment. The campaign focused on labour exploitation and associated indicators and was supported by a dedicated webpage where additional information was made available to businesses and the wider public.

Detect

The Detect Strand aims to identify, detect and prosecute those involved in Serious Organised Crime. The Strand Lead for Detect is Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors, Police Scotland's lead for the Crime and Operations portfolio.



There are three themes within Detect:

- collection, analysis and use of information and intelligence;
- investigation and detection of serious organised crime groups; and
- prosecution of serious organised criminals.

Work across the theme has progressed significantly since the publication of the last progress report, as detailed below.

Organised Crime Partnership (OCP)

The OCP is a collaborative unit consisting of officers from Police Scotland and the National Crime Agency (NCA), which aims to provide a formidable capability and international reach in order to tackle national priorities and those involved at the highest levels of criminality, both in Scotland and abroad. All investigative activity is authorised by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), which plays a vital role in supporting the enhanced efforts to disrupt SOC.

Since March 2020, there has been a number of successes. This includes:

- 7,264kg drugs seized;
- 36 firearms seized (26 guns, 10 other firearms);
- 45 convictions with sentences of 115 years;
- 190 disruptions; and
- more than £4 million in cash seized.

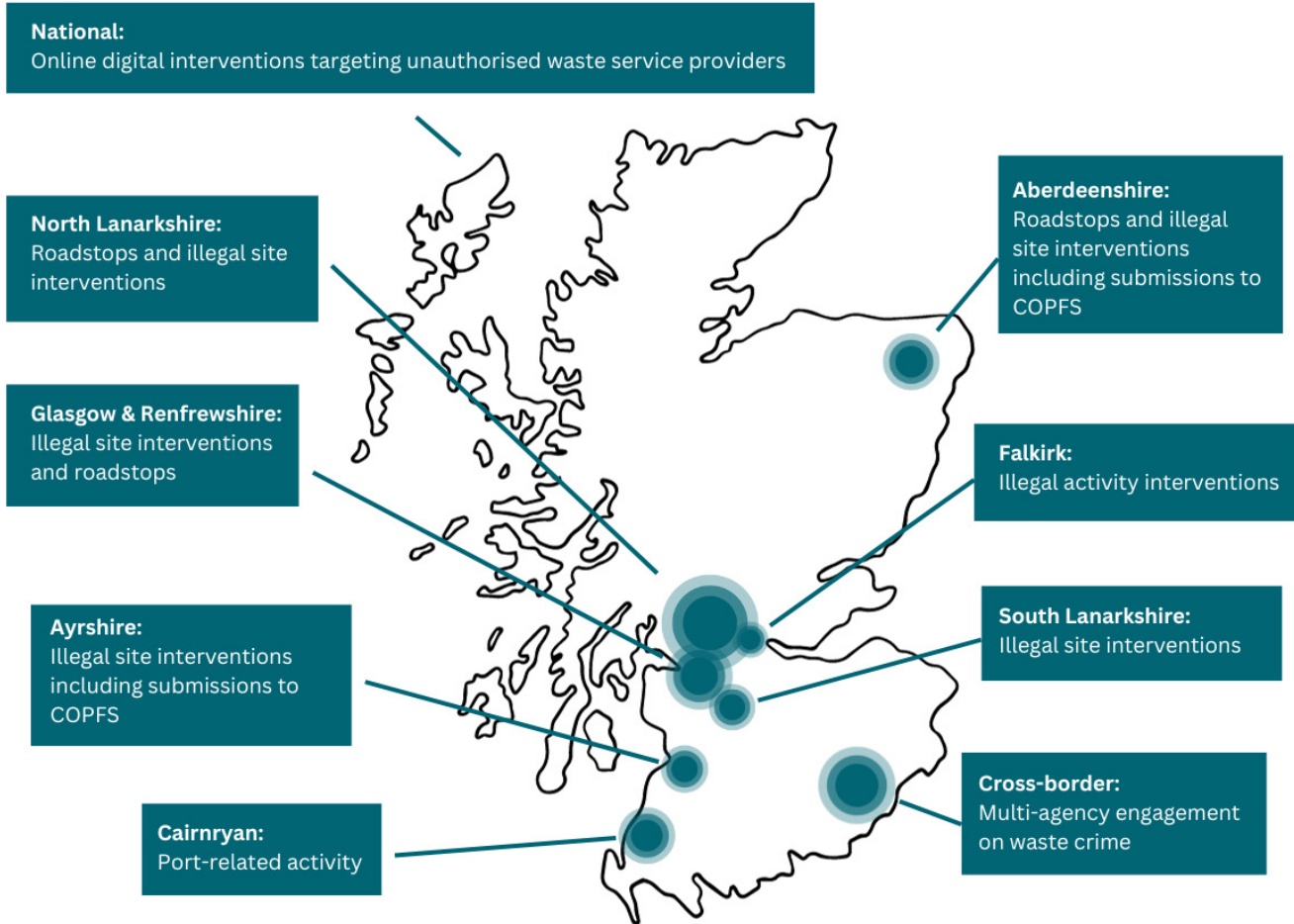
County Lines – Intensification Week

In May 2021, Police Scotland officers took part in a UK-wide week of activity targeting County Lines drug dealers – who exploit the most vulnerable people in our communities, including children and young adults. Action by officers in Scotland saw engagement with 29 vulnerable people and 64 addresses visited, which were believed to be used for the purposes of cuckooing.

Intelligence suggested that the postal service was being used by County Lines groups (particularly from Merseyside), and a number of post offices were identified and visited by the dog unit. This resulted in 250g of cocaine being recovered, with a “street value” of £25,000. Subsequent enforcement at one individual's address led to the recovery of 1.75kg of cannabis, with a “street value” exceeding £68,000.

The week resulted in 20 arrests and controlled drugs seized, as well as nearly £20,000 in cash. Offensive weapons, including a taser, two machetes and two large knives, were also recovered.

Partnership Activity on Waste Crime



Note: The activity marker sizes are indicative of the number of activities involved

Organised environmental crime – waste crime

