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Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: **The governance of the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SE ROCU)**

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Objective of the item

The reason for this item is to look at the governance of the South East Regional Crime Unit (SE ROCU) and how the Police and Crime Commissioner holds the SEROCU) to account.

The Panel will receive presentations which will provide the following:

- An overview of SEROCU to find out what services the Unit provides, how it is funded and key issues facing the Unit.

- Performance Monitoring - How the PCC scrutinise operational and financial performance of the Unit.

- A County Lines 'case study' – how this is being managed from the National (National Crime Agency) through the regional (SEROCU) to the local (force and partners)

Background

Regional organised crime units (ROCUs) form a critical part of the national policing network, and their importance is emphasised in the cross-government Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. They provide a range of specialist policing capabilities to forces which help them to tackle serious and organised crime effectively.

These capabilities include undercover policing, specialist surveillance, and cyber-crime investigation. ROCUs investigate and disrupt organised crime groups operating across police force boundaries, and some provide support to investigations into other types of crime such as homicide and kidnap. ROCUs also act as an important point of connection between police forces and the National Crime Agency (NCA). By their nature, many ROCU activities are not carried out in the public eye; they conduct sensitive and sometimes covert operations. Yet their work plays a vital part in protecting the public from serious and organised crime.

ROCU structures and capability [1]

ROCUs are a vital part of the national response to serious and organised crime. The number of capabilities made available to forces by ROCUs has grown in recent years, and most ROCUs are vastly bigger and better organisations than they were just a few years ago. This process has been led by a small group of chief officers and support staff. The ROCU development programme is now overseen by an executive board.

Most ROCUs have evolved in a piecemeal way since they were created and they continue to develop inconsistently. ROCUs are structured in a variety of different ways, ranging from highly ambitious and effective cross-force collaborative units to smaller scale and less effective arrangements for sharing police force capabilities.

This variation in ROCU structures creates a risk that, in some places, local and regional capabilities are collectively insufficient to counter serious and organised criminal threats effectively, and ensure that forces are meeting their obligations under The Strategic Policing Requirement. It also means that capabilities may be duplicated unnecessarily within forces.

From the HMIC report of November 2015, some ROCUs had yet to implement all of the 13 specialist capabilities which should be considered a minimum expectation. A lack of operational teams in some cases means that ROCUs are instead reliant on forces to provide staff to conduct investigations or surveillance.

HMIC found that some ROCUs lack a clear purpose or vision, and their evolution has been disjointed and inconsistent. Although it is relatively clear what the end result should look like, not all regions have sought or managed to realise this. There are a number of reasons for this – more local collaboration between forces (outside the ROCU network) has been pursued in some areas, while in others progress has been hampered by other factors such as personalities, or other local decisions which have acted against the central vision for ROCUs.

Some forces have been slow or unwilling to commit fully to the regional provision of specialist capabilities. HMIC found that this is especially the case with undercover policing and specialist surveillance as well as operational investigative teams. This has limited the ability of some ROCUs to provide these functions more effectively at a regional level, and means that their full potential is not being harnessed.

ROCUs should be more fully integrated with both the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the national counter-terrorist policing network. Their co-location is an explicit ambition of the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. Some capabilities, for example specialist surveillance, are used by ROCUs, the NCA and the counter-terrorism network, which creates opportunities for sharing.

Progress has been made, particularly with the NCA, and some alignment of structures and processes has been achieved. Joint management arrangements have been introduced in three regions which assign responsibility for serious and organised crime and counter-terrorism to one chief officer. This joint leadership model would enable fuller exploitation of opportunities for collaboration between those focused on tackling serious and organised crime and those responsible for preventing terrorism.

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[1] HMIC – A review of capability and effectiveness of Regional Organised Crime Units

Preventing serious and organised crime

The main focus of ROCUs is the pursuit and prosecution of organised criminals. However, there is a clear opportunity for them to assume a more active role alongside police forces in preventing serious and organised crime - for example by monitoring organised criminals more closely while they are in prison to reduce re-offending.

