

Regional Organised Crime Units

A review of capability and effectiveness

November 2015

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1. Summary

Regional organised crime units (ROCUs)

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*.¹ 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. A full list of ROCU capabilities is included at Annex A.

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.

This report examines the capabilities and effectiveness of ROCUs in tackling serious and organised crime. It is intended as a contribution towards an important debate about the way in which policing capabilities can best be provided.² The initial findings also informed HMIC inspections of police forces in England and Wales carried out in autumn 2015.

ROCU structures and capability

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 led by Chief Constable Mick Creedon (national policing lead for serious and organised crime) and Deputy Chief Constable Peter Goodman (National ROCU Programme Director).

¹ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

² *Reshaping policing for the public: A discussion paper from the advisory group on the national debate on policing in austerity*, National Debate Advisory Group, June 2015.

However, 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*.³ It also means that capabilities may be duplicated unnecessarily within forces. As a result, opportunities to build and strengthen a consistent national approach to tackling serious and organised crime are being missed.

Some ROCUs have 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.⁴ 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. It is HMIC's expectation that specialist capabilities should be provided once, not several times across a region.

³ *The Strategic Policing Requirement*, Home Office, March 2015, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417116/The_Strategic_Policing_Requirement.pdf

⁴ Operational investigative teams are not an agreed ROCU capability, although almost all have introduced them voluntarily.

ROCUs could 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*.⁵ Some capabilities, for example specialist surveillance, are used by ROCUs, the NCA and the counter-terrorism network, which creates opportunities for sharing. Progress is being 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.

There is now a real opportunity to build on the sound platform that ROCUs provide for regional collaboration, but in an age of austerity the police service cannot wait years for this to evolve. A shared plan needs to be developed quickly to take ROCUs to the next stage and enhance the provision of shared capability. It will be vital to have continued visible leadership and oversight of this plan, and to ensure that it is supported by police forces, the NCA and the Home Office as well as ROCUs.

Understanding the threat

HMIC found that ROCUs have a generally good level of intelligence capability. The growing involvement of partner organisations such as HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in the gathering, analysis and dissemination of regional intelligence is helping ROCUs to improve their ability to assess serious and organised criminal threats in their region. However, their understanding of so-called 'newer' threats such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), cyber-crime, modern slavery and human trafficking is still incomplete. While forces are responsible for the majority of these types of investigations, ROCUs can play a bigger part in improving collective understanding of threats and conducting specialist online investigations for example.⁶

ROCUs should also assume responsibility for 'mapping' organised crime groups on behalf of police forces to ensure that this is done more consistently and objectively. Organised crime group mapping is a critical process which is carried out using nationally standardised methods, but it is not always done in the same way in

⁵ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, paragraph 4.44, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

⁶ Since the time of HMIC's inspection in spring 2015, agreement has been reached on the roles and responsibilities for ROCUs, police forces and the NCA in relation to child sexual exploitation. CSE co-ordinators have also been recruited in each region to support work aimed at assessing this threat.

different forces. This can produce an imperfect understanding of threats, and inhibit the ability of ROCUs to compare threats across different force areas when deciding which of these to prioritise. ROCUs also have access to a wider range of intelligence, which means that they are well placed to map organised crime groups using both locally and regionally gathered information.

The Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN), used by forces and ROCUs to exchange intelligence with partner organisations, is an excellent concept. It is vital that the fullest possible range of information is used to understand the threat posed by organised criminals. However, the GAIN model is under-used by forces and partner agencies, and needs to be significantly strengthened in order to support a genuinely integrated approach to understanding serious and organised crime.

Investigating and disrupting serious and organised crime

ROCUs use a range of specialist operational and investigative tactics to disrupt organised crime groups, often with good results. The quality of ROCU-led investigations is generally good; ROCU detectives and staff are capable and motivated, and the investigations they conduct are generally of a high quality. However, two ROCUs (London and the West Midlands) have decided not to develop an investigative capability, and rely instead on their constituent forces to provide this support.

ROCUs' investigative capacity and capability are considerably less well developed in the field of cyber-crime than for more 'traditional' crime types such as drug supply, criminal use of firearms or money laundering. The ability of most ROCUs to respond to cyber-crime is limited; better co-ordination is needed to improve this and ensure that ROCUs and forces clearly understand their respective roles.

The ways in which ROCUs manage their activity are growing in maturity and effectiveness, and there are now agreed processes in place for assigning appropriate tasks between forces, ROCUs and the NCA. However, some ROCUs have yet fully to resolve questions about how their activity should be focused and prioritised.

