ORGANISED CRIME
TASK FORCE

ANNUAL REPORT

& THREAT ASSESSMENT

2024/25

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JULY 2026

FOREWORD BY JUSTICE MINISTER NAOMI LONG MLA

As Justice Minister, I am pleased to publish the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) Annual Report for 2024/25. This report provides an overview of the scale, nature and impact of organised crime affecting Northern Ireland, whilst also recognising the sustained and collaborative efforts of OCTF partners in responding to this complex and evolving threat. Although financial pressures and wider demands on public services persist, I am encouraged by the strength of partnership working and the progress being made. I remain steadfast in my commitment to building a safer Northern Ireland, and confident that, by working together, we can continue to disrupt organised crime and protect our communities.

Organised crime remains a significant challenge, causing real and lasting harm to individuals, families, communities and businesses. It is not a victimless activity. As this report demonstrates, organised crime manifests in many forms, including drug trafficking, fraud, cybercrime, modern slavery and environmental crime, often targeting the most vulnerable in our society. These criminal networks are adaptable and innovative, frequently operating across borders and exploiting opportunities wherever they arise. While border security is a reserved matter and sits outside my direct remit, I remain mindful of concerns surrounding potential exploitation of the common travel area and I have engaged proactively with the UK Government to ensure these concerns are fully considered.

The work of disrupting organised crime groups, pursuing offenders and bringing them to justice is both complex and demanding. This report highlights the progress made during 2024/25 and the outcomes achieved across a range of priority areas to reduce the harm caused by organised crime. One of the most concerning developments identified through the threat assessment is the continued growth in the market for synthetic drugs, including potent synthetic opioids, which are often mixed with other substances and can have unpredictable and potentially lethal effects. The worrying rise in illicit vape products containing harmful substances further demonstrates the disregard these groups show for the wellbeing of those they exploit in pursuit of profit.

I welcome the continued efforts of all law enforcement partners. During the reporting period, the Police Service of Northern Ireland seized drugs with an estimated street value of approximately £12.2 million. Alongside further significant seizures by Border Force and the National Crime Agency, this demonstrates the determination of partners to remove dangerous substances from circulation, disrupt criminal activity and bring offenders before the courts.

In addition, the continued recovery of criminal assets has created valuable opportunities to further invest in communities through the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS). During this reporting period, approximately £443k of ARCS funding supported a range of local initiatives focused on reducing crime, building resilience and improving community confidence. I undertook a series of visits to various projects supported by the scheme and heard first hand about the positive difference and impact they make in local communities across Northern Ireland.

Tackling organised crime requires more than enforcement alone. As we look ahead, I remain committed to strengthening our collective response, including progressing legislation to enhance law enforcement capability and ensuring our operational frameworks remain robust and responsive to emerging threats. At the same time, we must also continue to challenge any narrative that seeks to legitimise criminal behaviour, whilst promoting a strong culture of lawfulness and respect for the rule of law across our society.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all OCTF partners for their continued professionalism, collaboration and commitment throughout the year. Their work is vital in protecting our communities and ensuring that organised crime does not undermine our shared prosperity and wellbeing. It is also important to recognise the vital role the public plays in helping to keep Northern Ireland safe. By reporting suspicious or criminal activity, individuals can make a meaningful contribution to protecting their communities. By continuing to work together for fairness, justice and safety because together, we will challenge organised crime at every level and build safer communities where people respect the law and each other.

NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

EVERYBODY'S HELP IS NEEDED TO COMBAT ORGANISED CRIME...

DON'T SUPPORT IT. REPORT IT!

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

PSNI
101

REPORT FRAUD
0300 123 2040

HMRC HOTLINE
0800 788 887

CONSUMERLINE
0300 123 6262

ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME
0800 807 060

MODERN SLAVERY HELPLINE
0800 0121 700

CRIMESTOPPERS
0800 555 111

***CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland is an independent charity that takes information about crime 100% anonymously via a freephone number or by completing a secure anonymous online form.**

Professional and trained contact centre staff are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Every day concerned members of the public pass on what they know about crime – providing valuable information that otherwise might never reach law enforcement were it not for the charity's cast-iron guarantee of anonymity.

That promise has been kept since the charity began over 35 years ago.

ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

The OCTF Website provides information on the structure and purpose of the Task Force. It is a source of up-to-date information, guidance and support to the public throughout the year on how to identify, report and protect individuals and businesses from organised crime. Take a closer look at www.octf.gov.uk

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ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

ORGANISED CRIME

Organised crime can be defined as planned and coordinated criminal behaviour, conducted by people, groups or networks working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is usually financial gain. Organised crime operates within and across jurisdictions and causes harm to individuals, communities and businesses. Organised crime may involve violence or the threat of violence and, in Northern Ireland, some organised crime groups also have paramilitary connections. Criminality does not operate in a vacuum; criminals often bribe, coerce or prey on others to support their criminal enterprises, which can include the assistance of complicit or negligent professionals. It takes many forms including drug trafficking, modern slavery/human trafficking, cybercrime, counterfeiting, fuel laundering, waste crime, tobacco and alcohol smuggling, fraud or money laundering.

Driven primarily by greed, with no regard for the rights, safety and welfare of citizens, organised crime is never a victimless crime and it often affects more than just the direct victim. At a societal level, the corrosive impact that organised criminality, such as drug dealing, can have on local communities is clear. Local commerce can suffer as organised criminals operating outside the law offer lower prices that legitimate businesses cannot compete with. Organised criminality also diverts money away from investment in key public services, while the proceeds of crime are used to fund further criminality and lavish lifestyles at the expense of victims.

ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Organised crime groups (OCGs) are usually involved in a range of activities. They are quick to exploit changes in demand, and opportunities created by new legislation/systems. They prey on vulnerable victims, without any concern or any sense of guilt about their actions. By its very nature, organised crime is cross jurisdictional; in a Northern Ireland context, organised crime is committed by a range of groups, including:

- **Locally based OCGs**: operating in Northern Ireland and, in some instances, in other jurisdictions. Members are often local nationals, and there remain some links with former members of paramilitary groups.
- **OCGs from other parts of the world**: usually within Europe, living and operating in Northern Ireland is an increasing risk particularly due to the movement of people because of ongoing conflicts globally. These groups often interact with OCGs based in other jurisdictions, which facilitates the migration of modus operandi (MOs). Local OCGs will, inevitably, try to copy these new MOs, with varied success.

  Instances of violence against members of migrant communities living in Northern Ireland further isolates migrants and prevents them from fully integrating into society. This provides opportunities for those seeking to exploit vulnerable groups, both in terms of an increased risk of them being victims of crime and becoming involved in crime.
- **Foreign national OCGs:** operating in other parts of the world but targeting victims based in Northern Ireland. Examples include large-scale fraud networks, and the online sale of a wide range of illicit goods, including prescription medications.

The existence of an open land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland provides unique opportunities for OCGs to work at a cross-border level. The fact that the UK, including Northern Ireland, is no longer part of the European Union while Ireland continues to be a member state makes this issue even more complex due to variances in legislation and regulations combined with differing law enforcement agencies (LEAs). LEAs operate in collaboration where possible; however, some OCGs are adept at manipulating the border.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

At a tactical, operational level, law enforcement agencies (LEAs) regularly conduct joint investigations and operations against OCGs impacting in Northern Ireland. The Agency and Partner Management Information System (APMIS), which enables cross-partner access to input and share performance data and analysis of prioritisation assessments based on the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) methodology, is now embedded within both the National Crime Agency and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE (OCTF)

The OCTF is a voluntary, multi-agency partnership, which seeks to support law-abiding citizens and enable the legitimate business community to flourish by identifying and mitigating the effects of organised crime. Established in Northern Ireland in 2000, the Task Force provides strategic leadership and supports a collaborative, joined-up response to the threat posed by organised crime through multi-agency partnership working. OCTF partners work together to identify and assess any new and emerging crime types and keep these under review as well as monitoring the groups and networks active in Northern Ireland and further afield.

The OCTF provides a forum in which expertise and information can be shared. It supports the development of operational partnerships and plays an important role in informing the public about how to protect themselves from, and report any suspicions of, organised crime.

The OCTF Strategy Group membership includes senior representation from statutory agencies and law enforcement partners to provide oversight across a number of thematic Subgroups and oversee the delivery of strategic actions.

The OCTF Subgroups focus on a priority assessed area of organised criminality, including drugs, cybercrime, modern slavery and human trafficking, criminal finance and intellectual property crime (including counterfeit goods).

The co-ordination of the OCTF structures is supported by the Department of Justice.

A list of OCTF partner organisations and representatives on the Task Force is attached at **Appendix 1** to this report.

THE NORTHERN IRELAND ORGANISED CRIME STRATEGY 2024/25

The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy (2021-2024)[1] represents a coordinated, multi-agency approach aimed at protecting individuals, communities, and businesses across Northern Ireland from the harms associated with organised crime. Originally launched on 1 April 2021, the Strategy continues to guide activity into 2024/25, supported by the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) Addendum Work Plan 2024/2025[2], which outlines current priorities and actions.

The Strategy remains structured around four core pillars:

- **Pursue:** Identifying and targeting those involved in organised crime through robust investigation, disruption, and prosecution.
- **Prepare and Protect:** Strengthening the resilience of people, communities, organisations, and systems to reduce vulnerability to criminal activity.
- **Prevent:** Working to deter individuals from becoming involved in organised crime and supporting pathways away from offending behaviour.
- **Partnership:** Promoting sustained collaboration and coordination across agencies to deliver a unified response.

Together, these pillars provide a clear framework for delivery, defining roles, responsibilities, and priorities across all participating organisations. This shared understanding supports effective implementation while reinforcing public confidence in a collective and determined response to organised crime.

The Strategy also aligns closely with wider regional and national initiatives, including the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), and complements the operational work of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force.

Oversight is provided by the OCTF Strategy Group, supported by a network of OCTF Subgroups. A key area of ongoing focus is the development of legislation specifically designed to tackle serious organised crime in Northern Ireland. Building on earlier public consultation, the Department of Justice continues to progress detailed policy proposals, with legislative development expected to advance during 2025/26, subject to the Assembly's timetable.

Asset recovery remains a central component of the approach. Partner agencies utilise powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002[3] to identify, seize, and recover assets derived from criminal conduct. This not only disrupts the activities of organised crime groups but also prevents the reinvestment of illicit funds and addresses associated money laundering. The removal of criminal profits is a critical tool in weakening and dismantling such networks.

Recovered funds are reinvested to deliver positive community outcomes. The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) directs funding into local projects focused on crime prevention and community safety, while the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS) enhances the capacity of enforcement agencies to pursue criminal finances effectively.

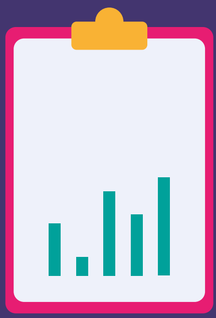
As the current Strategy is supplemented with an Addendum Action Plan, the Department of Justice is actively considering the development of a successor framework for the coming years. This next phase will seek to build on existing progress while introducing innovative approaches to meet evolving organised crime threats.

1 https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/organised-crime-strategy
2 OCTF Addendum Work Plan 24-25 | Department of Justice
3 Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Improve our understanding of existing and emerging threats, including the motivation and opportunities for modern slavery and human trafficking.

Regular UK **strategic threat** assessments shared with partners



Regular Strategic Assessments of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Ensure we have effective capability, tools and legislation to tackle organised crime affecting Northern Ireland.

Work continued on the development of new Northern Ireland-specific offences to strengthen the law enforcement response to serious organised crime.

Work was undertaken towards the implementation of Legislative Consent Memorandums relating to the Borders, Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill & The Crime and Policing Bill.

First Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) granted in Northern Ireland.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Continuous pursuit of those involved in organised crime.

6,951
PSNI drug seizure incidents

3,128
PSNI drug-related arrests

91
account freezing orders (£2.4m)

125
cash seizures (£1.67m)

17
confiscation orders granted (£1.45m)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Work with individuals, communities and businesses to build resilience against organised crime, and to ensure a system response which is focussed on victim safety and wellbeing.

Engage with public at the **Balmoral Show**, promoting public messaging on the **misuse of drugs**, impact of buying **counterfeit goods**, the benefits of good **cyber hygiene** and alerts of **cybercrimes**

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Potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking referred to **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**

Asset Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) supported **43 projects**.

£443K

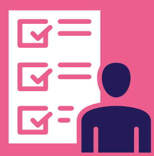
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Effective work to deter and divert people from becoming involved or re-engaging in organised crime.

Support Hubs are operating in all **11 council areas**

Multi-agency Support Hubs help vulnerable people get access to the right support, at the right time, from the right organisations within their local area.

The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime



The programme has invested £16m to keep people safe, develop community resilience and increase protective factors for people at risk.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Provide an effective and efficient collaborative response to organised crime affecting Northern Ireland.

Regular OCTF and JAFF Strategic and threat-specific meetings to address organised crime.

Regular strategic engagement and ongoing operational activity with other jurisdictions to tackle serious organised crime (SOC), including Northern Ireland law enforcement agencies participation in a Cross Border SOC Conference, organised by Police Service of Northern Ireland and took part in March 2025.

OP Pangea, a global Interpol coordinated operation to disrupt the illicit online supply of medicines commenced in December 2024 and concluded in May 2025. Results will be published in 2025/26 report.

ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

THREAT AND OCTF RESPONSE 2024/2025

This chapter highlights the outputs from partner organisations and the outcomes of the strategic approach to tackling organised criminality, assessing how far the work contributes to achieving the objectives of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy. The earlier summary infographic highlights some of the key achievements during 2024/25.

The information is reported according to crime type. The case studies and operations show the benefit of partnership working between the agencies. While this chapter details the disruptive activities and successful operations, it is important to note that this work will also have positive social, environmental and economic benefits not readily quantifiable.

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS IN 2024/25

*This is only data in relation to the OCG's investigated during this time period. This does not include work carried out under vulnerabilities, other serious organised crime, or priority individuals.

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POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF MODERN SLAVERY RECOVERED

Number of NRM referrals. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK-wide framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has implemented the Agency and Partner Management Information System (APMIS) platform. This assists easier sharing of performance, analysis and prioritisation assessments between law enforcement agencies, using a standardised approach and common language. The assessment criteria and terminology used in APMIS differs to that used by PSNI in previous years, and data is subject to change during this initial phase of transferring information onto the new system; however, once fully embedded it will provide more consistent and comparable data.

DRUGS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

6,951
Drug seizures

3,128
Drug-related arrests

PSNI

ASSET RECOVERY SUCCESSES BY PSNI

Confiscation Orders
£1,451,273.68**

Cash Forfeitures
£608,183.07

Cash Seizures
£1,667,639.74*

Account Freezing Order
£2,408,594.08

Restraint Orders
£133,950.00*

*Figure includes estimated amounts

** Number of orders including joint liability orders (figure for joint liability included).

2.1 CYBERCRIME

THE THREAT

In a reflection of the increasingly ICT-dependent world, cyber and cyber dependent crimes are now a key feature of the organised crime landscape in Northern Ireland.

Between 01 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) recorded 426 cybercrime reports in Northern Ireland, with reported losses of £9,800. This is likely to be a significant underestimation, and it should also be noted that education in relation to crimes like ransomware attacks has raised awareness, likely resulting in faster reporting and fewer blackmail payments being made. Reporting of cybercrime remains an issue due to embarrassment, the fear of reputational damage, and the fear of retribution (either by the OCG or regulatory bodies). Of the reports made, the majority related to hacking of social media and email accounts.

Cyber dependent crime

Cyber dependent crimes cannot be committed without the use of information and communication technology (ICT) devices. Examples include:

- **Ransomware attacks:** where the victim's device is locked and data/files encrypted. Criminals then demand payment of a ransom in exchange for decryption and access to the files and data. Non-payment of ransom demands can lead to the release of data extracted during the attack. Often released for anyone to download for free, this data can be of a nature that would be of value to criminals involved in other forms of criminality such as fraud. Over recent years, the delivery of ransomware has changed, with specialised groups now offering 'Ransomware as a Service' (RaaS) to low skilled affiliates and 'double extortion', i.e. demanding payment to acquire a decryption key and prevent the release data taken prior to the attack.
- **Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) Attacks:** where cyber criminals overwhelm websites and force them offline. They are illegal in the UK under the Computer Misuse Act 1990. Such attacks cause harm to businesses and organisations across all sectors, including critical national infrastructure, and often prevent people from accessing essential public and administration services, including emergency services.
- **Social Media Hacking**: is the most reported Computer Misuse Act (CMA) offence in Northern Ireland. This is the same across the UK. This area of cybercrime does not require significant skill by criminals and is often linked to social engineering and the exploitation of accounts. This can be facilitated through the compromise of linked email accounts and a lack of 2-step verification (2SV). Victims can face a ransom demand for the return of accounts and/or a threat of exposure of sensitive information or imagery. A further risk is the use of the victim's account to target friends and family in respect of further financial scams (e.g. concert tickets, Cryptocurrency investments scams and sale of high value goods, such as vehicles.

Cyber enabled crime

Cyber enabled crime is where ICT has been used to further develop the scale and scope of criminality, e.g. purchase frauds that are facilitated by social media sites, shopping and auction sites and online forums. In Northern Ireland, fraudsters frequently target online shopping and auctions sites to scam an unsuspecting consumer out of money. Sometimes these involve the sale of goods through seemingly professional, but fake, businesses. Other times the fraud is less sophisticated, for example posting something for sale online and then requesting a deposit from would-be purchasers, before disappearing. In these cases, the fraudster will then often reappear under a different name and using different contact details.

Phishing is another example of cyber enabled crime that frequently occurs in Northern Ireland. Phishing is widely known as being orientated through cyber-enabled fraud via email scams (e.g. scam emails sent to private accounts), however, cyber criminals also use elaborate phishing techniques to gain unauthorised access to systems. For example, public and private sectors continue to face such phishing attacks through spoof business emails, compromised accounts and impersonated websites/ malicious links.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Officers and staff within the PSNI Cyber Crime Centre offer ongoing support in respect of cyber enabled crime and continue to investigate large-scale cyber dependent crimes. At all levels, PSNI work alongside partner agencies to raise awareness and encourage prevention by individuals and businesses, encourage increased confidence in law enforcements' ability to investigate and achieve successful outcomes thereby increasing reporting, and to disrupt OCGs involved in cyber related activities.

Partnership work include prevention, with the PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer dedicated to,

- educating young people about the Computer Misuse Act 1990 and the possible consequences of getting involved in cybercrime,
- deterring and/or diverting individuals from cybercrime, and
- educating young people about opportunities in the cyber industry.

OCTF agencies use the NCA Cyber Choices programme to assist with awareness raising and engagement with young people in Northern Ireland. This is a national programme co-ordinated by the NCA.

The PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer delivers presentations to school and college pupils, and youth groups, in a variety of locations, as well as providing prevention advice to local businesses.

There is ongoing collaboration between agencies in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to existing and emerging threats.

The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre continue to take part in annual CyberNI Weeks. The aim of this annual campaign is to further strengthen the collaborative commitment to raising cyber security awareness locally through a wide range of events across government, industry, academia, charity and the voluntary sector.

OCTF partner agencies are fully engaged with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) Online Safety Hub. This Hub brings together the latest advice for young people, families and professionals to help promote child safety online.

CASE STUDY

NORTHERN IRELAND MAN SENTENCED FOR INTERNATIONAL OFFENCES

In October 2024, a male from Newry was the first person to be sentenced in the UK for manslaughter of a victim in a foreign jurisdiction. The offender had posed as a 13-year-old girl in order to groom a young girl in Scotland. Liaison between a number of law enforcement agencies led to the arrest of the offender who, it transpired, had groomed victims across the world, including in America, New Zealand, and at least 28 other countries. In each incident he used the same pattern of posing as a young girl of similar age to the victims, regularly using identities of girls he had previously abused to 'catfish'* others. The offender had groomed his victims before encouraging them to share indecent images of themselves or engage in sexual activity online. He subsequently threatened to share these images. In the case prosecuted in Northern Ireland, the offender was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum tariff of 20 years for 185 charges of child sexual abuse crimes and blackmail, along with one manslaughter charge. The manslaughter charge related to the suicide of a 12-year-old girl in West Virginia, who shot herself with a legally held firearm after being victimised by the offender. The catalyst being that he was attempting to coerce his victim into involving her younger sibling.

**Catfishing is a term used to describe when an offender creates a false online identity to deceive someone into having a romantic relationship with them.*

CASE STUDY

MAN SENTENCED FOR CYBERCRIME OFFENCES

In October 2024, a 25-year-old man was sentenced at Antrim Crown Court for cybercrime related offences. The man received 16-months imprisonment, suspended for four years, and was made the subject of a Serious Crime Prevention Order (SCPO) for three years. The investigation that led to his arrest was conducted by officers from the PSNI Cyber Crime Centre (CCC) with assistance from other partners and related to a large-scale credential stuffing attacks* against a multi-international sports brand company in April 2020 that resulted in the compromise of 227,000 user accounts.

**A credential stuffing attack is a type of cyber-attack that uses automated tools in conjunction with account credentials to try and gain unauthorised access to user accounts and is based on the assumption that people reuse usernames and passwords across multiple services.*

FORWARD LOOK

Cyber dependent and cyber enabled crime continues to evolve and adapt with the development and availability of new technology. OCGs are quick to adopt new technologies, such as encrypted messaging services, and to exploit new market opportunities such as online marketplaces. OCTF partner agencies remain vigilant to these emerging modus operandi and continue to upgrade their own systems, as far as budgets allow, to allow investigative results at an evidential level.

2.2 DRUG CRIME

THE THREAT

The Northern Ireland drugs market remains a key source of income for OCGs, based locally and in other jurisdictions. In recent years there has been an increase in the availability of new synthetic drugs, such as nitazenes and cannabinoids. There has also been a change in how users obtain illicit drugs. Prescription Only Medications (POMs) are now widely available online. These are purchased in large quantities by OCGs involved in supply, and for personal use by locally based drug users. Illicit POMs are often taken alongside other drugs, such as Class A heroin and cocaine.

OCGs involved in drug supply are primarily interested in the money it generates for them. They are not concerned with the chemical composition or strength of the drugs they supply. OCTF partner agencies are faced with the harms caused by the illicit drugs market daily. Impacts on the community include serious drug-related harm and deaths, alongside other types of linked criminality including murders and other violent crime, predatory money lending, extortion, robbery, criminal damage, acquisitive crime, and anti-social behaviour.

The majority of organised crime groups (OCGs) currently being investigated by PSNI are involved in the importation and/or supply of illicit drugs. Whilst heroin, cocaine and cannabis remain of concern in Northern Ireland, changes in the drugs market at a global and European level are also being reflected locally. The emergence of new synthetic drugs, new formats, and the availability of potentially counterfeit/ mispackaged/misdescribed drugs online are of particular concern.

Vaping has become something of a trend amongst younger people, with some schools reporting issues with pupils vaping synthetic substances including ‘Spice’ and synthetic forms of cannabis (THC), in some cases leading to hospitalisation.

Poly drugs use which is the combination of more than one drug, is a particular issue in Northern Ireland, and is responsible for the majority of drug-related deaths. In some cases, users have knowingly taken a ‘pot pourri’ of drugs. In other cases, users will have unknowingly taken a mix of drugs due to adulteration (where the strength, quality or purity is altered). The purity levels of drugs vary greatly and no ‘batch’ will be the same as the next, both in terms of purity and chemical composition. Of particular concern is the abuse of POMs such as pregabalin, alongside other drugs such as cocaine. In the 2024/25 financial year, pregabalin and cocaine were the drugs most commonly seized in seizure incidents, with the exception of cannabis. Cannabis was seized in 4,099 incidents, cocaine in 1,264, and pregabalin in 1,080. In total there were 58.5kgs of cocaine powder, and 57,056 pregabalin capsules/tablets seized.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Law enforcement agencies, including PSNI, National Crime Agency, His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, and Border Force continue to work alongside partners, including Probation Board, Northern Ireland Prison Service, government departments and treatment services. This collaborative approach allows a combined response, ensuring prevention, protection and prosecution outcomes.

NCA Seizures

Drugs trafficking and money laundering investigation:

- Seven significant seizures of Class A cocaine and Class B herbal cannabis.
- To date, over £26.5 Million worth of Class A and Class B controlled drugs have been seized along with a significant amount of cash.

Multiple search and arrest operations conducted and charges outstanding for nine persons linked to the offending.

BORDER FORCE SEIZURES

Cocaine Seizures

There has been an increase in cocaine seizures detected in parcel depots. Border Force has found that some packages have been dipped in diesel to prevent detection by Border Force dogs.

Cannabis Seizures

Herbal cannabis remains the biggest drug seized by Border Force in Northern Ireland. Packages are often detected at parcel depots and smugglers use the 'little and often' method of importing by flooding the various depots with large amounts of parcels containing 1 or 2 kg per parcel. Cannabis is generally being imported into Northern Ireland from Thailand, Canada, USA and GB.

Illicit Prescription Medicines

There has been a large increase of seizures of Illicit Prescription Medicines. Prescription medicines such as pregabalin, zopiclone and diazepam are regularly being detected in postal depots. Border Force continue to work alongside the PSNI and the Medicines Regulatory Group on imports of illicit prescription medicine, making referrals for further investigation where appropriate.

Most seizures originate from India via GB and are suspected to be counterfeit.