Environmental crime is attractive to SOC, particularly within the waste management sector. These criminal activities cause harm to the environment, communities and human health, violate environmental legislation, undermine legitimate operators and involve tax avoidance.

SEPA investigates waste enforcement, which includes the monitoring of over 325 active cases including 59 high priority sites, with some linked to SOC activity. The map above gives a flavour of areas linked to SOC.

Using the media to highlight new trend in waste crime

In February 2021, SEPA began to advise the public that a new waste crime trend appeared to be establishing in Scotland. A number of abandoned HGV trailers filled with waste were discovered in the central belt over several months.

Media releases were issued to local and national media across Scotland asking communities to be vigilant and to report any suspicious trailers left by the roadside or in isolated areas as soon as possible. As well as SEPA's Head of Enforcement, Jennifer Shearer, media coverage featured

Robert Steenson, the then SOC Taskforce Deter Strand Lead, and Executive Director of North Lanarkshire Council, which had to pay to dispose of several of the trailers.

19 different outlets in total, including STV news, BBC Radio Scotland, several national daily newspapers and trade press outlets, ran stories on the trailers and SEPA's investigation. This also provided the opportunity to remind the public of their own duty of care and the steps they should take to ensure they were not inadvertently giving their waste to criminals.



Dirty Business

During 2021, SEPA, along with other partner agencies in Scotland, took part in the BBC Disclosure programme “Dirty Business” which delved into criminal waste activities – ranging from “man with a van” fly-tipping and waste being burnt in a drum to large-scale illegal activities with links to SOC.

The documentary saw a BBC presenter shadowing staff on complex investigations including a site visit to an unidentified location, where a criminal gang had buried large amounts of waste underground resulting in environmental impact from the release of harmful gases and liquids as the illegal deposit degrades.

The presenter also accompanied SEPA staff to a legitimate waste operator to see how businesses should be operating to stay within the law and discovered how criminals undercutting these types of businesses can impact on the industry.

The programme aired on 31 January 2022 and resulted in four times more reports of waste disposal, movement and fly-tipping to SEPA’s pollution hotline than the same time in 2021. Consequently, there was notification to SEPA of at least two previously unknown significant waste crime sites and increased intelligence and information on waste illegality impacting local communities.