This means finding a way of maintaining a focus on the most serious threats across each region, while ensuring that all constituent forces benefit from regional support. Regional investigations – while often effective – are not always carefully co-ordinated with forces or the NCA to maximise their long term effect. ROCUs also need to do more – alongside forces and the NCA – to understand and measure the impact of their activity on serious and organised crime.

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.

Several ROCUs are beginning to 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.

National policing arrangements

HMIC found that ROCUs currently play only a narrow role in preparing for serious incidents, and should assume much more responsibility for testing national preparedness to deal with threats which demand a co-ordinated response, such as a serious cyber incident.

The recruitment and retention of staff present significant difficulties for ROCUs, and the national co-ordination of specialist police career planning needs to improve. While ROCU detectives and staff are generally experienced and well trained, better planning and co-ordination are needed to ensure that specialist policing skills are maintained and developed at a regional level.

ROCUs are also well equipped to play a more substantial part in anticipating future threats and developing new, innovative capabilities which work from the neighbourhood to the national. They are 'natural homes' for the harnessing and sharing of innovation, and anticipation of future threats; this work should become a prominent part of their remit.

Recommendations

This report makes 11 recommendations for ROCUs as well as police forces, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Home Office. Recommendations focus on the consistent implementation of the minimum specialist capabilities at a regional level, the need for ROCUs and their constituent forces fully to exploit those capabilities and the imperative for collective agreement upon – and commitment to – a shared vision for ROCUs as a platform for the development of specialist policing capabilities in the future. None of the proposals in this report seek to alter in any way the national co-ordination and tasking arrangements in place for counter-terrorism, or the responsibilities of the senior national co-ordinator for counter-terrorism.

2. About this inspection

This inspection forms part of HMIC's police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection programme, an annual assessment of how efficiently, effectively, and legitimately police forces serve the public. In 2015/16, the Effectiveness inspection programme includes for the first time an assessment of how effectively police forces tackle serious and organised crime. Many of the specialist functions used to respond to serious and organised crime are provided by regional organised crime units (ROCUs) on behalf of police forces. For this reason, HMIC inspected all ten ROCUs in spring 2015, focusing on the capabilities which they provide to their constituent forces, and the effectiveness of those capabilities. The evidence collected has informed HMIC's Effectiveness inspections of all police forces in England and Wales that were carried out in autumn 2015.

This report presents only a regional perspective and its findings are based solely on ROCU inspections. It should therefore be read in conjunction with HMIC's Effectiveness reports on how effectively individual police forces tackle serious and organised crime. These reports will be published in early 2016. It is also closely linked to a recent report published by the National Debate Advisory Group which explored the way in which policing services should be provided in the future.⁷

This report does not contain HMIC graded judgments (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate) for ROCUs, although it does make recommendations which, if acted upon, should help to ensure that ROCUs are more effective, and so better able to protect the public from serious and organised crime. HMIC will re-inspect ROCUs to assess progress against these recommendations as part of its future PEEL programme.

A small group of critical readers kindly supported the process of producing this report, including the NCA, the Home Office and the police service. Chief Constable Mick Creedon (national policing lead for serious and organised crime) and Deputy Chief Constable Peter Goodman (National ROCU Programme Director) have provided valuable external scrutiny. Several of the observations and recommendations made in this report are similar to those which they have identified as part of their ROCU programme development work. We are also grateful to Heads of ROCUs for their engagement throughout this inspection, and for verifying the factual accuracy of this report.

⁷ *Reshaping policing for the public: A discussion paper from the advisory group on the national debate on policing in austerity*, National Debate Advisory Group, June 2015. See also: Home Secretary's speech at the Serious and Organised Crime Exchange, 19 March 2015, available at: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretarys-speech-at-the-serious-organised-crime-exchange

Methodology

Fieldwork for HMIC's inspections of ROCUs commenced on 28 April 2015 and concluded on 12 June 2015 (See Annex B). HMIC inspectors considered the structures of each ROCU and the capabilities which they provide to their constituent forces – these are discussed in detail in chapter 3 of this report.

In addition, fieldwork addressed four questions adapted from HMIC's PEEL inspection framework.⁸ These questions are addressed in chapters 4 to 7 of this report:

- How effectively do ROCUs understand the threat and risk posed by serious and organised crime?
- How effectively do ROCUs respond to serious and organised crime?
- How effectively do ROCUs work with partners to prevent serious and organised crime?
- How effective are the arrangements in place to ensure that ROCUs fulfil their national policing responsibilities?