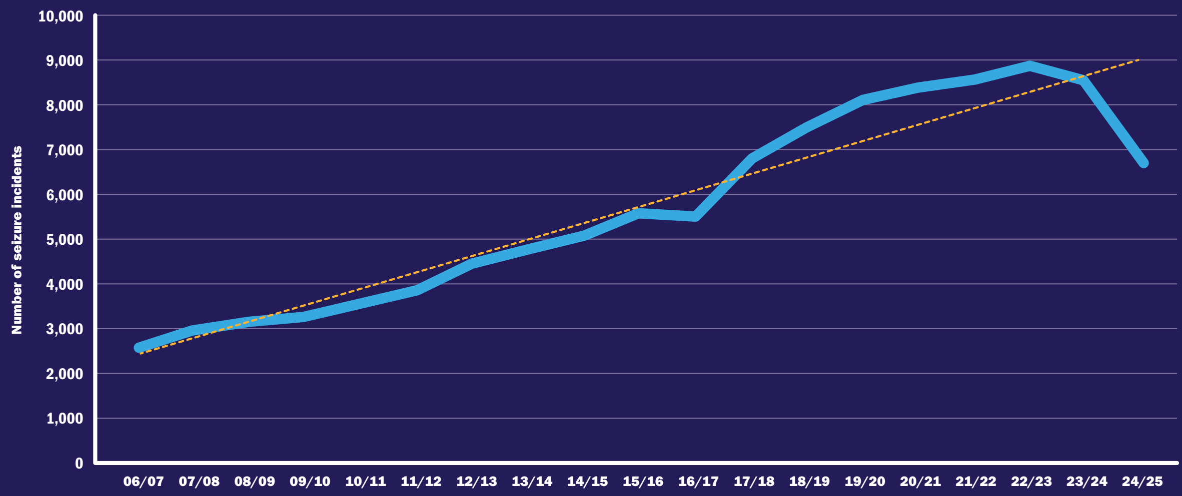
PSNI SEIZURES

The drugs market in Northern Ireland remains dominated by cannabis, cocaine, and illicit prescription only medications (POMs):

- Cannabis was seized in 59% of PSNI seizures in the 2024/25 financial year (4,099 of 6,951 seizures)
- Cocaine was seized in 18% of PSNI seizures in the 2024/25 financial year (1,264 of 6,951 seizures)
- Pregabalin was seized in 16% of PSNI seizures in the 2024/25 financial year (1,080 of 6,951 seizures)
- The number of ketamine seizure incidents, and amounts seized, have seen annual increases since 2013/14. Prior to this there had not been seizures in Northern Ireland. In 2013/14 there were three seizures of ketamine, rising to 106 seizure incidents in 2024/25, resulting in 18.3kg seized in 2024/25.

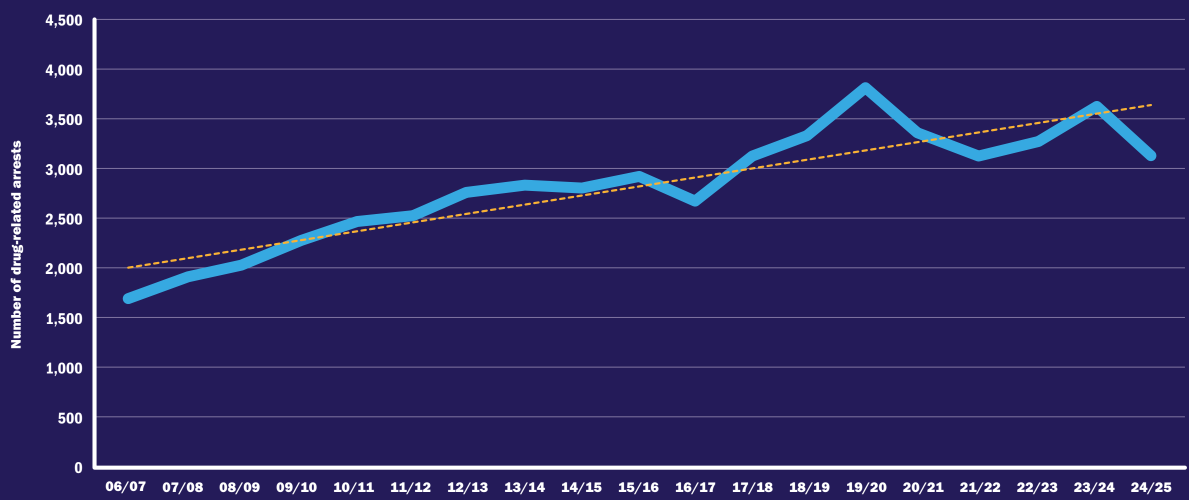
RESULTS

During the 2024/25 financial year, PSNI recorded 6,951 drug seizure incidents. This is a decrease on the previous year; however, the trend since 2006/07 remains upwards. The number of drug seizure incidents in 2024/25 (6,951) increased by 36% when compared to 2014/15 (5,103). Drugs with an estimated street value of over £12.2 million were seized by PSNI Organised Crime Branch (OCB) in the 2024/25 financial year.



PSNI Drug seizure incidents by financial year

During the 2024/25 financial year, PSNI recorded 3,128 drug-related arrests. This maintains the overall increasing trend in the number of seizures since 2006/07.



PSNI Drug-related arrests by financial year

PSNI drugs seizures by type and quantity are illustrated as follows

Drug Class	Drug type	Drug seizure incidents		
		Apr'23-Mar'24	Apr'24-Mar'25	Change
CLASS A	Cocaine	1599	1264	-335
	Ecstasy	150	123	-27
	Heroin	73	44	-29
	LSD	19	16	-3
	Methadone	16	15	-1
	Morphine	12	8	-4
	Other Class A	149	190	41
	All Class A	**1911**	**1576**	**-335**
CLASS B	Herbal cannabis	4710	3663	-1047
	Cannabis resin	187	129	-58
	Cannabis plants	56	59	3
	Cannabis, other formats	672	544	-128
	Total cannabis	**5297**	**4099**	**-1198**
	Amphetamines	114	100	-14
	Ketamine	91	106	15
	Mephedrone	4	5	1
	Other Class B	340	342	2
	All Class B	**5617**	**4441**	**-1176**
CLASS C	Anabolic steroids	36	29	-7
	Benzodiazepines	1218	805	-413
	Gabapentin	68	74	6
	Pregabalin	1190	1080	-110
	Other Class C	310	394	84
	All Class C	**2312**	**1982**	**-330**
ALL DRUGS		**8519**	**6951**	**-1568**

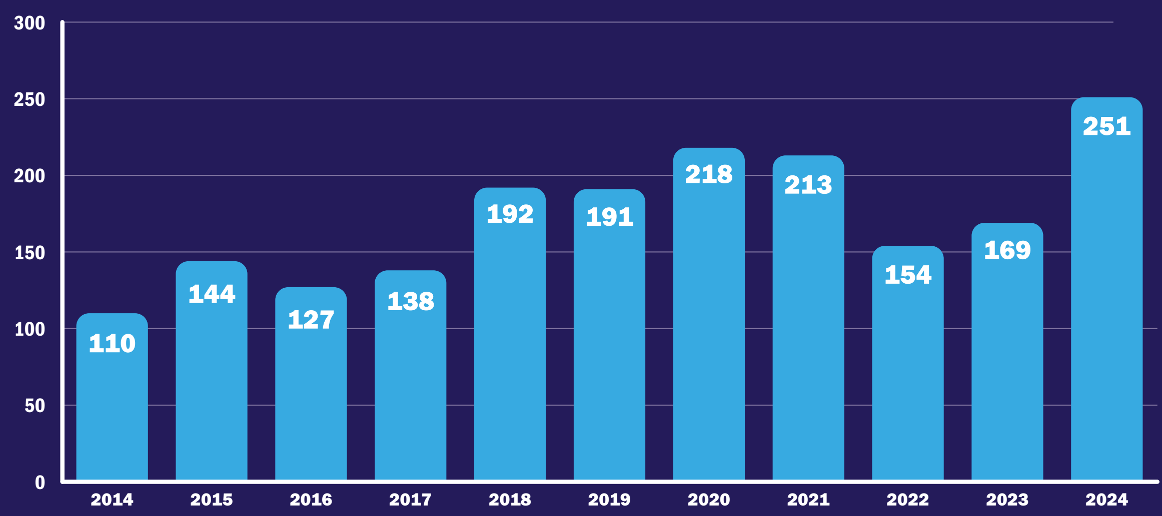
Please Note:

- *Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.*
- *Other Class A drugs include fentanyl/ fentanyl derivatives, nitazenes, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms) and methamphetamine (crystal meth).*
- *Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/ dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine, barbiturates and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.*
- *Other Class C drugs include tramadol, buprenorphine, GHB/ GBL, Nitrous Oxide and 'Z-class' drugs (zolpidem, zopiclone and zaleplon).*

Drug-Related Deaths

Statistics in relation to drug related deaths and deaths due to drugs misuse are published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The most recent figures cover up to the end of 2024 and indicate an upwards trend in the number of deaths registered each year over the ten-year period from 2014 and 2024.

The number of drug-related deaths by registered year 2014-2024



Official NISRA statistics, released 13/05/2026

CASE STUDY | BORDER FORCE

LARGE CANNABIS SEIZURE AT BELFAST CITY AIRPORT

Border Force Officers detected 47kg of Cannabis from an Irish female who was travelling alone. She arrived from Thailand via London Heathrow and was carrying 2 large suitcases. She was questioned by BF Officers, and her baggage was searched where the cannabis was detected. She was arrested and taken to Custody where the NCA adopted the seizure for investigation. The Irish female was charged with drug importation offences .

CASE STUDY | BORDER FORCE

DIAZEPAM TABLETS SEIZED

20,000 counterfeit diazepam tablets were detected and seized that had arrived from GB into Northern Ireland at a postal depot. The seizure was adopted by the PSNI, which resulted in more quantities of drugs seized at the house search and one arrest.

CASE STUDY | NCA

NCA conspiracy investigation concerning a Northern Irish based Organised Crime Group, operating from the Armagh area who were involved in the large scale importation and onward supply of Class A and Class B controlled drugs and Money Laundering. Since November 2021 there was seven significant seizures linked to the OCG, five of which was investigated by the NCA. Two of these seizures were outside of this jurisdiction and with NCA assistance were investigated by An Garda Síochána. To date, over £26.5 Million worth of Class A and Class B controlled drugs have been seized along with a significant amount of cash.

The crime group favour the use of sophisticated concealments, utilising associated haulage/ freight companies under their control to facilitate the movement of controlled drugs and other illicit goods between the United Kingdom, Ireland and Europe.

During the reporting period two significant seizures of 102KG of herbal cannabis were recovered in HGV vehicles at the Port of Killingholme, Immingham and in Yorkshire. Both vehicles had sophisticated hides built into the trailer floors and were making a return journey from Great Britain and the Netherlands to Northern Ireland.

A number of OCG members were identified as being linked to the offending and were arrested, charged and convicted of importation and trafficking offences.

Seven persons are subject to a report file which has been submitted to the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY | PSNI

DRUG OFFENCES LINKED TO ENCROCHAT

On 12 April 2024, a 44-year-old male appeared before Londonderry Crown Court, in connection with drug offences linked to EncroChat, an encrypted phone network used by criminals. He was sentenced to 12 years, half to be served in custody and half on licence. The defendant was charged with, and pleaded guilty to, over 40 offences, including conspiracy to import Class A controlled drugs, being concerned with the supply of Class A controlled drug, namely cocaine, and two counts of conspiracy to commit murder, encouraging or assisting murder, conspiracy to possess a firearm, and conspiracy to inflict grievous bodily harm. Other offences included criminal property offences, such as conspiracy to transfer criminal property and possession of criminal property that amounted to over £250,000 and conspiracy to import Class A drugs. The investigation that led to this sentencing was led by the National Crime Agency and supported by other law enforcement agencies, including PSNI. This Case Study highlights the links between drugs importation and supply, murder and violent offences, as well as the amount of money that can be criminally obtained by OCGs engaged in this type of activity.

FORWARD LOOK

When 2024/25 is compared with 2023/24, the most significant increases in quantities seized were seen in respect of ecstasy in liquid or powder form, morphine tablets, and benzodiazepine capsules.

The availability of new synthetic drugs is a trend seen globally and is a concern due to the availability of substances of unpredictable nature online. These come in a variety of formats, including vaping oils/pre-filled vapes, and edibles that are commonly packaged as wellbeing products, and/or sweets. In some instances, the packages appear to be deliberately designed to appeal to young people. The ban on single use vapes could push consumers further towards online and/or under the counter suppliers. Whilst this might successfully put some users off, it also potentially increases the dangers to those who continue to use illegal and unregulated products.

OCTF partner agencies are also monitoring any signs of the emergence/growth in the ketamine, fentanyl and/or nitrous oxide markets, due to trends seen in other parts of the UK and Europe.

Law enforcement agencies will continue to work with partners, facilitated by the OCTF, to identify and mitigate threats as they emerge. The OCTF Drugs Group meets regularly to discuss the drugs market in Northern Ireland, including horizon scanning and analysis of the local drugs market to identify emerging issues and threats at an early stage. Partners also use this forum to identify where they can work collaboratively to best mitigate these threats.

Collaborative work is ongoing in respect of existing areas of particular concern, including identified importation modus operandi (MOs), and the emergence of new synthetic drugs of varying chemical composition. Trends and emerging risks are analysed on a regular basis to allow mitigations to be put in place, and operational activity to be planned as appropriate.

2.3 ECONOMIC CRIME

THE THREAT

Fraud

OCGs involved in fraud, based in Northern Ireland and further afield, continue to prey on members of local communities. These offenders are particularly heinous due to their targeting of vulnerable victims. Despite ongoing awareness campaigns, members of the public continue to be tricked by so-called scammers. In some instances, the levels of expertise shown by the OCGs makes their phone calls/texts/emails/letters difficult to identify as fake. In other instances, less 'professional' OCGs successfully dupe unsuspecting victims, particularly where those targeted are vulnerable through age and/or circumstances.

In the 2024/25 financial year, there were 5,007 reports made to Report Fraud about fraud in Northern Ireland, resulting in £27.7 million in reported losses. Of these, 17% (861 reports with losses of £709,700) were in relation to Online Shopping and Auctions frauds.

Scams

The Department for the Economy (DfE) Trading Standards Service (TSS) works to tackle mass marketing scams and disrupt the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. Working with the National Trading Standards Scams Team and partners across Northern Ireland, TSS identifies and supports victims who have sent money to scammers.