SOC Operations

Operation Cybernetic

Operation Cybernetic was an intelligence-led investigation targeting a SOC group criminally active in the supply of controlled drugs, firearms and SOC offences.

In September 2020, Police Scotland received intelligence regarding the potential handover of firearms in Ayrshire. The handover of weapons took place at Ardeer Golf Club in Stevenson and executive action was carried out on both nominals.

Officers recovered five replica pistols which had been modified to shoot live ammunition and two boxes of 9mm bullets. Both accused pled guilty to possessing illegal firearms and ammunition without a license when they appeared at the High Court in Glasgow in March 2021. Both accused were jailed for five years.

Operation Venetic

Police Scotland and the NCA continue to see significant results from activity that took place across the country as part of Operation Venetic – the most significant operation into SOC in the UK.

The operation culminated in the takedown of Encrochat, an encrypted global communication service used exclusively by criminals, which offered a secure mobile phone instant messaging service. The company's encryption has now been cracked by an international law enforcement team.

To date there have been 31 convictions in Scotland, with sentences totalling in excess of 134 years for a range of criminality including the supply of controlled drugs, involvement in SOC, firearm offences, violence and money laundering.

Operation Escalade

Operation Escalade was aimed at disrupting the activities of one of Scotland's most prolific SOC groups which remains ongoing. Since its inception in 2014, 42 people have been convicted of serious offences including being involved in SOC, the supply and possession of drugs, firearm offences and money laundering.

Eight fugitives connected to the groups criminality in this country have been arrested on international warrants in Europe and South America with the co-operation of law enforcement partners in the UK and abroad, and extradited back to Scotland to face justice.

In April 2022, following his extradition from Italy, Christopher Hughes was convicted of directing SOC and a charge of murder, aggravated by being involved in SOC. He was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for the first charge to run concurrent to the sentence of 25 years imposed for the murder charge.



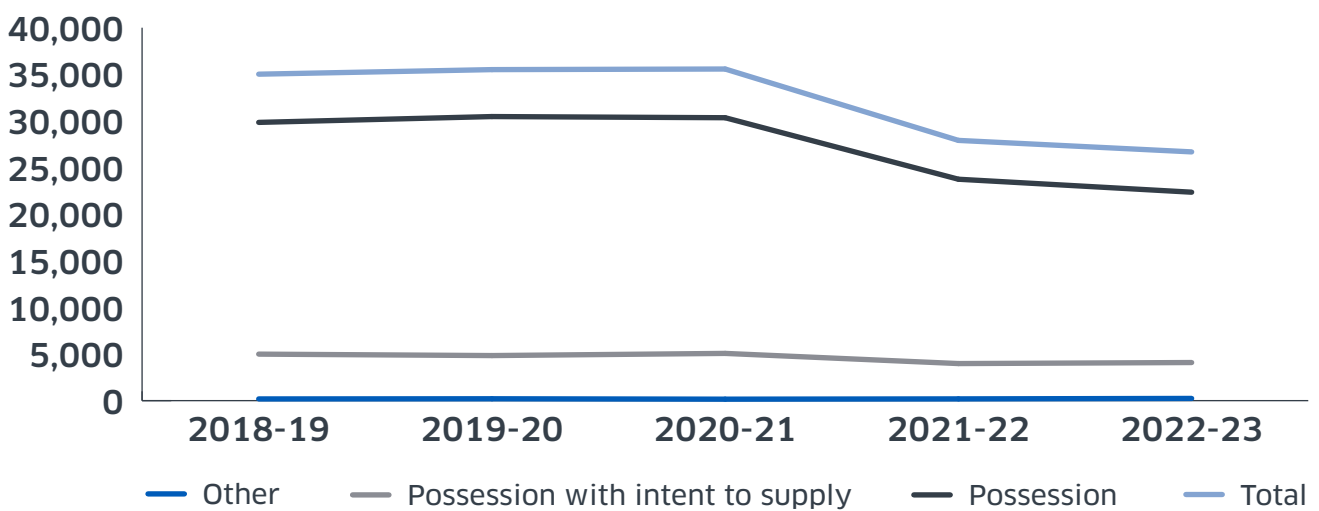
Police recorded drug crimes

The arrest, conviction and imprisonment of serious organised criminals is crucial to the fulfilment of the SOC Strategy’s strategic vision. To measure this, we draw on police recorded crime statistics, criminal proceedings statistics and data concerning charges and convictions under Sections 28 to 31 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010.