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,⁹ 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

⁸ The PEEL inspection methodology is available on the HMIC website, www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/peel-2016-questions.pdf

⁹ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

identified organised crime and large-scale cyber-crime as “priority risks” in its *National Security Strategy*.¹⁰

Serious and organised crime is also one of six national threats included in *The Strategic Policing Requirement*,¹¹ 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.

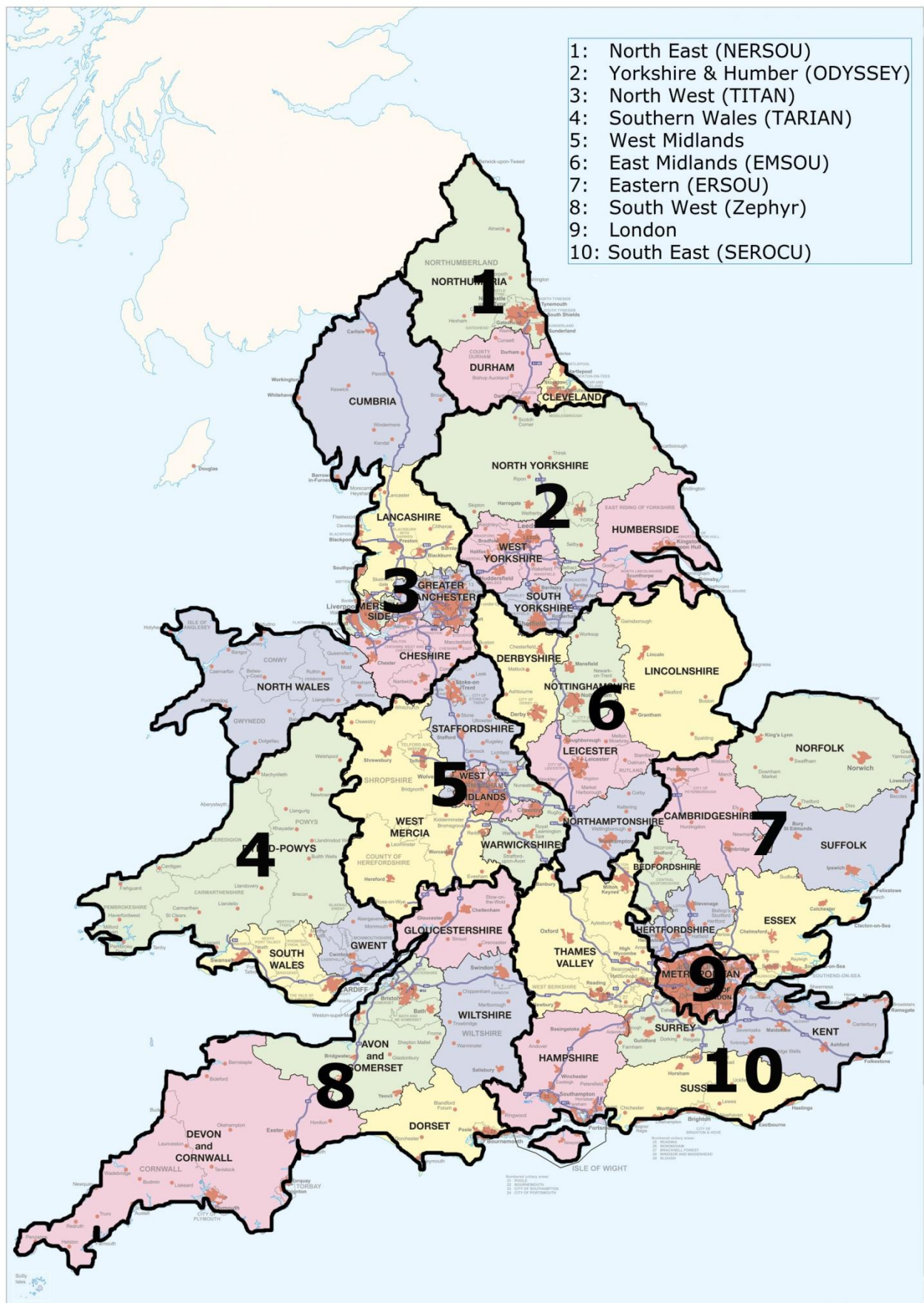
Regional organised crime units

There are ten ROCUs in England and Wales, each of which serves a number of 'constituent' forces ranging from three to six. These are shown in the map on the next page.