In most cases, victims have lost thousands of pounds and have been identified as vulnerable with reported losses to TSS totalling over £10 million. TSS officers provide advice and support to victims and investigate the scams, taking enforcement action where possible. TSS Officers have visited hundreds of scam victims in the last year, helping many of them take cases to the Financial Ombudsman Service, resulting in over £1million being returned to those individuals defrauded by criminals.

A robust education and awareness-raising policy, alongside ongoing criminal investigations, has brought scams to the forefront of public attention. Scamwise Northern Ireland Partnership brings together over 30 organisations to share intelligence and protect vulnerable consumers.

The following threats have been identified by TSS:

- An increase in phone-enabled scams targeting elderly and vulnerable victims.
- A marked increase in cryptocurrency investment scams with consumers often losing over £50,000.
- Non-UK call centres data harvesting and selling victim lists to UK criminal enterprises.
- Scammers inducing victims to take out multiple loans to facilitate bogus cryptocurrency investments.
- Scam mail now targeting repeat and chronic victims rather than mass targeting.
- Increased use of multiple and repeat mailings to consumers who previously responded.
- Increase in clairvoyant and religious mailings which are menacing and request personal details.
- Telephone-based frauds around white goods cover and green energy on the increase.

Money laundering and the physical movement of cash

OCGs continue to launder money through bank accounts and by using shell companies, money service bureaux (MSBs), and cash businesses. This type of activity is sometimes facilitated through professional facilitators, such as corrupt solicitors and accountants.

A vast amount of cash moves through Northern Ireland's ports. During the 2024/25 financial year, there were regular seizures at Northern Ireland Sea and airports.

In May 2024, the first unexplained Wealth Order was granted in Northern Ireland. The Order, secured by the NCA through the High Court in Belfast, compels a man well known for his involvement in paramilitary activity and organised crime, and his wife, to explain the source of funds used to construct a £275,000 property in County Armagh.

Illegal money lending

Whilst it is widely accepted there are illegal money lenders operating in communities in Northern Ireland, reports to PSNI remain limited. Those who have borrowed money from so-called 'loan sharks' are often vulnerable and/or living in poverty. Illegal money lending has traditionally been carried out by members and former members of former/existing paramilitary groups, many of whom still elicit fear within local communities. A failure to repay the debt, alongside extortionate interest rates, can lead to a 'debt spiral', where the original debt continues to rise and becomes less and less manageable. Those unable to pay are often threatened with violence, damage to property and community excommunication.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Fraud

PSNI officers continue to work in partnership with both Report Fraud and Scamwise Northern Ireland, The objective of the partnership is to engage and inform the community about the risks of scams and the range of scams that exist. The partnership is mindful of the particular need to provide information to assist the more vulnerable in our society and highlight the number of scams to them. Encouraging people to discuss the topic of scams with friends and families, to report scams, help protect and support each other against scams, forms the campaign's ethos. Where OCGs are identified, joint operations can be discussed and put into action via relationships formed and maintained through OCTF Groups.

scamwiseNI PARTNERSHIP

Scams

TSS undertook the following actions in response to the threat posed by scams.

- Continued participation in Scamwise Northern Ireland Partnership with over 30 partner organisations (including PSNI, Commissioner for Older People, Consumer Council, and Age Sector Platform).
- Issued regular public warnings and alerts advising people to remain vigilant following rises in scam reports.
- Victims of scams advised to check if they are eligible for compensation under the Payment Systems Regulator's APP reimbursement scheme by contacting their bank promptly.
- Promoting Safe Online and Financial Behaviors. Advising consumers to:
  - Never send money or share personal information in response to unsolicited requests.
  - Avoid clicking on links or opening attachments in unsolicited emails or texts.
  - Use strong, unique passwords and enable multi-factor authentication.
  - Verify the legitimacy of websites and businesses before making purchases or investments.
  - Be cautious with online relationships and requests for money from people met online.
- Working with advertisers and telecoms companies to prevent scammers from posting adverts.
- Providing evidence and intelligence to the National Trading Standards Scams Team, enabling investigations, PO Box shutdowns, and interception of mail and money.
- Returning intercepted money and paperwork to victims while educating them on how to spot scams in future.
- Installing call-blocking devices in the homes of known vulnerable scam victims.
- Raising awareness via press releases during scam awareness month, social media, and awareness sessions to local community groups.
- Directing victims to sign up to the Mail Preference Service and Telephone Preference Service to reduce scam calls and mail.

Money laundering and physical movement of cash

Law enforcement agencies continue to seize cash and other assets as a key part of operations against OCGs. Agencies also work in partnership to carry out operations at ports and airports in Northern Ireland.

In the 2024/25 financial year, regular ports seizures were made of sterling and euros. Other currencies, seized less commonly and in smaller amounts, included Jordanian dinar, Romanian leu, and Pakistani rupees.

Predatory money lending

It is an offence for an unlicensed individual to lend money; however, illegal money lenders, also known as 'loan sharks', continue to operate in Northern Ireland. The extent of the issue is difficult to quantify for a number of reasons. Victims are often unwilling to report the offence for fear of reprisals, and even when problems are reported to police it can be at a later stage, for example when the person or their family have been further victimised through damage to property, threats, or violence. In some instances, predatory money lending is identified as part of a wider investigation into an OCG involved in other serious organised crime offending.

The PSNI now has a dedicated helpline for anyone looking advice and support around illegal money lending, without any obligation to report a crime. Further information is available at [Illegal Money Lending | PSNI].

The Crimestoppers Predatory Money Lending Campaign is currently running in Northern Ireland, with the backing of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime, and Advice Northern Ireland. The independent charity, police and partners are reaching out to communities to encourage the public to speak up.

The ‘Ending The Harm’ Campaign is also ongoing, with a dedicated advice website at www.endingtheharm.com

PSNI officers, alongside other OCTF partner agencies, remain committed to breaking the negative influence of illegal money lenders on local communities, and will continue to investigate the organised criminals involved, but they cannot act without the help of members of the communities affected. Those who have become caught up in a debt spiral and/or feel threatened, should not hesitate in reporting the situation, whether that be by making an official report, or by confidentially reporting via Crimestoppers. Remaining silent allows these criminals to continue to line their own pockets at the expense of the communities they exploit.

NCA

The NCA’s UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU) work directly impacts Northern Ireland and assists the PSNI by disseminating high-risk Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) and requests for Defence Against Money Laundering (DAMLs), alongside making all other SARs relating to Northern Ireland available to accredited financial investigators and intelligence officers.

Civil Recovery and Tax powers under Parts 5 & 6 of Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 continue to be used by the NCA in Northern Ireland to disrupt and recover the criminally acquired assets of individuals and organisations who are engaged in serious organised crime, including fraud, drug trafficking, illegal money lending, money laundering, excise duty evasion and tax evasion. The powers are used by NCA Financial Investigators and Tax Investigators on the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) and the wider Agency operating within Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION HENHOUSE

In January and February 2025, PSNI took part in Operation Henhouse, a UK-wide campaign to tackle fraud, coordinated by the National Economic Crime Centre and City of London Police. During this two-month period, PSNI:

- Seized £444,728 under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.
- Engaged with 42 victims of fraud.
- Conducted two searches under warrant, one in London and one in Northern Ireland. Several items, including documentation and electronic equipment, were seized for further examination.
- Made four arrests.
- Charged two people to court for fraud and money laundering offences, and released two people on bail to allow for further enquiries.
- Sent four files to the Public Prosecution Service for consideration in respect of fraud and money laundering offences.

CASE STUDY

CASH AND DRUGS SEIZED

In March 2025, officers from PSNI Roads Policing Unit stopped a vehicle on the A1 near Banbridge. A search was carried out on the vehicle and approximately £165,000 in suspected criminal cash was located and seized. A 33-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of possession of criminal property. Follow up searches resulted in further seizures of suspected herbal cannabis worth an estimated £67,500, £6,000 cash, drug supply paraphernalia, and a round of ammunition. The man was further arrested for possession of a Class B drug, handling stolen goods, and being concerned in the supply of a Class B drug.

CASE STUDY

In this reporting period NCA working with PSNI Organised Crime Branch took opportunities to make alternative disruptions focusing on the criminal cash courier network who are abusing the Common Travel Area between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

7 arrests and cash seizures amounting to £598,680 and €223,490 were made.

CASE STUDY

UNEXPLAINED WEALTH ORDER

On 17 May 2024, as part of an ongoing civil recovery investigation, the NCA secured an Unexplained Wealth Order against a man suspected of involvement in serious organised crime.

The Order compelled the man and his wife to explain the source of funds used to construct a property in County Armagh worth approximately £275,000. The man, who is now resident in the Republic of Ireland, is believed to have connections to paramilitary activity, cigarette smuggling and money laundering.

The Order was granted following a number of legal challenges in the High Court by the Defendant's Senior Counsel, including an unsuccessful challenge to the legal standing of the NCA in Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

CRYPTOCURRENCY SCAM

A victim was persuaded by an online scam company to invest £34,500 in cryptocurrency, funding the investment through loans and credit cards. The motivation for the investment was to cover private medical treatment for his wife. Upon notification, TSS officers visited the victim's home to offer support and guidance. Initial complaints to his bank were unsuccessful, but with TSS's assistance, the matter was escalated to the Financial Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman determined that the bank should have intervened earlier and awarded the victim just over £31,000 in compensation.

CASH AND ASSETS RECOVERY

PSNI

The following table shows the number and value of Restraint Orders, cash seizures, Account Freezing Orders (AFOs), Listed Assets (LAs) and subsequent forfeitures obtained by PSNI Organised Crime Branch officers in the 2024/25 financial year.

	1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025	
	Quantity	**Value**
Restraint Orders	5	£133,950.00*
Cash Seizures	125	£1,667,639.74*
Listed Assets (LA)	7	£38,582.00*
AFOs	91	£2,408,594.08
Total (Value)	**228**	**£4,248,765.82***
Confiscation Orders	17**	£1,451,273.68
Cash Forfeitures	65	£608,183.07
LA Forfeitures	1	£351.00
AFO Forfeitures	21	£244,457.03
Total (Value)	**104**	**£2,304,264.78**

***Figure includes estimated amounts**
**** Number of orders including joint liability orders (figure for joint liability included).**

NCA

During the 2024/25 financial year, 10 civil recovery investigations were progressed in relation to 22 properties, the collective value of which is approximately £5.1million. In addition, extensive assessment was undertaken of some 29 individuals to identify any possible asset denial opportunities.

An Account Freezing Order under the provisions of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 was obtained, with a sum of £21,000 initially being frozen and £5,000 ultimately forfeited. A total of 17 POCA investigative orders were obtained, 6 Disclosure Interviews were conducted, and 21 Disclosure Notices were issued alongside these.

FORWARD LOOK

Partner agencies continue to share information at an early stage where new and/or emerging threats are identified. Fraud alerts are regularly shared between partners and with the public, often via social media. Sharing information between agencies and ensuring local communities understand the importance of reporting criminality, allows agencies to better understand the modus operandi being used locally. OCTF partners will continue to engage in awareness campaigns in relation to predatory money lending, and money laundering.

TSS have identified the below actions to combat scams:

- Increase focus on cryptocurrency scams and phone-enabled frauds, enhancing rapid response and victim safeguarding.
- Expand targeted awareness campaigns for vulnerable groups and chronic victims, including sheltered accommodation.
- Scale deployment of preventative technology (e.g., call-blocking devices) and refresh educational materials with real case insights.
- Adopt proactive technologies to detect and block fraudulent content, such as AI-driven scam detection and real-time monitoring of suspicious activity.
- Encourage intelligence sharing between financial institutions, law enforcement, and consumer protection agencies to disrupt scam operations and identify emerging threats.

2.4 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME AND SCAMS

THE THREAT

Counterfeit goods remain widely available in Northern Ireland, as in other parts of the UK and Ireland. Some counterfeit items continue to be produced locally, including illicit alcohol and fuel. Counterfeit goods are readily available online as well as from individual sellers, under the counter, and at markets. Items easily obtained include toys, electronics, clothing and footwear, tobacco, vapes, cosmetics, personal hygiene products, and medicines. Whether the supplier is a member of an OCG or has purchased some items for onward sale, the money spent will ultimately end up in the pockets of an OCG somewhere in the world. Some consumers see counterfeit goods as cheap alternatives that only hurt 'big' companies and brands. The reality is that money made from selling counterfeit goods provides a source of funding for other types of organised crime, including drugs and firearms. It allows organised criminals to become wealthy, often by defrauding members of their own communities. The supply of counterfeit goods damages the local economy, resulting in local businesses becoming unviable, leading to closures, job losses, and empty high streets. Counterfeit goods do not conform to health and safety standards, often making them dangerous.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Law enforcement agencies continue to work alongside partners, including brand owners, often facilitated via the OCTF framework. Regular operations take place at ports and airports, and checks are conducted at postage hubs, parcel depots, and storage facilities.

Counterfeit Goods
Border Force continues to detect counterfeit goods. The majority of seizures are found at parcel depots. Goods include counterfeit phones, perfumes, sportswear, trainers and watches. Imports generally arrive from China, Hong Kong and Turkey.