Recorded drug crimes decreased by 5% from 27,723 in 2021-22 to 26,443 in 2022-23 (Graph 1). However, since 2018-19, this crime has fallen by 24%.

Crimes of drug possession decreased by 6% between 2021-22 and 2022-23 (23,747 to 22,356 crimes). This follows a decrease where it hit a high of 30,469 in 2019-20.

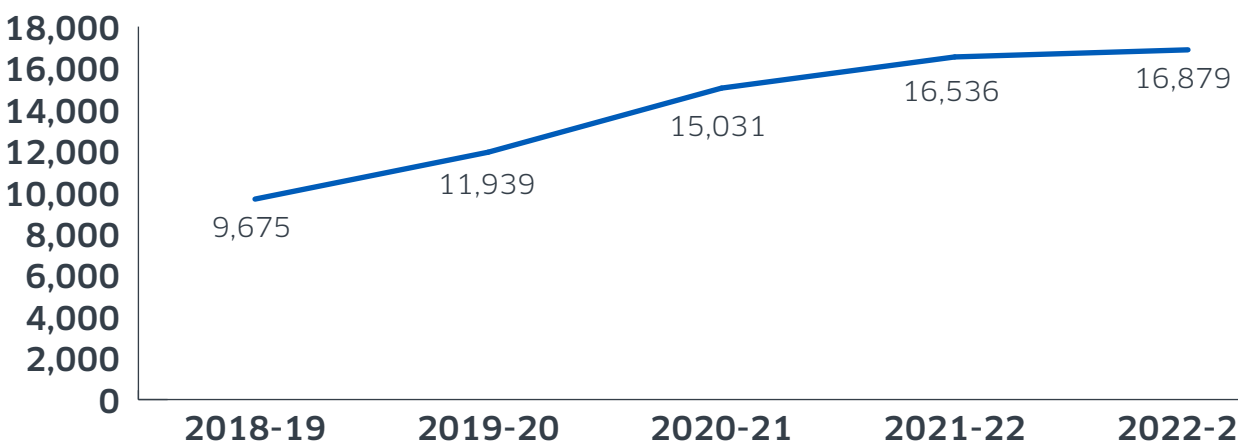
Graph 1: Recorded drug crimes in Scotland 2018-19 to 2022-23



Police recorded fraud crimes

The number of recorded fraud crimes has increased by 2% in 2022-23 to 16,879 crimes (Graph 2), the fourth consecutive increase across the time series in this report. The number of recorded fraud crimes has increased by 74% since 2018-19.

Graph 2: Recorded fraud crimes in Scotland 2018-19 to 2022-23



Source: Recorded Crime in Scotland 2022-23

SOC proceedings and convictions

One of the ways in which SOC offences can be prosecuted is using sections 28 to 31 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. This legislation provides convictions for:

- involvement in SOC (s.28);
- offences aggravated by connection with SOC (s.29);
- directing SOC (s.30); and
- failure to report SOC (s.31).

In 2021-22, 11 people were proceeded against under these sections, 10 more than those in 2020-21 (Table 1). The total number of convictions increased from one in 2020-21 to seven in 2021-22. However, due to the subsequent court closures during the pandemic and the impact on cases not being called, the data for 2020-21 should be used and interpreted with caution.

Table 1: court proceedings and convictions 2017-18 to 2021-22, under Sections 28, 30 and 31 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010

Main charge	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Total Proceeded Against	5	4	13	1	11
S28(1)	3	4	9	-	11
S30(1)(A)	1	-	-	1	-
S30(1)(B)	-	-	3	-	-
S30(1)(B) & 30(2)	-	-	1	-	-
S31(1)(A) & B(l)	1	-	-	-	-
Total Convicted	5	4	12	1	7
S28(1)	3	4	9	-	7
S30(1)(A)	1	-	-	1	-
S30(1)(B)	-	-	3	-	-
S31(1)(A) & B(l)	1	-	-	-	-
Conviction Rate	100%	100%	92%	100%	64%

Source: Scottish Government Criminal Proceedings Database

Proceedings under section 29 of the Act concern charges where a SOC aggravation has been added to the substantive offence. An offence is aggravated if the person committing the offence is motivated (wholly or partly) by the objective of committing or conspiring to commit SOC.