¹⁰ *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, HM Government, October 2010, Cmnd 7953, page 27. The risk of large scale cyber-crime appears in tier one (the highest set of priority risks for UK national security), and the risk of a significant increase in the level of organised crime affecting the UK appears at tier two (the next highest set of priority risks), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf

¹¹ *The Strategic Policing Requirement*, Home Office, March 2015, Part A, page 5, paragraph 1.9, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417116/The_Strategic_Policing_Requirement.pdf

Figure 1: Map of regional organised crime units (ROCs)



ROCUs provide police forces with access to a standardised range of 'capabilities' to help them tackle serious and organised crime.¹² 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.

In total, there are 13 ROCU capabilities. These were formally identified in 2012 as part of a ROCU development programme led by the chief constable for Derbyshire Constabulary, in agreement with other chief constables.¹³ It was the aim of the ROCU development programme for all ROCUs to have introduced these capabilities by April 2014, although HMIC has previously reported that the implementation of ROCU capabilities is taking longer than was intended.¹⁴

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. In March 2013, the Home Office announced a two-year increase in the level of financial support it provides to ROCUs, in order to help them “mature into the consistent and effective network that forces and the [National Crime Agency] will rely on as they work together to fight organised crime”.¹⁵

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.

It is not necessary for all ROCUs to be organised in exactly the same way; each region 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

¹² A full list of ROCU capabilities is provided at Annex A.

¹³ Some collaborative arrangements pre-date this formal agreement on ROCU capabilities. Several regions had asset recovery teams and shared intelligence functions in place as far back as 2004, and the first EMSOU teams were introduced in 2002.

¹⁴ *The Strategic Policing Requirement: An inspection of the arrangements that police forces have in place to meet the Strategic Policing Requirement*, HMIC, 2014, page 73, paragraph 6.33.

¹⁵ Letter from Home Secretary to chief constables and police and crime commissioners dated 12 March 2013.

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.

3. ROCU structures and capability

This section of the report describes:

- the ways in which ROCUs are structured, organised and led;
- the capabilities which they provide on behalf of forces;
- their relationships with other bodies which form part of the national policing network; and
- Their funding arrangements.