CASE STUDY

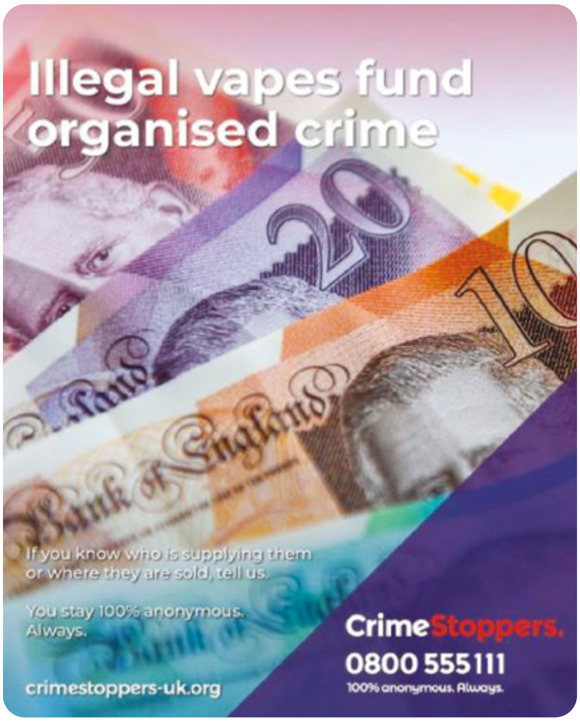
ILLEGAL STREAMING SERVICE

In October 2024, a Bellaghy man was sentenced to two years imprisonment and a further two years on licence, for his part in running an illegal TV streaming service. The man and his wife had pleaded guilty to offences relating to possessing, and converting, criminal property, and fraud. They had been living a lavish lifestyle on the back of the money they had obtained from members of the public. Similar to other types of intellectual property crime, consumers often believe the victims are big companies that charge too much for their services. The links to other types of organised crime, such as fraud, and damage to local business viability, are not considered.

FORWARD LOOK

The counterfeit goods market continues to evolve and OCTF partners are continually identifying new trends and emerging risks. In the reporting period fake Labubu dolls were seized en-route to Northern Ireland from China. These fake versions are sometimes referred to as Lafufu dolls. The increasing availability of fake versions is a trend being seen in other parts of the UK, including England and Scotland. Versions, that are sometimes openly fake, and sold as Lafufu dolls, are readily available online, often from popular online shopping sites. These fake dolls are poorly manufactured and are unsafe, particularly to young children, due to small, detachable parts, loose stitching and exposed stuffing causing choking and suffocation hazards.

Counterfeit vapes are an increasing concern, particularly due to the UK-wide ban on single-use vapes. The OCTF remains engaged with UK-wide operations and initiatives, including the ongoing Crimestoppers campaign.



The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is making the production of fake goods easier. The OCTF Intellectual Property Crime (IPC) Expert Group includes brand holders which helps agencies identify trends and to identify fake products, as well as allowing the identification of opportunities for collaborative operational work.

TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE (TSS)

In Northern Ireland, there continues to be availability of counterfeit goods being sold via online platforms; this is coupled with a rise in drop shipping websites where the trader does not hold any stock but arranges for the goods to be shipped directly to the consumer from China.

The use of semi ‘legitimate’ Fulfilment Houses to facilitate the importation and distribution of often unsafe counterfeit goods continues to be a concern, as is the ongoing use of self-store facilities to import, manufacture, distribute and store counterfeit goods.

The physical marketplace allows counterfeit goods, including dangerous consumer products, to be openly sold at markets, car boot sales and from retail/commercial premises.

Intellectual property crime remains a priority area for TSS. It is often the work of sophisticated OCGs capable of operating across UK and as well as other multiple countries in Europe and beyond. It is acknowledged that recorded incidents to Consumerline have reduced, however it is suspected that many intellectual property crime incidents go unreported by consumers, who are looking for a cheaper alternative, especially with the cost-of-living crisis. Online sellers of counterfeit products continue to take advantage of social media for such purposes, as well as physical markets across the UK.

A key issue is the consumer’s appetite for ‘a bargain’. Consumer messaging is fragmented and many within local communities still see the sale of counterfeit goods as providing an opportunity for them to obtain ‘designer branded goods’ at far cheaper prices than the genuine article. There is no legal deterrent to stop a consumer buying a counterfeit product.

Infringements of intellectual property rights reduce the revenues of the affected businesses. The resulting adverse social and economic effects include the loss of jobs and livelihoods. There are also other costs. As counterfeit goods are produced without regard to health and safety standards, they may also be dangerous for consumers.

Government revenue is affected by counterfeiting and piracy. It can stifle investment and innovation, hinder economic growth and cause untold damage to legitimate business interests. In addition, the criminal groups involved in intellectual property crime often use the profits to finance other illegal activities.

THE THREAT

The current intellectual property crime threats have been identified as:

- The sale of counterfeit clothing and footwear, football jerseys, electrical products (such as phone chargers, hair products and cables), shoes, toys, chocolate confectionary, cosmetics, jewellery, alcohol, car parts and accessories etc.
- Counterfeit goods coming into the UK on a daily basis, and then finding their way onto physical markets, retail shops, online marketplaces and social media platforms.
- Market traders frequently mix counterfeit and genuine goods to evade suspicion/detection.
- Counterfeit trade and supply networks in Northern Ireland
- Lack of public awareness that Organised Crime Groups operate across Northern Ireland using physical and on-line marketplaces to sell counterfeit goods to consumers and legitimate businesses.
- The increase in domestic counterfeiters to store and sell counterfeit or illicit products.
- Illicit traders continue to use bogus social media accounts, that operate within local or closed ‘buy and sell’ groups, to attract customers who are often unaware that the products they are buying are counterfeit.

The emerging intellectual property crime trends show increases in:

- The number of social media platforms and online marketplaces selling counterfeit goods.
- Social media and smart phone apps being used to extend the reach and profitability of counterfeiters.
- The continued use of IPTV/streaming devices which are highly prevalent in Northern Ireland.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

TSS actions included intelligence-led inspections based on reports from registered trademark holders and consumer complaints, resulting in significant seizures, disruption and prosecution of offending traders. Operational coordination strengthened through collaboration with PSNI, UK Border Force and National Trading Standards including training and planned support for seizures of fake goods. Preventive engagement included advice to major event organisers on trademarks to keep events free from fakes, consumer education on the costs and dangers of fakes, alongside targeted inspections of suspected sellers of counterfeit electronics.

CASE STUDY

COUNTERFEIT CLOTHING

A Belfast trader was given a 12 month custodial sentence, suspended for 12 months, at Belfast Crown Court for selling counterfeit clothing. In a case brought by the Trading Standards Service (TSS), the trader pleaded guilty to 13 charges under the Trademarks Act 1994.

A TSS operation identified an online marketplace trader who was advertising and selling goods bearing unauthorised registered trademarks. The charges related to the selling of clothing which bore trademarks such as Audi, Jaguar, Land Rover, Massey Ferguson and Volvo without the consent of the brand owners.

Sales figures obtained from eBay established that the trader had sold more than £136,000 worth of counterfeit items.

CASE STUDY

COUNTERFEIT GOODS

The Trading Standards Service (TSS) seized a substantial quantity of counterfeit goods following two days of targeted inspections across Northern Ireland. The counterfeit goods have an estimated retail value of over £200,000 /represent a potential loss of over £200,000 to the brand owners and include branded clothing, trainers, handbags, mobile phone covers, chargers, headphones and ear pods.

TSS received intelligence from a number of registered trademark holders who identified specific traders in Northern Ireland who were selling goods which infringed their registered trademarks. TSS also received a number of complaints from consumers who had purchased what they believed to be genuine branded clothing, only to discover that the items were of extremely poor quality and not what they would have expected from genuine items. Some consumers even attempted to return the poor quality items to store, only to be refused a refund.

Thousands of items of branded clothing, trainers, handbags and mobile phone accessories were seized from five retail premises in Bangor, Belfast, Lisburn and Derry.

FORWARD LOOK

TSS have identified the below actions to combat intellectual property crime:

- **Coordinate joint enforcement operations:** Work closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and other agencies to plan and execute targeted inspections, raids, and seizures at retail premises, markets, and online sellers suspected of distributing counterfeit goods. This includes sharing intelligence and conducting multi-agency days of action.
- **Deliver cross-agency training and upskilling:** Provide and participate in joint training sessions for enforcement officers, including PSNI and Border Force, to ensure all partners are equipped with the latest knowledge on intellectual property crime, investigative techniques, and legal frameworks.
- **Raise public and business awareness:** Collaborate on awareness campaigns and publicity events to educate consumers and businesses about the dangers of counterfeit goods, how to spot them, and the legal consequences of trading in fakes.
- **Develop intelligence-sharing and reporting mechanisms:** Strengthen information exchange between TSS, PSNI, the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), and other OCTF partners through regular meetings, shared intelligence forms, and reporting channels. This enables faster identification and disruption of counterfeit supply chains.

2.5 MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THE THREAT

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the framework used in the UK for identifying victims of trafficking and ensuring they receive the correct support. In the 2024 calendar year, there were 651 potential victims of human trafficking referred to the NRM where PSNI was identified as the police service responsible for investigation:

	Male	Female	
Children (<18)	22	21	43
Adults (18+)	419	189	608
TOTALS	**441**	**210**	**651**

Of the adults referred:

- 62% (379 of the total 608) were referred in relation to labour exploitation.
- 13% (80 of the total 608) were referred in relation to more than one type of exploitation.

Of the children referred:

- 47% (20 of the total 43) were referred in relation to more than one type of exploitation.
- 37% (16 of the total 43) were referred in relation to labour exploitation.

Of the 651 NRM referrals received during 2024, 92% (600) alleged exploitation overseas, 28 alleged exploitations both overseas and within the UK, and 23 alleged exploitations within the UK. This makes investigation more challenging because the OCGs are most likely based outside the local jurisdiction.

Whilst NRM referrals offer a starting point for analysing the extent and profile of human trafficking and modern slavery issue in Northern Ireland, it is also likely that many illegal immigrants, and the OCGs exploiting them, remain unknown to law enforcement agencies. Some are brought into the country specifically to work in clandestine operations, such as cannabis cultivation facilities. The traffickers are adept at controlling their victims and ensuring they remain silent, by threatening them, and their families who often remain in their home countries. Some migrants will have been trafficked from countries with corrupt governments and law enforcement agencies; making them untrusting and/or scared of anyone in a position of authority.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The OCTF allows partner agencies to collaborate in terms of knowledge, to allow more efficient and effective rescuing of and protection for victims, alongside the advancement of investigations into the OCGs involved. Where these OCGs are based overseas, local law enforcement agencies can work alongside those with a wider reach, such as the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Europol. The NCA is a key member of the OCTF and participate in the Strategy Group as well as all the Sub/Expert Groups.

In 2024/25, PSNI Organised Crime Branch detectives carried out 13 disruptions, made five arrests and safeguarded 29 adults. There were four searches conducted, resulting in ten arrests. Five people were charged with MSHT related offences, and a further one reported.

Op Aidant

A series of multi-agency operations involving Border Force and the PSNI's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking team targeted flights at Belfast International & Belfast City Airports for Human trafficking and modern slavery. Several referrals were made to the PSNI for further investigation.

This activity involved speaking to travellers as well as raising awareness around human trafficking/modern slavery when travelling or in the local community. Leaflets were also distributed to passengers.

Awareness was also raised at the modern slavery day in October 2024 at Belfast International Airport and George Best Belfast City Airport.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Department of Justice Modern Slavery Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (MSHTCE) branch continues to engage formally with operational partners and key stakeholders through the OCTF Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) Sub-Group and the NGO Engagement Forum on a quarterly basis, providing an opportunity to share operational and strategic insights and review the implementation of the three-year MSHT Strategy. Policy officials continue to support engagement with colleagues in UK Government and the devolved administrations, the office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), and with counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF EXPLOITATION

Potential victims of slavery or trafficking referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are entitled to a range of support measures to assist in their recovery. The Department of Justice fund adult support contracts with Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid for women and their children, and Migrant Help for men and their families. Support for victims can include, among other things, safe and secure accommodation, financial assistance, and assistance in accessing healthcare services. In 2024, 492 adults were referred for support, including 340 males and 152 females.

CHILD EXPLOITATION

In September 2024, the Ministers for Justice, Health and Education launched the cross-departmental and multi-agency plan to address Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) in Northern Ireland, along with an agreed definition for CCE which was developed with input from young people. The agreed actions in this CCE action plan along with those in the three-year MSHT Strategy, seek to increase awareness of child exploitation among front-line practitioners and the public in Northern Ireland, building on the work of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime, to create a system wide response to child exploitation. To compliment this work, the Department of Justice is working with counterparts in UK Government to extend a new offence of CCE, along with CCE prevention orders, to Northern Ireland.

In 2024 the Department of Justice supported colleagues in the Department of Health to secure a successful bid to the Home Office for the rollout of a Regional National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Child Decision Making Pilot. This pilot will cover the whole of Northern Ireland and will devolve decision making in respect of all forms of child exploitation to a specialist local panel of safeguarding practitioners. The Northern Ireland extension of the pilot is expected to be in operation from January 2026.

CASE STUDY

HUMAN TRAFFICKING OPERATION

On 13 August 2024, PSNI Detectives carried out searches and arrested four people as part of an operation to target human trafficking. The operation focussed on the activities of an OCG suspected of trafficking Romanian women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Officers from PSNI Organised Crime Branch with the support of Tactical Support Group (TSG) carried out four searches, three in Ballymena and one in Omagh. Three men and one woman were arrested on suspicion of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, controlling prostitution for gain, brothel keeping, and money laundering.