Adding charges with a SOC aggravation to the analysis (Table 2), shows there have been considerably more prosecuted charges and convictions aggravated by a SOC connection compared to the figures for Sections 28, 30 and 31 of the legislation.

Table 2 shows the position as of 23 August 2023. COPFS has a live operational database and as more charges are progressed through the system, data will continue to be updated and is therefore subject to change

Table 2: charges reported to COPFS 2017-18 to 2022-23, under Sections 28 to 31 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 and any charge with a SOC aggravation (s.29)

Charges and convictions with SOC aggravation	2017 - 18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2017-18 to 2022-23
Total charges prosecuted	416	284	219	734	600	421	2,674
Total convicted	82	95	96	181	36	13	503
% of charges convicted at date of extract	20%	33%	44%	25%	6%	3%	19%

Source: Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service



Disrupt

The Disrupt Strand is responsible for disrupting Serious Organised Crime groups. The Strand Lead for Disrupt is Kenny Donnelly, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service's Deputy Crown Agent for Serious Casework.

There are five themes within Disrupt:

- multi-agency disruption of serious organised crime groups;
- serious organised crime group access to people, skills and advice;
- serious organised crime group access to finance, logistics, technology and information;
- recovery of proceeds of crime; and
- exposure of those involved in serious organised crime.

There has been a range of successes within the Disrupt Strand, including those set out below.

Prosecution of those involved in SOC

COPFS works closely with partners including Police Scotland, the NCA and HMRC to ensure that SOC is thoroughly investigated and SOC groups which cause harm to our communities, are disrupted and dismantled.

COPFS is committed to using all available legal tools to achieve this aim: prosecuting perpetrators, seeking appropriate court orders to protect the public, and taking action to seize and confiscate the proceeds of crime.





Notable prosecutions

The first cryptocurrency seizure in Scotland was made in August 2022. During the search of the address of an individual suspected of having breached an SCPO, Police Scotland seized an electronic ledger device which was found to contain a large quantity of cryptocurrency. Evidence suggested that the individual had obtained the cryptocurrency through criminality, and COPFS and Police Scotland lodged an application to the court to seize the cryptocurrency. The value of the cryptocurrency was £66,612.43, which was subsequently included in a confiscation order.

In November 2022, four individuals were convicted after trial of multiple charges of human trafficking and brothel keeping. The principal was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and the three co-accused received sentences ranging from six to eight years. Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Orders were imposed on all four offenders, to commence upon their release from prison.

Five accused, including three former solicitors, were convicted after a nine-week trial at the High Court in

Glasgow of being involved in SOC, fraud and money laundering to the value of £1.48 million. In January 2023, the accused were sentenced to a combined total of 30 years and four months imprisonment following charges brought under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Their convictions came following an investigation by the Law Society of Scotland into the accounts of a Paisley legal firm. A motion for confiscation was made in respect of each accused.

A joint HMRC and NCA investigation discovered a former VAT inspector and a group of associates were involved in a £171,000 tax fraud. James McGee of Troon, South Ayrshire, was the controlling mind of the scheme and used a hijacked identity to make bogus VAT repayment claims. The proceeds fraudulently obtained from HMRC were laundered through accounts controlled by McGee and others in the group. As a former HMRC employee of 34 years, McGee used his knowledge of the VAT system to mastermind the fraud which stole from the public purse. He was jailed for 30 months in May 2022 at Ayr Sheriff Court.

Serious Crime Prevention Orders (SCPOs)

SCPOs are court orders which may be applied for by the Crown where a person has been convicted of, or is involved in, SOC. The aim is to protect the public by restricting the activities of offenders once they are released from serving custodial sentences, to prevent them from becoming involved in SOC again. They are a valuable tool in disrupting SOC and are considered as a key part of the prosecution strategy in all significant SOC cases.