ROCUs communicate with the public about serious and organised crime, including through social media. But there is scope for ROCUs to communicate with the public more extensively, either directly or through their constituent forces. This would help to publicise successful operations and provide advice to individuals and businesses about how to protect themselves from serious and organised crime.

Serious and organised crime

Serious and organised crime includes human trafficking, drug trafficking, organised illegal immigration, high value fraud and other serious financial crimes, counterfeiting, organised theft, burglary or robbery and cyber-crime. It is perpetrated by groups of people operating collaboratively on a continuing basis, typically in order to realise substantial financial gain and sometimes with the use of serious violence. These are known as organised crime groups.

Serious and organised crime is the subject of a cross-government strategy, which in addition to the crime types listed above also covers the serious – though not necessarily organised – offences of child sexual exploitation and certain other kinds of fraud. Serious and organised crime is one of several forms of crime which present a serious risk to the UK's national security. In particular, the government has identified organised crime and large-scale cyber-crime as "priority risks" in its National Security Strategy.

Serious and organised crime is also one of six national threats included in The Strategic Policing Requirement, which places a legal obligation upon police forces to have regard to certain national responsibilities in addition to their local priorities. Serious and organised crime poses a threat to the public across the whole of the UK and beyond. Its impact can be felt by individuals, communities and businesses. Tackling serious and organised crime effectively requires the most advanced capabilities within police forces, other law enforcement agencies and wider partner organisations. Increasingly, serious and organised crime is perpetrated online and has an international dimension. It demands a carefully planned and nationally co-ordinated response which includes police forces and the National Crime Agency (NCA) as well as ROCUs and wider partner organisations.

Regional organised crime units

There are ten ROCUs in England and Wales, each of which serves a number of 'constituent' forces ranging from three to six. ROCUs provide police forces with access to a standardised range of 'capabilities' to help them tackle serious and organised crime. These capabilities encompass specialist abilities such as undercover policing, specialist surveillance and cyber-crime investigation. The regional provision of these capabilities can reduce or remove the need for forces to maintain specialist capabilities of their own, many of which are expensive to maintain and only required on relatively rare occasions.

ROCUs are also designed to provide the National Crime Agency (NCA) with a consistent point of connection to police forces. This connection is essential because together police forces, ROCUs

and the NCA form a national policing network. These organisations have been designed to work alongside one another in a co-ordinated way to maximise their collective ability to fight serious and organised crime across the UK and beyond.

Although they are designed to provide the same range of capabilities to police forces, not all ROCUs are the same. They differ not just in terms of their size and structure, but also their purpose and identity. Some ROCUs are large regional entities which are clearly distinct from their constituent forces. Elsewhere, ROCU capabilities are hosted within constituent forces and made accessible to others.

Each ROCU has its own unique characteristics, and community needs may differ across the country. But for ROCUs to be effective, they all need to have developed the full range of capabilities to a consistent standard set by the College of Policing, and to make these accessible to their constituent forces through robust, standardised processes. They need to be structured, organised and led in a way which allows all forces fully to exploit these specialist capabilities. And there needs to be a clear expectation that forces will make active and appropriate use of the regional capabilities that ROCUs provide.

Structures and capability

Although ROCUs were introduced to provide the same services across the country, significant variation exists in their size, structure and capability.

There are several regions consisting of similarly-sized forces, and these tend to include those where regional collaboration arrangements are among the most advanced. ROCUs in these areas, are mature and growing entities – these include the South East ROCU (SEROCU).

ROCUs form part of a national policing network which includes both the National Crime Agency (NCA) and a national network of counter-terrorist policing units. From the HMIC report it was found that opportunities for improved integration between these national networks could be better exploited. From a regional perspective there appeared to be scope for the NCA – along with forces – to play a more active part in supporting the development of ROCUs.

There is a need for the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the national policing lead to work with the NCA and other partner agencies to co-ordinate the introduction of new capabilities for tackling regional threats so as to minimise duplication, for example. Some work is already underway which aims to identify which police capabilities are best provided nationally, regionally and locally. This is being led by the NPCC, with the support of the Home Office, the NCA and other agencies.