CASE STUDY

HUMAN TRAFFICKING CONVICTION

On 16 December 2024, a 74-year-old man was sentenced to one year imprisonment and one year on licence following a conviction for human trafficking and three counts of paying for sexual services. The offences were carried out in 2020 in the Belfast area and related to a vulnerable young woman. In October 2024, the offender had received a three-year sentence for offences of a similar nature in respect of three victims.

FORWARD LOOK

Changes in the management of immigration will impact on the levels of human trafficking victims entering Northern Ireland, as well as the prevailing types of exploitation.

At time of writing, the British government had announced a scheme to introduce a digital ID system across the UK, with the aim of ensuring the borders are more secure. These IDs will be used to prove a person’s right to live and work in the UK. The plan is opposed by Northern Ireland political parties, with members claiming it will be ineffective in Northern Ireland due to the land border, and that it conflicts with the ethos and allowances within the Common Travel Area (CTA). The plan is to be rolled out by the end of August 2029, so OCTF partners will continue to monitor its progression and any potential impacts on illegal immigration and MSHT in Northern Ireland.

Ongoing wars and armed conflicts in countries outside the EU and UK inevitably lead to more people being displaced, with many willing to take risks to reach what they envisage as utopian countries such as the UK and Ireland. Over the reporting period and period leading up to the publication of this report the war between Russia and Ukraine was escalating, as was the conflict between Israel and Palestinian terrorist group, Hamas, and conflict had also spread into Iran. The threat of the availability and use of nuclear weapons may further drive innocent civilians to seek safety outside of their home country.

In June 2025 Ulster University and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) published research exploring the barriers to identification for child victims of criminal exploitation in Northern Ireland, which was commissioned and co-funded by the Department of Justice and Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (MSPEC). The research raised a number of recommendations for Northern Ireland and UK Government, including the need for increased training and awareness among front line practitioners and the STROs and “Duty to Notify” provisions.
The findings of this research have supported the Department and other key stakeholders in improving the response to child exploitation in Northern Ireland.

2.6 BORDER CRIME

THE THREAT

Border Force is a law enforcement command within the Home Office. Border Force secures the border and promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by staff at ports and airports.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Working with OCTF partners

During the past year Border Force has worked alongside partner agencies in planned and reactive operational activity. Collaborative working has been key in frustrating and disrupting Organised Crime Groups throughout the year.

Border Force has assisted partners with its capabilities.

Safeguarding at the border

Frontline staff in Border Force are provided with training in identifying potential victims of modern slavery, and guidance issued to staff sets out indicators of modern slavery, including forced labour. In addition, Border Force also has a network of specially trained Safeguarding and Modern Slavery (SAMS) teams who receive classroom training focussing on the knowledge and skills needed for this area.

Op Karetu

Op KARETU was an outbound awareness raising initiative targeting young adults travelling out to Mediterranean destinations who could be exposed to exploitation, criminality and illegal working though engaging in PR work.

Border Force Officers worked with the PSNI and Ports Policing to target flights going outbound to party destinations such as Ibiza and Cyprus.

CASE STUDY

CASH SEIZURE AT BELFAST CITY AIRPORT

Border Force Officers detected and seized £40,000 cash from 2 British nationals who were travelling outbound to Hong Kong via London Heathrow. Both declared carrying only £5,000 each.

They both denied having any cash in their hold luggage. A search revealed £35,000 which couldn’t be explained. The cash was seized and the NCA adopted the seizure where the money was detained for further investigation.

CASE STUDY

LARGE CIGARETTE SEIZURE – 4 MILLION SEIZED

Border Force Officers detected just over 4 million cigarettes from a container that had arrived from Dubai and was destined for an address in Co Armagh.

The ‘Kingdom’ Cigarettes were concealed in the middle of the load which was manifested as Tiles. The cigarettes are often classed as ‘cheap whites’ where they are made purely for smuggling in unregulated warehouses. HMRC adopted the seizure.

CASE STUDY

£30,000 CASH SEIZURE AT POSTAL DEPOT

£30,000 cash was detected at a postal depot that arrived from GB. The PSNI economic crime team adopted the seizure for further investigation.

FORWARD LOOK

Border Force will continue to engage with partner law enforcement agencies and conduct planned and reactive operational activity utilising the assets and capabilities to frustrate organised crime.

Border Force continues to work and assess with other law enforcement departments to understand the implications of the Windsor Framework on serious and organised crime and how organised crime groups may adapt to vulnerabilities exposed by it.

2.7 EXCISE EVASION AND TAX FRAUD

INTRODUCTION

HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS), seizure summary 2024/25

Alcohol

Beer: 768,442 litres

Wine: 37,559 litres

Spirits: 696 litres

In terms of wider alcohol fraud, alcohol travelling to/from Europe is being diverted into the UK market. Alcohol can be brought into the United Kingdom & Republic of Ireland untaxed (duty suspended) if certain conditions are met. OCGs are circumventing these controls by using duplicate documents (known as "mirror loads") or through misdeclaration on customs paperwork. The alcohol is then diverted into wholesale/retail supply chains without the applicable payments of duty. Other modes of fraud, such as smuggling and counterfeiting continue.

For those seeking to utilise Ireland as a gateway for illicit alcohol supplies, OCGs continue to demonstrate intent and capability to exploit Northern Ireland for illicit alcohol trade.

Oils

Fuel seized within running tanks of vehicles/machinery: 22,358 litres

Fuel seized from retail sites or other premises: 167,106 litres

2 fuel laundering plants, seized & dismantled: 189,464 litres

Although it is believed the capability to launder by distillation, in a bid to remove the Accutrace S10 marker, is limited to a small number of individual groups, the dumping of laundering waste in both Northern Ireland and ROI indicates that laundering activity continues to take place mainly in the border area.

Driven by price differentials between North and South, as well as any currency fluctuations, the threat posed by the smuggling of Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel (ULSD) into Northern Ireland remains lucrative in commercial quantities. In addition, taxation changes in the ROI which came into effect on 1st April, made Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (biofuel) cheaper than ULSD in Northern Ireland, enhancing the risk that this fuel also becomes an option for OCGs intent on fuel smuggling.

Tobacco

Cigarettes: 26,130,533

Hand rolling Tobacco: 976kg

Shisha: 294 pouches

Illicit Tobacco smuggling continues to be a significant threat. The majority of the supply comes from Eastern Europe via Roll-on, Roll off ferries traffic as well as UAE produced product via container and deep-sea shipping. OCGs are using ferry routes from Continental Europe to the ROI, before transporting the goods into Northern Ireland via the land border and then onto mainland UK via ferry, to circumvent Brexit issues. HMRC continue to target retail premises throughout Northern Ireland on a regular basis, and seizures confirm the presence of both cheap whites from Europe and the Far East, as well as counterfeit brands of products normally sold on the UK market.

THE THREAT

OCGs operating between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland are quick to adapt to changes in prices and duty rates. There are around 300 border crossing points between the two jurisdictions, and none have active border check points, due to the existence of the Common Travel Area (CTA) and the Northern Ireland Protocol. The CTA allows freedom of movement between the UK and Ireland, along with the right to access social benefits, healthcare and social housing support. Furthermore, the Northern Ireland Protocol allows free movement of goods between UK and Ireland, and vice versa. OCGs are quick to adapt to new regulations and continue to either take advantage of the border, or to completely ignore it; whichever is most advantageous to them.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

HMRC continues to target those involved in the supply and distribution of illicit cigarettes through inspections, arrests, criminal investigations and prosecutions.

HMRC's comprehensive anti-fraud oils strategy targets both laundering and fuel smuggling. This includes routine and intelligence led interventions throughout the fuel supply chain including inspections at oil suppliers, retail sites and of bulk storage at commercial users' sites. These checks are designed not only to verify the integrity of the fuel but also to educate those involved in the supply chain, particularly Registered Dealers in Controlled Oil (RDCO's) of their obligations during supply. In April 2022, changes in the entitlement to use red diesel were introduced which restricted the amount of red diesel in circulation. HMRC has worked alongside trade bodies such as the Northern Ireland Oils Federation and RDCOs to ensure that the supply of rebated fuel is restricted to those entitled to receive it, restricting the volume available to those intent on putting red diesel to illegal use.

HMRC robustly tackles alcohol by addressing policy, regulating the movement of alcohol and the monitoring and interception of perceived risk movements, as well as with working with trade sectors to improve their knowledge with the aim to identify and counter fraudulent activity across their trades.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION CHARMED

In November 2024, HMRC officers, supported by PSNI conducted a successful controlled delivery of two 40-foot containers to two different locations in the border area. 11.5m non-UK duty paid cigarettes were detected and seized, with a revenue loss prevented of £9.9m, a fully operational fuel laundering plant was also detected at one of the locations. Four individuals were arrested, and 5 mobile devices seized. The investigation is ongoing.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION BANISTER

In November 2024, HMRC officers of the Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) supported by PSNI officers uncovered a substantial fuel laundering site.

Behind the locked doors of what appeared to be a normal working farm, lay an oils operation capable of processing 8,000 litres of illegal fuel per cycle.

Officers were faced with the removal of industrial quantities of equipment adapted for the sole purpose of illegally laundering fuel. Together with the environmental hazard of the toxic waste, a by product of the process, vehicles to transport the highly volatile, dangerous cargo, the operation put a halt to the estimated Revenue loss of £1.5million. Those involved in this operation have been reported to the Public Prosecution Service.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION BARON

HMRC investigation into the fraudulent evasion of excise duty and Value Added Tax as well as money laundering, identified an OCG involved in the importation, storage and distribution of commercial quantities of non-UK duty paid alcohol with a revenue loss to HMRC estimated to be £20 million per year.

On 23rd October 2024, nine containers of illicit alcohol, under the control of the OCG, were identified and seized by the Revenue in Dublin Port. These containers were bound for storage premises in Northern Ireland before the onward transportation and distribution into the GB market. In excess of 32,000 litres of wine and 174,000 litres of beer was seized saving an excise duty loss of approximately £348,600.

In November 2024, HMRC executed seven search warrants at both residential and commercial addresses in Northern Ireland in relation to the importation and distribution of illicit alcohol. Seven individuals were arrested and interviewed under caution. Several phones, laptops and electronic devices along with £22,500 cash was seized.

Several phones, laptops and electronic devices along with £22,500 cash was seized and further investigation followed.

FORWARD LOOK

HMRC will continue to work closely with partner agencies to disrupt the illicit tobacco trade at retail level through visits to commercial premises to verify the legitimacy of tobacco products being sold. To increase compliance, a range of sanctions and penalties are used to penalise individuals handling illicit tobacco products and recovering the unpaid duty on seizures at these premises.

January 2024, saw the introduction of a new marker 'n-butyl phenyl ether' added to any fuel being marked as a condition of allowing the rebate. The addition of this new marker has enhanced the existing marking regime, ensuring the risks posed by fuel laundering continue to be mitigated to the greatest extent possible. It also maintains alignment with the fuel marking requirements in other jurisdictions, particularly Ireland, which will support ongoing efforts to tackle fuel fraud. As fuel fraud is an all-island crime, HMRC continues to collaborate with the Irish Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána as well as working with the PSNI and NIEA to ensure that intelligence streams are maximised.

HMRC have introduced an Alcohol Tactical Priority, which includes intensification of deployments at UK ports. The objective is to tackle the flow of illicit alcohol into the UK via West Coast Ports including, but not limited to, traffic via the island of Ireland.

2.8 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

INTRODUCTION

Determining the full scale of environmental crime in Northern Ireland remains challenging. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) relies significantly on reports from the public, law enforcement agencies, government departments, arm's-length bodies, and both community and environmental organisations to detect and respond to such offences.

We do know, however, that environmental crime is becoming an increasingly attractive pursuit for criminals due to the potential for substantial financial gain. Although the harm caused by such activities may not always be immediately visible, the impact on Northern Ireland's environment, economy, and communities is significant, far-reaching and long lasting.

THE THREAT

Illegal waste practices, such as the depositing and disposal of controlled waste in unlicenced or covert landfills can release harmful chemicals into the environment, leading to both immediate and long-term pollution. In the short term, this can cause serious contamination of air, land, and water. Over time, as the waste breaks down, it can release toxins into the soil and groundwater, damaging biodiversity, spreading disease, and even entering the food chain.

Beyond the environmental damage, waste crime like many other illegal activities is often driven by profit and opportunity. Criminals may also engage in large-scale fraud and tax evasion, including using fraudulent waste management licences, avoiding landfill taxes at legal sites, illegally transporting and concealing waste across borders.

Therefore, illegal waste activity not only breaks the law but also undermines legitimate businesses and puts our environment and communities at risk.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) of NIEA plays a leading role in identifying and responding to the most persistent and serious environmental crimes through the prevention, disruption, investigation, and prosecution of waste crime by using evidence-based investigations to enforce relevant legislation and, where necessary, bringing offenders to justice.

In accordance with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Enforcement Policy, the ECU undertakes enforcement action against individuals or entities suspected of breaching environmental legislation, primarily under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended). Enforcement measures are applied proportionately, taking into account the severity of environmental harm, the nature and method of the offence, its impact on affected communities, and the extent of financial gain derived from the criminal activity. The ECU strategically allocates its resources and operational capacity to target those individuals and organisations that present the highest risk to environmental integrity and public health.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the ECU received 490 reports of environmental crime, leading to 278 initial site inspections being carried out. During this period, ECU issued 21 formal notices requiring the remediation of illegal waste sites, leading to the removal of approximately 1,145 tonnes of waste. Additionally, the ECU provided advice and guidance on 60 occasions regarding legislative obligations and departmental requirements for waste management. A total of 44 formal warnings were issued. Enforcement actions included the issuance of 6 fixed penalty notices, the opening of 25 enforcement files, and the securing of 5 successful criminal convictions. These convictions related to approximately 13,900 tonnes of waste and resulted in three fines totalling £10,000 and two suspended sentences.