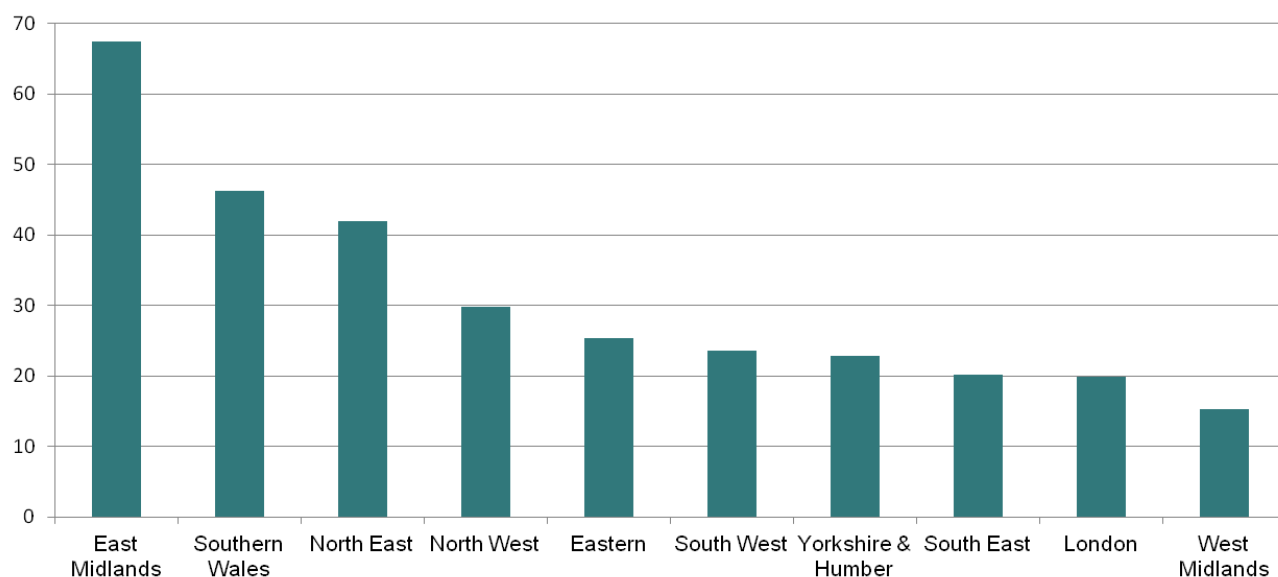
Main findings

- ROCUs are a vital part of the national response to serious and organised crime, but have evolved in a piecemeal way since they were created and continue to develop inconsistently.
- Some forces have been slow or unwilling to commit fully to the regional provision of specialist capabilities, particularly undercover policing and specialist surveillance. This has limited the ability of some ROCUs to provide these functions more effectively at a regional level.
- ROCU integration with the national counter-terrorist policing network could be improved; a joint leadership model would enable fuller exploitation of opportunities for collaboration.

Structures and capability

Although ROCUs were introduced to provide the same services across the country, significant variation exists in their size, structure and capability. When adjusted for the size of the regional population, the difference in scale between ROCUs is pronounced. For the range of specialist capabilities examined by HMIC, the East Midlands Special Operations Unit (EMSOU) employs almost 67 staff per million of the regional population, while the West Midlands ROCU employs just over 15 staff per million of the regional population.

Figure 2: FTE in post per one million population, for the range of capabilities examined by HMIC



Sources: HMIC data collection and ONS population data

The East Midlands Special Operations Unit (EMSOU) is the most advanced and well established of the ROCUs. EMSOU is an ambitious model of cross-force collaboration,¹⁶ which means that its constituent forces and regional communities can benefit from effective and efficient specialist policing services. Over 1,400 staff and officers are employed by EMSOU, of whom the equivalent of 313 full-time staff work within specialist capabilities provided by its serious and organised crime division (equivalent to a ROCU).¹⁷

EMSOU and the South East ROCU (SEROCU) are the only ROCUs which provide all of the 13 ROCU capabilities to all of their constituent forces. In addition to these 13 capabilities, EMSOU has established a number of additional capabilities which form part of the proposed third phase of ROCU development.¹⁸ As well as tackling serious and organised crime, EMSOU also investigates all major crimes which occur in the East Midlands region, such as murder and kidnap. Its size and remit are therefore much larger than any of the other ROCUs, and the EMSOU model is one which other regions can emulate.

¹⁶ Some police forces provide services collaboratively in order to realise operational benefits (e.g. policing major roads which cross force boundaries) or to save money (e.g. in support services such as human resources). These arrangements are not necessarily related or aligned to ROCU areas, but may have been developed at a more local level between two or more forces.

¹⁷ Other regions may have equal or greater numbers of staff carrying out the same functions as EMSOU, but at a force level rather than within a regional body.

¹⁸ See Annex A for a list of 'phase three' capabilities.

The relative similarity between EMSOU's constituent forces is one factor which has helped it to reach its current state of maturity. Its five constituent forces are of a similar size, and the nature and scale of organised criminality in each force area is broadly comparable. This similarity, which also exists in several other regions, can make the prospect of sharing resources more attractive to chief constables. This is partly because it does not lead to a perception among smaller constituent forces that they have contributed financially to regional capabilities, yet do not receive a fair share of the benefits. As a result, it may be quicker and easier for forces in these regions to reach agreement about which capabilities can be provided at a regional level.

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, while not as well developed as EMSOU, are mature and growing entities – these include the Southern Wales ROCU (TARIAN), the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) and the South East ROCU (SEROCU). Yet uniformity of size among constituent forces is not a pre-requisite of advanced regional collaboration. For example, HMIC found that the North West ROCU (TITAN) is a relatively advanced model of regional collaboration despite serving six police forces of very different sizes, facing very different threats from serious and organised crime.

Three regions (Yorkshire and the Humber, London and the West Midlands) have chosen to maintain capabilities within constituent forces rather than creating separate regional units. These ROCUs are more modest in scale, and correspondingly limited in the extent to which they can serve as a vehicle for a genuinely progressive and effective response to serious and organised crime.

For example, the West Midlands ROCU performs a role which is largely limited to the co-ordination of activity among its constituent forces. It employs the equivalent of just 87 full-time personnel within the specialist functions examined by HMIC. The West Midlands ROCU provides only a small range of capabilities to its constituent forces, and has no investigative teams to undertake operations; instead, it relies on forces to provide this capacity. This limits the ability of the ROCU to act upon the intelligence it collects by conducting investigations and enforcement activity. It also creates a risk that the priorities of a dominant force (in this case West Midlands Police) unfairly take precedence over those of smaller constituent forces.

