

## **UK THREAT ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUS ORGANISED CRIME 2008/09**

### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the key findings from the unrestricted version of the UK Threat Assessment of Serious Organised Crime 2008/09. The report is submitted for discussion and noting.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. In June 2008, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) published an unrestricted version of the UK Threat Assessment of Serious Organised Crime 2008/09. The document describes and assesses the threats posed to the UK by serious organised criminals. The assessment is drawn from a fuller, restricted version which is produced annually for law enforcement and wider government use.
3. Improving overall awareness of serious organised crime is critical to combating the various threats and mitigating the harm they cause. SOCA have made this information available to public and private sector organisations in order to develop 'target hardening' measures, and for the public to protect themselves against becoming victims of serious organised crime.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

4. The key findings from the unrestricted version of the UK Threat Assessment include:

**Criminal Business Structures** – many of those involved in serious organised criminal activity in, and directly affecting, the UK are British nationals. Most serious organised criminals are involved in more than one area of criminal activity directly or indirectly concerned with making money. Most activities require some measure of criminal collaboration and infrastructure, and this lies behind the formation of organised crime groups and networks.

**Firearms** – the vast majority of recorded firearms offences in England and Wales are linked to street-gangs. Over half of all recorded gun crime takes place within three force areas, namely the Metropolitan, Greater Manchester and West Midlands police areas. Since 2006, seizures of live firing weapons being brought into the UK have been in larger quantities, in batches of up to 30. Previously there were relatively small numbers seized, often less than five at a time. There has been an increased trend of Baikal gas pistols converted to fire 9mm ammunition entering the UK from Lithuania.

**Cocaine** – most cocaine destined for Europe is concealed in large vessels crossing the Atlantic. Possibly in response to successful law enforcement action against these transatlantic shipments there is increasing evidence of shipments by air to West Africa from where the cocaine is transported to Europe. There is evidence of a two-tier market for cocaine in the UK both at wholesale and street level. Dealers are selling cheaper, more heavily adulterated cocaine to some customers while selling higher purity cocaine to more affluent buyers.

**Heroin** – at least 90% of the UK's heroin supply is manufactured from opiates originating in Afghanistan. Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan continues to rise. There are indications that some opiates are being stockpiled, although it is not known whether this is to regulate the price worldwide or because of overproduction.

**Organised Immigration Crime** – the scale of people smuggling far exceeds that of human trafficking. Eastern European traffickers, who trade mainly in Eastern European victims, routinely purchase victims from criminal associates who have trafficked them from source countries, either directly or through agents. The groups are relatively small in size and unsophisticated and rarely engage in end-to-end trafficking, unlike some South East Asian groups who may control the movement of their victims at all stages. Many victims of trafficking work in the sex industry (mainly 'off-street') across the UK and not just in metropolitan areas. Based on those identified and recovered, most come from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, China, South East Asia and Africa and this largely reflects the nationality of traffickers involved.

**Non Fiscal Fraud** – fraud against large companies may appear to be a 'victimless crime', in practice, everyone is affected, since the income lost to fraud and the costs of measures to combat it are reflected in higher prices. Serious organised criminals are actively involved in many forms of fraud, especially those calling for an effective criminal infrastructure, such as payment card crime, 'boiler room' fraud (telesales centres that persuade investors into purchasing worthless or over-priced stock in companies with little or no value) and mortgage fraud. Frauds that offer high profits at lower risk than other forms of criminality are obviously attractive. Some of the profits made from these frauds are used to fund other serious criminal activity.

**Technology Enabled Crime** – the rapid growth of the Internet has resulted in the evolution of a criminal market for the compromise, trade and exploitation of personal data. This includes collating and selling large quantities of data, targeting of individuals to enable criminal access to accounts and using techniques such as 'spamming' to attempt to influence potential victims. The internet is also a potentially anonymous market place for criminals wishing to supply illegal commodities.

## **OTHER AND EMERGING THREATS**

5. The document also covers other and emerging threats. These include:

**Criminal activity associated with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games** – this will be one of the largest events staged in the UK in modern times, and will present serious organised criminals with many opportunities. Fraud, organised immigration crime, intellectual property crime, e-crime and money laundering are

likely to be the main threats beginning from now and extending through the period of the Games and beyond.

**Organised armed robbery** – there were 1,059 cash in transit robberies in England & Wales in 2007. The Metropolitan, Greater Manchester and West Midlands police areas account for almost half of all cash in transit offences.

**Road freight crime** – in 2007, goods were stolen during road freight offences with a value of £80.4m in the UK. Serious organised criminals target easily disposable high-value loads, steal entire loads by deception/robbery, or travel motorways to steal from lay-bys.

**Organised vehicle crime** – serious organised criminals are involved in vehicle crime principally to profit from reselling stolen vehicles and parts. Some of the profits fund other crime, whilst stolen vehicles are also used in the commission of armed robberies and ATM raids.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6. Not applicable.

### **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

7. Not applicable.

### **CHILDRENS ACT 2004**

8. Not applicable.

### **CONCLUSION**

9. The overall aim of the UK Serious Organised Crime Control Strategy is to reduce the harm caused by serious organised crime. Although the picture of serious organised crime nationally is becoming clearer each year, SOCA has identified that there are still many gaps.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

10. It is recommended that Members discuss the key issues from the UK Threat Assessment.

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**Background Papers:** The (Unrestricted) United Kingdom Threat Assessment of Serious Organised Crime 2008/09 (SOCA, June 2008)