In order to maximise impact in line with the 'Polluter Pays' principle the operational branch of ECU are supported by accredited financial investigators. ECU's financial investigators pursue Confiscation Orders (under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002) with the aim of depriving those convicted of the monies generated from their environmental crimes. Between April 2024 and March 2025, the NIEA secured 1 confiscation order totalling approximately £16,516.14. This sum represents avoidance by the defendants of payment of gate fee landfill tax and VAT at licensed waste facility, (a loss to the revenue and to legitimate licensed waste facilities). During this period the agency also managed 9 restraint orders (relating to both individuals and corporate entities) with a combined value of approximately £8.025 million.

Monies generated from the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS) has bolstered the agency's ability to tackle organised crime. Monies received between April 2024 and March 2025 were used to procure specialist resource and investigative training for officers within ECU. This training not only enhanced the capability of those officers but it also directly assists the unit driving up asset recovery.

The targeting and confiscation of criminally obtained assets carries a strong crime prevention message by removing illicit assets and discouraging further offending often by removing how offenders might re-offend. The instigation and progression of POCA proceedings can encourage offenders to remediate the waste at their own expense. In doing so this eliminates any benefit and assists in the prevention and deterrence of future harm.

The various branches within the ECU are supported heavily by NIEA's Intelligence Branch (IB) who collaborate extensively with partner agencies to enhance communication, streamline coordination, and facilitate the exchange of intelligence. Their involvement in the OCTF enhances the unit's ability to detect cross-border criminal activity, share specialist expertise, and assess emerging threats.

Regular collaboration and improved interoperability led by IB enables NIEA to more effectively identify risks at an early stage, contribute to the establishment of shared priorities, and assist in delivering coordinated responses. This integrated approach builds trust, reduces duplication of effort, and encourages consistent, innovative, and accountable practices. The complexity of cases managed by the ECU underscores the critical importance of collaborative working both within the Agency and with a range of external, and international partners. The ECU has taken part in two joint working operations with the PSNI and officials from the Republic of Ireland in an attempt to disrupt, deter and detect illegal waste movements.

The ECU's active involvement in the Organised Crime Task Force and the establishment of the Waste Crime Subgroup has strengthened working relationships with other law enforcement bodies and embeds the Unit within a multi-agency framework. This collaborative approach enhances the collective capacity to identify, disrupt, and prosecute those who seek to profit from environmental crime.

CASE STUDY

UNLAWFUL DISPOSAL OF CONTROLLED WASTE

On 22 November 2017 NIEA officers, on routine duties, discovered a large deposit of waste on the site of an operating sand and gravel quarry off the Longland Road, Londonderry.

In June 2017 the NIEA undertook an intrusive survey on the quarry site. During the survey officers identified approximately 1,377 tonnes of controlled waste in the form of trommel fines which had been deposited on and buried in a number of areas throughout the quarry.

Trommel fines are the residual waste resulting from the processing of waste to recover and separate waste streams at commercial recycling facilities. This waste cannot be processed any further therefore is required to be disposed of at landfill. On 13 June 2017 NIEA officers attended a second sand and gravel quarry off Tornoge Road, Donemana which was operated by the same company and identified further waste deposits.

NIEA Officers later returned to the site and undertook 2 further intrusive surveys which uncovered the unlawful burying of approximately 68 tonnes of trommel fines within the site.

Following NIEA's investigation a Director of the Company operating both quarry sites was reported to the Public Prosecution Service for waste offending. Parallel to the criminal investigation ECU officers conducted a financial investigation under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). Enquiries by the financial investigator identified a substantial financial benefit generated by the defendant from his environmental criminality. The financial investigation traced and restrained assets connected to the defendant making them available for any future confiscation order the Court may be minded to make.

On 19 April 2024 the company Director pleaded guilty to 5 charges relating to offences under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997. These offences included unlawful deposit, keeping and treating of waste and waste pollution offences. On 17 October 2024 the director was sentenced on to a custodial sentence of 15 months suspended for three years to run concurrently. Following sentencing confiscation proceedings under POCA were instigated in the Crown Court.

CASE STUDY

FUEL LAUNDERING PLANT

On 17 October 2022, NIEA officers and officers from partner agencies, PSNI and HMRC discovered a fuel laundering plant and associated waste on premises in the Newry area. Three intermediate bulk containers were seized by HMRC and laboratory analysis confirmed the oils had been laundered. The controlled waste, a by-product of the laundering process, was being stored in the intermediate bulk containers. PSNI and NIEA adopted a coordinated interview approach, which led to the inclusion of waste offences within the broader criminal case and its subsequent referral to the Public Prosecution Service.

On 5 July 2024 and following a joint investigation with HMRC a Newry man pleaded guilty for keeping controlled waste, namely 3,000 litres of fuel laundering waste, on land except under and in accordance with a waste management licence. The offence is pursuant to Article 4(1)(b) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. As a result of this collaborative effort, the individual was sentenced to 18 months in custody, suspended for two years, and ordered to pay £2,500 to HMRC.

FORWARD LOOK

The nature of environmental crime is continually changing, with offenders employing increasingly sophisticated and integrated methods to evade detection, regulation, and enforcement. NIEA has observed clear evidence of criminal actors adapting their tactics and actively seeking new avenues to infiltrate the legitimate waste management sector for illicit financial gain.

The evolving nature of environmental crime increases risks to public health, the environment, and legitimate businesses. To meet these challenges, NIEA is working to strengthen its operational and strategic response, expanding capacity, enhancing collaboration, and building stronger partnerships locally and across jurisdictions.

NIEA's ongoing participation in the Organised Crime Task Force assists by providing valuable opportunities for data sharing and joint operational planning, with collaborative initiatives already in development.

HELP PROTECT NORTHERN IRELAND FROM ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is working hard to combat environmental crime, but we need your help. We rely on information from the public, local communities, environmental groups, and partner organisations to identify and stop illegal waste activity.

If you've seen something suspicious or have information that could help prevent environmental waste crime, please report it.

Reports can be made by phoning 0800 807 060 or by scanning the QR code.

2.9 ORGANISED CRIME AGAINST THE BENEFITS SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

The Department for Communities administers an annual benefit expenditure of £9.4 billion. While most of these payments are correct, a small percentage are subject to fraud and error, leading to benefit over and underpayments for customers, placing strain on the public purse. The Department's Benefit Security Division (BSD) takes the lead in driving activity to minimise fraud and error. The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within BSD is responsible for undertaking investigations into allegations of potential organised criminality against the benefit and National Insurance Number (NINO) systems.

THE THREAT

The rate of customer fraud and error has continued to rise; in 2024 this amounts to £307.8 million or 3.3% of expenditure. Within this result, Universal Credit (UC) remains the highest risk and in monetary terms saw an increase in fraud of £32 million from 2023 to 2024 despite the rate of fraud reducing from 9.9% to 9.1% over the same period. This is due to a substantial increase in expenditure; a trend that is likely to continue as more claimants transition from legacy benefits to UC.

Most UC claimants will self-serve online providing opportunities to make the journey easier for them but also providing opportunities for prospective fraudsters. The Department continues to evolve its processes to maintain a careful balance between user accessibility and robust system security.

Continuing trends within referrals to OFU continue to centre on two key areas, Identity Fraud and Cross Border Fraud. In cases of Identity Fraud - where identities are hijacked or stolen sometimes with the identity holder's complicity - there is growing involvement from Organised Crime Groups or Organised Crime Networks across regional and international borders. This has led to increased collaboration with other government departments and law enforcement agencies.

These investigations are resource intensive requiring the unravelling of complex layers of deception that often span multiple government departments.

For Cross Border investigations, strong working relationships with counterparts in the Department of Social Protection in the Republic of Ireland remain vital. Offenders frequently exploit the open border to commit similar frauds in both jurisdictions, moving location to suit their narrative.

Across all investigations OFU remains focused on identifying opportunities to strengthen the systems and processes to prevent further attacks.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Throughout 2024, the Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) remained focused on investigating serious and complex allegations of benefit fraud. Key areas of activity included:

- **Scrutiny of False Documentation**: the examination of false documents submitted in support of benefit claims such as forged medical certificates, tenancy agreements and childcare invoices.
- **Intelligence Sharing**: referring intelligence reports to other law enforcement agencies to support the prevention and detection of wider criminal activity.
- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** working closely with partner organisations to disrupt criminal networks exploiting the NINO Gateway and social security systems through hijacked or false identities and counterfeit documentation.
- **Support to Law Enforcement**: Assisting partner law enforcement agencies where broader criminal investigations uncover potential benefit fraud offences.
- **Raising Awareness**: Promoting awareness of benefit fraud risks and indicators within partner law enforcement agencies.

CASE STUDY

IDENTITY FRAUD JOINT WORKING SUCCESS

In 2024, a significant identity fraud case reached its conclusion following prolonged and proactive investigation by the Benefit Security Division's Organised Fraud Unit (OFU), supported by search and arrest operations conducted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The investigation uncovered 18 fraudulent benefit claims, all made using false identities and linked by a common landlord. This case highlights the increasing sophistication of organised benefit fraud and the importance of collaborative efforts in tackling such threats.

The investigation uncovered that 14 suspects had falsified birth certificates to obtain driving licences under false identities. These licenses were then used to secure National Insurance Numbers enabling fraudulent benefit claims. The total loss to the Department for Communities was estimated at £320,000.

Key findings included:

- One individual successfully obtained a full driving licence from DVLA 10 days prior to their actual 15th birthday, using a false identity.
- Another individual operated three separate false identities, each used to claim benefits with claims to benefit in each one. Additionally, eight of their family members were also found to be claiming benefits under false identities.
- A further individual was discovered to be claiming benefits under their real identity in both the Republic of Ireland and England, while simultaneously using two false identities to claim in England and Northern Ireland.

Due to scale and complexity of the criminality involved, evidence was referred to the PSNI and a joint operation was established. In Summer 2023, the PSNI executed search and arrest operations at multiple properties in the Omagh and Newry areas.

Outcomes to date:

- Seven suspects have pleaded guilty and been convicted of fraud offences by the Courts.
- Five suspects remain under active investigation.
- Two individuals involved in the case have not yet been identified.

The case underscores the evolving nature of organised benefit fraud and the critical importance of cross agency collaboration in tackling complex, multi-jurisdictional criminal activity.

Sentences were as follows:

A – 12 months imprisonment, suspended for 2 years.

B – 100 hours Community Service and £7k Compensation Order.

C – 18 months imprisonment, suspended for 3 years and £10k Confiscation Order.

D – 100 hours Community Service and 18-month Probation Order.

E – 100 hours Community Service over 12 months.

F – 3 months imprisonment, suspended for 12 months.

G – Youth Conference (under 18).

CONFISCATION ORDER SECURED FOLLOWING BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATION

In 2024 the Department's Financial Investigation Unit secured a Confiscation Order for £29,300 against a woman who failed to disclose that she held £200,000 in a bank account whilst claiming means-tested benefits. The individual had claimed Employment and Support Allowance, and Housing Benefit, stating she was unfit for work and had no capital or other source of income. The investigation revealed deliberate concealment of substantial assets, resulting in fraudulent benefit claims. This case highlights the importance of financial scrutiny in benefit fraud investigations and demonstrates the Department's commitment to recovering public funds through enforcement powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

FORWARD LOOK

As organised attacks on the social security system increasingly intersect with wider criminal activity, the Department for Communities' Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) remains focused on strengthening partnerships with law enforcement agencies. These collaborative efforts enhance the ability to detect, investigate and prosecute benefit fraud more effectively.

The Benefit Security Division (BSD) continues to work closely with colleagues in the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to reinforce the Universal Credit system against organised fraud. The shared goal is to ensure robust safeguards are in place while maintaining services that are both accessible and supportive for claimants.

2.10 PROSECUTION DECISIONS

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has a key role to play in prosecuting and disrupting the criminal activities of those involved in organised crime and to work with partners to bring organised criminals to justice.

RESULTS

Restraints:
5 Orders were made

Confiscations:
20 Confiscation Orders Granted

Totalling:
£1,189,897.68

During 2024/25, 45,222 prosecutorial decisions were issued by the PPS, 30,396 for prosecution 2,633 for diversion from the courts. There were 1,725 indictable prosecution decisions and 28,671 summary prosecution decisions. There were 12,193 no prosecution decisions. It is not possible to provide a breakdown by offence types and the figures provided relate to all decisions taken by PPS in the year not just the offence types linked to organised crime.

ORGANISED CRIME
TASK FORCE

ASSET RECOVERY SCHEMES

(ARIS AND ARCS)

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CHAPTER 3: ASSET RECOVERY SCHEMES (ARIS AND ARCS)

One of the most common incentives to drive the activities of OCGs is the desire to make a profit and accumulate wealth. Law enforcement agencies respond to this by using asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). Under this legislation, the proceeds of crime can be recovered with criminal confiscation (this first requires a conviction) and using civil powers such as civil recovery, cash seizure and taxation powers. Removing profits that fund crime is a helpful disruption tool, breaking the cycle of criminal activity to prevent further offences occurring. Seizing the ill-gotten gains from organised crime sends out a clear message that crime does not pay.