As of March 2023, 90 individuals have had SCPOs imposed on them by Scottish courts, with the numbers granted varying over the past four years. The vast majority of SCPOs granted in Scotland relate to individuals convicted of SOC. 58 individuals remain in prison, whilst 32 are live and being actively monitored in the community.

SCPOs can contain a range of restrictions, such as prohibiting the ownership of multiple mobile phones, or preventing someone from travelling abroad. An SCPO can last for a maximum of five years. The penalty for failing to comply with an SCPO is up to five years in prison and/or a fine.

Table 3: SCPOs granted in Scotland 2020-23

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Annual SCPOs Granted	13	7	18	10
Cumulative Total	13	20	38	48

Source: Police Scotland

Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Orders (TEPOs)

TEPOs may be made on the motion of the prosecutor or at the courts own instance where there is a risk that the person may commit a human trafficking or exploitation offence, and the prohibitions or requirements contained in the order are necessary to protect individuals from the physical or psychological harm which would likely occur if the person committed such an offence.

12 TEPOs have been granted in Scotland since the legislation was introduced. One order is currently live, with the individual recently released after serving a custodial sentence.

SOC Groups and Nominals

Police Scotland and partners monitor the activity of known SOC groups and nominals identified as being involved in SOC. The data included below in Table 4 is Police Scotland’s Q4 management information and covers the period 1 December – 28 February of each of the respective years.

The number of known nominals has decreased by 29% since 2018-19, where there were 2,417, to 1,726 in 2022-23.

In 2022-23, 165 SOC nominals were incarcerated, the lowest figure of the relevant time series.

Table 4: number of known SOC groups and nominals in Scotland, 2018-19 to 2022-23

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
SOC groups	112	98	99	97	101
SOC nominals	2417	2106	2005	1827	1726
SOC nominals incarcerated	237	188	166	196	165
%SOC nominals incarcerated	9.80%	8.90%	8.30%	10.70%	9.60%

Source: Police Scotland

Proceeds of Crime

The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) is an extremely powerful and effective tool in the fight against SOC. The legislation provides for the criminal confiscation or civil recovery of the financial benefit derived from criminal activity. Ensuring that criminals do not profit from their illegal activities is a key element of the strategy to disrupt SOC. COPFS has a specialist team which works with partners to ensure that the proceeds of crime are restrained and then confiscated from offenders, following conviction.

In 2022-23 (to date), 19 restraint orders have been obtained, totalling approximately £6.7 million, and a further £3.9 million has been secured by way of moratorium. 185 confiscation orders have been obtained, totalling in excess of £2.6 million.

Civil Recovery Unit (CRU)

The Civil Recovery Unit (CRU) acts on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. The aim of the CRU is to use civil court proceedings to make Scotland a hostile environment for people involved in unlawful conduct, including SOC. To achieve this, the CRU carries out non-conviction based asset recovery, investigating the source of funds used to acquire assets and recovering any property obtained through unlawful conduct. The CRU can also recover money which may be intended for use in unlawful conduct. Removal of such assets helps disrupt SOC groups. The sums recovered are remitted to the Scottish Consolidated Fund (SCF) and used by the CashBack for Communities programme.

The CRU works closely with law enforcement, government departments and other agencies, and the financial sector. To maximise disruption to criminality, the CRU routinely refers cases to HMRC for the possible taxation of criminal gains.

Table 5 illustrates the remittances to the SCF from the four types of investigation and litigation undertaken by the CRU, ranging from a total of £3.26 million in 2018-19 to £8.88 million in 2022-23.

Table 5: Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 – remittances to the Scottish Consolidated Fund

Year to 31 March	Court of Session (Asset Recovery) (£)	Cash Forfeiture (£)	Listed Assets (£)	Bank Account Freezing Orders (AFOs) (£)	Yearly total – all business areas (£)
2018-19	1,353,838	1,905,218	n/a	n/a	3,259,056
2019-20	1,742,848	2,226,923	35,893	139,396	4,145,060
2020-21	2,275,962	2,141,445	129,387	972,912	5,519,707
2021-22	2,243,247	2,235,104	47,634	464,267	4,990,253
2022-23	4,296,396	2,738,459	51,049	1,793,447	8,879,351

Source: Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service and Civil Recovery Unit.