The relationship between local NCA offices and ROCUs is improving, but the exchange of information is not always reliable. This occasionally results in NCA operations taking place in regions of which the relevant ROCU is unaware. Increased co-location of ROCUs, counter-terrorism policing units and NCA offices is an explicit ambition within the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy.

Funding

Approximately 22 percent of ROCU funding comes from an annual grant provided by the Home Office, and around 78 percent is contributed by their constituent forces, although a number of

smaller, temporary funding sources exist for specific projects, such as cyber-crime and asset confiscation enforcement.

Investment into serious and organised crime is only a small part of the total investment of forces and police and crime commissioners, as most policing activity under the 'pursue' strand of the government's Serious and Organised Crime Strategy is carried out at local force level. All ROCUs reported to HMIC inspectors that the current ROCU funding model makes it difficult for them to make long-term plans. This is primarily because the Home Office grant for ROCUs is an annual settlement, so ROCUs are not certain how much they will receive beyond the financial year.

ROCU leaders believe that the annual funding settlement creates uncertainty and inhibits essential long-term projects including estate planning, recruitment and retention of staff and IT development. In order to tackle serious and organised crime effectively, there is a clear need for ROCUs to anticipate future threats and continually develop new, innovative capabilities which are aligned to those of the NCA, police forces and partner organisations. In order to support this long-term development, the Home Office should assess the benefits and viability of a longer-term funding settlement for ROCUs. This type of settlement could give greater certainty and help ROCUs to plan more effectively for the longer term.

South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SE ROCU)

SEROCU is a force which currently delivers all 13 ROCU capabilities, and is under the command of a dedicated chief officer. Four of the forces in the South East region effectively commission ROCU capabilities from the fifth (Thames Valley Police). All officers and staff working within SEROCU are employed by (and thus under the Direction and Control of the chief constable of) Thames Valley Police.

In addition, although the Thames Valley PCC has responsibility for holding the TVP Chief Constable to account for policing services provided by TVP including the SEROCU which the force hosts, the four other PCCs also provide formal oversight and scrutiny through regular regional governance board meetings.

SEROCU has responsibility to protect communities in the South East from serious organised crime. The aim of the unit is to create a cohesive regional response to serious organised crime aligned to the current Counter Terrorism Policing, South East.

Delivering enhanced interoperability and resilience across the regions supporting police forces in Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex and Thames Valley, as well as national agencies and capabilities.

The South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROCU) brings together the current regional organised crime units under the one structure:

• Regional Investigation Unit
• Regional Asset Recovery Unit
• Regional Intelligence Unit
• Regional Protected Persons Unit
• ACPO Regional Cyber Crime Unit

There are a number of other specialist units within SEROCU dealing with specialist functions. SEROCU is enhanced through a joint management of assets and flexibility in tasking. In particular enhancements to capability from new growth areas would be maximised.

Structure

From April 1 2014, the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit was aligned to Counter Terrorism Policing South East with Thames Valley Police as the host Force for both functions

Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN)

One vehicle for exchanging intelligence with partner organisations is the Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN), a group of approximately 20 national bodies including the police, law enforcement agencies and bodies such as Trading Standards and the Environment Agency, as well as other organisations with whom SE ROCU has built a local relationship.

GAIN enables ROCUs and police forces to access valuable information about organised criminals, and helps partner agencies to understand the threat that they face from serious and organised crime. It also gives them the ability to draw on powers belonging to partner organisations – for example HMRC – in order to disrupt organised crime groups (OCGs).

The GAIN network relies upon local information sharing and problem solving but it is also dependant on national relationships.

"County Lines"

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has found that the use of 'county lines' by gangs, is a growing issue, and is exploiting ever-younger victims. County lines exploitation describes how gangs from large urban areas supply drugs to suburban and rural locations; using vulnerable children and young people to courier drugs and money.

The definition of County lines was first identified in 2014, and in 2016 it was updated and highlighted how county lines exploitation remains a widespread issue and a key driver of criminality and violence.

Typically, gangs use mobile phone lines to facilitate drug orders and supply to users. They also use local property as a base; these often belong to a vulnerable adult and are obtained through force or coercion (known as 'cuckooing'). It is also found that the age of those involved is getting younger, with children as young as 12 being targeted. Gangs 'recruit' through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming into drug use and/or child sexual exploitation.