Criminal confiscation is the most used power under POCA. Confiscation proceedings can be brought following a criminal conviction involving financial gain or the laundering of criminal assets. Any criminal financial gain will be calculated during proceedings, and the Court may make a Confiscation Order. In Northern Ireland, money surrendered to the Courts under Confiscation Orders is allocated to the Northern Ireland Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS).

WHAT HAPPENS WITH CONFISCATION ORDER PAYMENTS?

Payment against Northern Ireland Confiscation Orders are transferred to the Department of Justice. These funds are split 50-50 on an annual basis.

50% of the total Northern Ireland ARIS pot is shared between the agencies responsible for investigating, prosecuting and processing successful confiscation cases (see the table below) and is used to **invest in measures to support the further recovery of criminal assets and proceeds of crime** to **disrupt criminal activity** and **deprive criminals of their profits**.

50% is allocated to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) to provide funding for projects often delivered in community settings, with the aim of **preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime**. ARCS funding is allocated under a grant application process managed by the Department of Justice.

The total value of criminal recovery receipts paid under Confiscation Orders during the 2024/25 financial year in Northern Ireland was more than £1 million.

ASSETS RECOVERY INCENTIVISATION SCHEME (ARIS)

The table below sets out the value of Confiscation Order receipts returned to each law enforcement agency, PPS and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) under the ARIS scheme in 2024/25.

Agency	ARIS Payments 2024/25
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	£120,726
HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)	£18,032
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)	£73,551
Home Office – Immigration Enforcement	£0
National Crime Agency (NCA)	£0
Department for Communities (DfC)	£22,705
Security Industry Authority (SIA)	£989
Public Prosecution Service (PPS)	£236,005
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS)	£52,445
Total Paid	£524,453

ASSETS RECOVERY COMMUNITY SCHEME (ARCS)

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) seeks to re-invest in projects to prevent crime and/or reduce the fear of crime. Projects supported through ARCS also benefit one or more of victims, communities and the environment. Removing profits that fund crime is an effective disruption tool by helping to break the cycle of criminal activity and prevent further offences occurring. Seizing the ill-gotten gains from organised crime sends out a clear message that crime does not pay.

The call for applications in January 2024 meant that applicants could seek financial support for projects to be delivered within a timeframe of up to three years starting in April 2024. Projects were invited to apply for funding of up to £25,000 per year.

Over 180 bids were received and assessed by a departmental assessment panel. Funding for 40+ projects was approved by the panel across the three financial years. The majority of successful projects were offered partial funding – and most were funded across the maximum period available. During this reporting period ARCS continued to fund a range of activities, including those working with young people to build skills and confidence; addressing anti-social behaviour and environmental crime; reducing re-offending; supporting victims of modern slavery, domestic abuse and hate crime; raising awareness of fraud, scams and organised crime as well as support for community safety initiatives.

Examples of some of the projects funded during 2024/25 are set out below, followed by a comprehensive list of all the projects funded during the period of this report.

King's Trust – Youth Against Crime Project

King's Trust was awarded £10,242 in 2024/2025 to deliver the Youth Against Crime Project. It aims to provide the opportunity for young people, aged 14-16, who are identified as being at risk/vulnerable to becoming involved in criminal related activities, to participate in an interactive and engaging programme that will help build their knowledge, confidence, and resilience to prevent and deter them from engaging in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity.

Kings Trust worked in collaboration with PSNI Community engagement officers to identify appropriate areas where levels of youth involvement in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity are regarded as high. The beneficiaries where then recruited from these areas to participate in the project and during the reporting period supported 92 young people.

One of the objectives of the project is to educate vulnerable young people on the types of crime prevalent in their communities with a particular focus on Hate Crimes. They are also shown how young people could unknowingly be coerced into participating in activities that they may not perceive as being a crime e.g., online bullying, and provided with strategies and skills to build their knowledge, confidence, and resilience to prevent them from participating in crime.

The sessions gave the young people a safe space to share their experiences and opinions and reflect on the information shared. It provided the opportunity to gain knowledge which they will be able to take forward and share with their peers in the community and feel more confident. This included delivering sessions to cohorts of young people in alternative education settings where the group had high support needs and presented challenging behaviours. Many had previous negative experiences with the PSNI and links to Anti-Social behaviour and criminality within their communities. Staff were able to work alongside the young people over the 2 sessions to build positive relationships and create a supportive environment in which they felt safe to share their opinions and to allow staff to effectively challenge where necessary. This proved to be a valuable session in reframing young people's opinions on policing, Hate Crime and 'Stop and Search.'

Community Sports Network – Positive Impact – Fresh Start

Community Sports Network's Positive Impact – Fresh Start Project was awarded £16,500 for 2024/25. Its aim is to create an environment where ex-offenders can participate in an outdoor exploration programme, recognising that a lack of opportunities and support often intensifies feelings of isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, and low self-esteem, leading ex-offenders to violate restrictions or return to a life of crime. Each quarter, between 15-18 individuals took part in the project.

The core of the programme involves planning, navigating, and executing a series of hiking trails across Northern Ireland. Participants supported each other throughout the process, emphasising collaboration during planning, navigation, and physical challenges on the trails. Beyond hiking, the programme includes additional outdoor activities such as mountain biking, caving, and canoeing, promoting teamwork and individual decision-making.

Fresh Start's holistic approach aims to instil positive routines, enhance self-confidence, and foster community involvement through physical activities and personal development. Recognising the benefits of outdoor activities, the programme also includes fitness and exercise-focused activities at a local community hub. Staff engaged participants in boxercise and circuit training activities to further develop positive routines.

The programme has helped to encourage peer support, from map reading to recognising good timekeeping and the importance of following direct instructions. There is a good sense of friendship amongst the programme's participants that has now extends beyond the programme, with individuals socialising outside of the project.

Marrowbone Community Association – Bone Intervention Project
Marrowbone Community Association was allocated £11,320 for 2024/25 to deliver the Bone Intervention Project. The project aimed to deliver a needs-based programme of activities that endeavours to alleviate the harm that is caused to local residents and facilities in the Marrowbone area. The organisation carried out initial outreach work in the first 3 weeks of the project at hotspots to identify and build positive relationships with those young people who are engaged in or on the periphery of anti-social behaviour and seek to transition them away from the hotspots and back into structured youth programmes.

To facilitate the project, the youth club opened on Friday and Saturday evenings and provided a range of drop in activities to include sports, gaming, cooking, arts and crafts as well as structured youth programmes including community safety, citizenship, drug and alcohol awareness, first aid, disability awareness, healthy lifestyle choices, managing social media, bullying awareness and an intergenerational programme. The programme also implemented environmental clean up activities, improving both physical surroundings and community relationships. A total of 60 residents and community members actively participated in interventions aimed at fostering a safer environment.

As a result of these interventions, young people reported an increased awareness of the consequences of anti-social behaviour and crime in combination with developing key life skills including problem solving and conflict resolution. Residents benefited from a reduction in local anti-social behaviour and an increased sense of safety within the community. The project promoted a safe and resilient community and played a key role in preventing crime and reducing the fear of crime within the local area.

ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

OCTF PUBLIC OUTREACH

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CHAPTER 4: OCTF PUBLIC OUTREACH

A key priority for the partners on OCTF is to make Northern Ireland a hostile environment for organised criminals by understanding the threats and emerging organised crime trends to predict actions required and facilitate proactive responses.

To help raise awareness of the threat from and impact of organised criminality, it is critical that across a range of partners every effort is made to inform the public about organised crime trends and make them aware of the work of OCTF. The Task Force remains focused on issues affecting people and communities and promotes awareness raising through stakeholder groups, public outreach opportunities and other events.

Minister Muir (DAERA) photographed with Minister Long (Justice) at the OCTF stand

OCTF AT BALMORAL SHOW IN MAY 2024

OCTF joined with PSNI and others at the Balmoral Show in May 2024. The event provided the opportunity for the Department of Justice, law enforcement agencies and the private sector to engage directly with the public to raise awareness of the range of criminal activity, which threatens lives and livelihoods in Northern Ireland. A specific crime type was highlighted on each of the four days and representatives from PSNI, Border Force, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Trading Standards, HMRC as well as Department of Justice officials were on hand to help discuss how individuals, communities and businesses can better protect themselves against crime.

OCTF partners engaged with the public to raise awareness on key community safety messages, how to stay safe online and protect themselves against fraud and the importance of reporting suspicious activity to PSNI. As well as direct engagement, a range of OCTF branded promotional goods were distributed alongside relevant information leaflets and helpline numbers.

BELFAST POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP'S (PCSP) SPRING SAFETY EVENT

Belfast PCSP's Spring Safety Event took place in the Great Hall, City Hall in March 2025. This was a free event for members of the public. Almost 600 people attended, many of whom took the time to stop and talk to Department of Justice staff who were part of the exhibition and were keen to provide practical advice on issues such as crime prevention, personal and online safety.

OCTF promotional items were distributed to visitors and useful engagement prompted interest from visitors, particularly regarding protecting themselves and their families from scams.

APPENDIX 1: KEY STAKEHOLDERS

THE KEY OCTF STRATEGIC PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT ARE:

The Department of Justice is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system in Northern Ireland. The Department is the lead department for the Organised Crime Strategy and supports the Organised Crime Task Force Strategy Group and its Subgroups. The Department helps shape the policy context and leads on necessary legislative changes. The Department also funds the provision of analytical support to the OCTF and administers the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS). Representatives from relevant agencies are represented on the OCTF.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is responsible for keeping people safe by investigating a range of offences across the crime spectrum. As such, it is a major contributor to the work of the OCTF, including:

- Cybercrime - The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre is a specialist unit to develop capability, capacity and connectivity in respect to the prevention, protection and detection of cybercrime to keep people safe in Northern Ireland.
- Drugs - PSNI works closely with partners to target those who import, supply and use drugs. It takes a proactive role to stop drug dealers operating within our communities.
- Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking - PSNI has had a dedicated Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) in place since 2015.
- Economic Crime - PSNI Economic Crime Unit and Organised Crime Unit work closely to combat money laundering and to prevent organised criminals benefiting from their illegal enterprises.
- Intellectual Property Crime - PSNI supports other OCTF partners to remove counterfeit goods from the market; reduce the physical harm they can cause; reduce the impact on legitimate traders; and prevent profit being used to fund other forms of organised crime.

NCA National Crime Agency

The National Crime Agency (NCA) is the UK's national law enforcement Agency operating in Northern Ireland since May 2015. Its mission is to protect the public by leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC) and its scope extends to crimes committed outside the UK. With the agreement of PSNI, which retains operational primacy in Northern Ireland, designated NCA officers are able to exercise the powers of a Northern Ireland police constable. NCA supports operational partners, including PSNI, to tackle serious and organised crime impacting Northern Ireland and help protect Northern Ireland communities.

HM Revenue & Customs

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), a non-ministerial department of the UK Government, is the UK's tax, payments and customs authority and has a vital purpose collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services and helps families and individuals with targeted financial support. HMRC helps the honest majority to get their tax right and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system. HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) which has responsibility for civil and criminal investigations into the most serious tax evasion and fraud works closely with partner agencies locally and across international borders to draw upon and share expertise to tackle organised criminality in Northern Ireland.

Border Force

Border Force is a law enforcement command within the Home Office. Border Force secures the UK border and promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by Border Force staff at ports and airports.

NIEA Northern Ireland Environment Agency www.daera-ni.gov.uk

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The Agency's primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. The NIEA Enforcement Branch focuses its resources on investigating cases, which present a significant risk to the environment and public health, including waste crime.

The Department for Communities Benefit Security Division – The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within the Benefit Security Division investigates any incident of potential organised criminality against the benefits system.

Immigration Enforcement is a Directorate of the Home Office and is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders and prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement carries out operations against document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers

The Department for the Economy's Trading Standards Service (TSS) delivers consumer protection enforcement in Northern Ireland. TSS delivers a front-line public protection function for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the Northern Ireland economy. That function comprises the twin aims of protecting Northern Ireland consumers - particularly the most vulnerable - from illegal and unfair trading practices and providing support and guidance for Northern Ireland businesses (particularly small businesses) so that they can deal effectively with regulation.

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) receives investigation files and determines if the Test for Prosecution is met and conducts criminal proceedings where appropriate.

The Security Industry Authority (SIA) is responsible for regulating the private security industry in the United Kingdom. This means the SIA licenses individuals undertaking designated activities within the private security industry and manages the voluntary Approved Contractor Scheme, which measures private security suppliers against independently assessed standards. The SIA works closely with local and national police forces, local authority licensing partners, other enforcement agencies, security providers, buyers and venue owners to understand, identify and successfully mitigate a broad range of public protection and safeguarding risks. These include terrorism, violence (including against women and girls), drugs and spiking, serious and organised crime, modern slavery, labour exploitation as well as child sexual exploitation and abuse.

APPENDIX 2:
NI EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME ON PARAMILITARISM AND ORGANISED CRIME (EPPOC)

*The OCTF Strategy recognises the importance of coordination with other initiatives, both locally and nationally, and is closely linked with the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (**www.endingtheharm.com**). It also supports the operational efforts of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force.*


If you have information about a crime, contact us.
Crimestoppers won't ask where you live, only what you know about the crime.
100% anonymous. Always.
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