In 2022, the CRU undertook concurrent investigations into the sources of a significant sum of cash detected by Police Scotland at the home of an individual and money held in bank accounts of four companies linked to him, which were frozen by HMRC under account freezing order powers. The CRU settled both investigations with the individual agreeing to pay over £600,000, representing a proportion of the cash detected at his house by Police Scotland and £1 million from the frozen bank accounts of the companies of which he was associated with.

A successful outcome is not solely determined by the value of the assets ultimately recovered but also by the disruption to criminals, including those involved in SOC. For example, the CRU has recovered properties with low equity which were previously believed to be owned or occupied by SOC nominals.

It should also be noted that over the period 2018-19 to 2022-23, the CRU recovered £723,413 (in addition to the above remittances) which was returned to the victims of crime.

Looking forward

This progress report gives a flavour of the work that is undertaken by the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce, its subgroups and partners to reduce the harm caused by serious organised crime in Scotland.

Law enforcement partners located at the Scottish Crime Campus produce the Scottish Multi Agency Strategic Threat Assessment (SMASTA), which is a key reference document that allows the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce to identify priorities, and direct its collective resources more effectively. Serious organised crime groups are constantly evolving, looking to identify opportunities to increase their wealth with no regard to anyone who may be affected. It is essential that the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce and partners look to use every means at their disposal to anticipate and respond appropriately and effectively to the harm serious organised crime poses.

Following publication of the refreshed Serious Organised Crime Strategy, a Steering Group was formed comprising of a number of partners representing the four Strands of the Strategy to analyse available data and make recommendations to the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce. One of the priorities of the Steering Group over the next year is to work with Taskforce members and other partners to develop a consistent approach to information sharing between law enforcement agencies and the third sector, and ensure that our most vulnerable are not at risk of exploitation.

I would encourage everyone and all organisations across the country to work with us to continue to make Scotland a hostile environment for those who commit serious offences for their own gain, and ensure we achieve our aims of making Scotland a safer, fairer and more prosperous place for everyone.



ANGELA CONSTANCE MSP

Cabinet Secretary for
Justice and Home Affairs
Chair, Serious Organised
Crime Taskforce

Key stakeholders

- Action for Children
- Age Scotland
- Barnardos
- Border Force
- British Security Industry Association
- British Transport Police
- Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Civil Recovery Unit
- CoSLA
- Crimestoppers
- Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
- Cyber and Fraud Centre Scotland
- Dundee City Council
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- Education Scotland
- Food Standards Scotland
- Glasgow City Council
- His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
- HM Revenue and Customs
- Inverclyde Council
- Midlothian Council
- National Crime Agency
- NHS Counter Fraud Services
- NHS National Services Scotland
- North Lanarkshire Council
- Office of the Traffic Commissioner
- Police Scotland
- Resource Management Association Scotland
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- SACRO
- Scotland Excel
- Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research
- Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Scottish Environmental Services Association
- Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Police Authority
- Scottish Prison Service
- Security Industry Authority
- Society of Chief Officers in Environmental Health Scotland
- Solace (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers)
- South Lanarkshire Council
- Stirling Council
- Trading Standards Scotland
- Zero Waste Scotland

Key contacts and resources

In an emergency always call 999

If you see something, say something –
telephone numbers for reporting concerns below.

Police Scotland – **101**

Crimestoppers – **0800 555 111**

HM Revenue and Customs Confidential Hotline – **0800 59 5000**

HM Revenue and Customs Tax Evasion Hotline – **0800 78 8887**

Modern Slavery Helpline – **0800 0121 700**

Websites for further information

Police Scotland – www.scotland.police.uk

HM Revenue and Customs – www.hmrc.gov.uk

National Crime Agency – www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk

Cyber and Fraud Centre Scotland – www.cyberfraudcentre.com

Modern Slavery – www.modernslavery.co.uk

Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service – www.crownoffice.gov.uk

Get Safe Online – www.getsafeonline.org

Thinkuknow – www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Childnet International – www.childnet.org



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