Examples of what other PCCs are doing in relation to the war on drugs

West Midlands:

Drugs related issues facing the West Midlands:
- 22,500 heroin and crack cocaine users in West Midlands are estimated to be costing the area £1.4bn per year.
- The average user not in treatment commits crime costing £26,074 per year. The annual cost of each problematic drug user is estimated at £62,320.
- Half of all burglary, theft shoplifting and robbery is committed by people who use heroin, crack cocaine or powder cocaine regularly. This represents 1 in 5 crimes reported to West Midlands Police.
- 701 discarded needles were recorded by local councils in the West Midlands in 2016.
- 1 in 5 prisoners who report using heroin tried it for the first time in prison.
- Every three days someone in the West Midlands dies from drug poisoning.

- An estimated 22,500 children in the West Midlands have a parent or parents with serious drug problems.
- Most organised crime groups in the West Midlands are heavily involved in the drugs trade worth approximately £188m. Organised Crime Groups involved in drugs trade are likely to have international links, also likely to be involved with firearms, theft, sexual offences, money laundering, etc.

Evidence shows that there is no link between levels of enforcement and levels of drug use. Police will keep responding to crimes, but also recognise that preventing crime is the best way to protect people.

West Midlands PCC hosted a Drugs Policy Summit in December 2017, which included representatives from the Police, Public Health England, Prison Service, Councils, Parliament and other organisations. This included presentations, Q&A sessions and roundtable discussions focusing on new solutions for reducing the harm caused by drugs in the West Midlands.

Following the Summit, the PCC Proposals Report was published in February 2018. Proposals included in the Report included:
- A scheme to divert those suffering from addiction into treatment and away from courts.
- To join up police, community safety and public health funding to increase efficiency and improve outcomes for those suffering from addiction.
- To prescribe heroin in a medical setting to take the market away from organised criminals and stop stealing to fund addiction.
- To equip and train officers to use naloxone which can help stop overdosing.
- To establish a Drug Early Warning Programme to make the public, outreach workers and medical professionals aware of emerging drugs.
- To introduce on-site testing in night time economy areas.
- To consider benefits of Drug Consumption Rooms to allow people suffering from addiction to access clean equipment, medical support and treatment services.
- To ensure more money is seized from organised criminal gangs profiting from drugs, and invest money in drug treatment programmes.

Durham

The PCC hosted an international symposium about the future of drug policy in the UK in July 2017, featuring speakers from a range of sectors including policing, health, prisons, courts, politics, academia and the third sector.

A document "Towards a Safer Drug Policy" was published in July 2017 including the following suggestions for reforming drug policy:
- Review the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and UK Drug Policy – promote a policy which is evidence-based and achieves better outcomes.
- Ensure the approach is based on evidence – ensure decisions are based on facts to create cost-effective policies.

- Support fully funded effective education and prevention – prevention measures with a strong evidence base need to be promoted in schools and in the community.
- Develop effective responses to reduce harm – current policy has not been effective in reducing harm. Policies should minimise the social, psychological and physical harm to users of drugs and society.
- Promote cost-effective specialist drug treatment and recovery as a proven way to reduce crime and make communities safer – encourage and support people to receive treatment and recover from their addiction.
- Protect vulnerable people by supporting alternatives to the criminalisation of people who use drugs and focus efforts on tackling organised crime groups – find alternatives to punishment and protect vulnerable drug addicts and their families. Must intervene at the earliest opportunity to improve life chances whilst focusing resources on tackling organised crime groups.

Derbyshire

The PCC for Derbyshire hosted a multi-agency drugs conference on 25 June 2015 including academics, health leads, and practitioners working in drugs and substance abuse. 91% of the 100 delegates attending agreed that the current UK drugs policy was not working.

PCC believes that the best way forward is to concentrate on harm reduction and helping people gripped by addiction to rebuild their lives. The PCC called for a two fold focus- helping people contribute to society as well as keeping the streets free of crime and drugs, which cannot be achieved through enforcement alone.