Similarly, the London ROCU provides only four capabilities to its constituent forces (the Metropolitan Police Service, the City of London Police and British Transport Police).¹⁹ All other capabilities are held at force level. In London, the full-time equivalent of 176 people carry out the functions examined by HMIC; some of these work within the London ROCU itself while others are force personnel providing capabilities on behalf of the London region. Like the West Midlands ROCU, the London ROCU has no operational investigative teams of its own; instead, it assigns tasks to operational teams which belong to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This carries the same risk that regional intelligence is not always translated into action, although HMIC did not find evidence that this has occurred in London.

However, the sheer size of the MPS means that it makes little operational or financial sense to maintain a separate, regional entity in London which provides the full range of ROCU capabilities. The MPS is by far the largest force within the London ROCU, and in fact the MPS serious and organised crime division is larger than most ROCUs. Rather, constituent forces belonging to the London ROCU should ensure that they have reliable access to one another's specialist policing functions.

Development of regional capabilities

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. ROCUs and their constituent forces have – through lengthy and often difficult discussions – agreed upon ways of redistributing resources to allow certain functions to be provided once at a regional level rather than duplicated in every force.

Some of these functions are now relatively well-established within ROCUs: regional intelligence, asset recovery, asset confiscation enforcement, protected persons, fraud investigation, Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) and prison intelligence are provided by all ten ROCUs. However, several important gaps in regional capabilities still remain, and some ROCUs have yet to implement the basic range of 13 capabilities which should be a minimum requirement. The table on the next page shows which capabilities exist within each ROCU (although in many areas these capabilities will exist at a force level).²⁰

¹⁹ Since the time of our inspection, the London ROCU has in effect ceased to exist due to reduced funding. Some capabilities may be retained, but final decisions have yet to be made regarding its future.

²⁰ This table contains 14 capabilities as undercover policing has been split into foundation and advanced services. These are explained fully in Annex A.

Figure 3: Regional organised crime unit capabilities

	EMSOU	South East	ERSOU	Yorkshire & The Humber	North West	South West	North East	Southern Wales	West Mids	London
Regional Intelligence Unit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regional Confidential Unit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Under Cover - Foundation	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Under Cover - Advanced	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Asset recovery team only	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fraud Investigation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Specialist Surveillance Unit	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Protected Persons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyber-crime Unit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Operational Security Advisor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
GAIN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prison Intelligence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Operational Investigative Teams	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Asset Confiscation Enforcement (ACE)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: HMIC data collection

Undercover policing and specialist surveillance are the least fully implemented capabilities at a regional level. Only two ROCUs provide foundation undercover policing services on behalf of their constituent forces, and only four ROCUs provide advanced undercover policing.²¹ Specialist surveillance is only provided by EMSOU, SEROCU and the North West ROCU (TITAN) on behalf of their constituent forces (although ERSOU has a small specialist surveillance support team).

In some cases, regional capabilities are hosted within a force rather than a ROCU, and shared with other forces belonging to a particular region. For example, the London ROCU does not have its own specialist surveillance unit. Instead, it has access to a specialist surveillance unit within the MPS. Many of the capabilities held by the Yorkshire and Humber ROCU (ODYSSEY) are also held at force level by West Yorkshire Police, and there are other examples in other parts of the country

Progress towards the full implementation of regional capabilities has been slow, partly as a result of the complexity associated with reconciling force policies and procedures, purchasing or leasing new premises and agreeing shared objectives. However, the development of regional capabilities has also been delayed by a reluctance among some forces to relinquish a degree of control over specialist assets. For example, neither Cheshire Constabulary nor Lancashire Constabulary has agreed to contribute towards the regional provision of undercover policing

²¹ The Metropolitan Police Service is in effect a region in its own right for undercover policing.

capability, and as a result the North West ROCU (TITAN) has not been able to develop an undercover capability for the entire region – instead this capability remains at force level. This reluctance to commit to the regionalisation project is preventing some ROCUs from reaching their full potential, and increases the risk of expensive duplication.

It is understandable that some forces are concerned that a regional model may not allow them to access a particular function when needed in order to protect their communities. Yet the regional provision of specialist capabilities offers clear advantages and could form an important part of a future policing framework, as the National Debate Advisory Group has outlined.²² For example, it can allow the ‘smoothing’ of demand for expensive policing functions which often follow a pattern of ‘peaks and troughs’. Regional service provision can also ensure that operational practices are more consistent and professional, encourage innovation and allow targeted investment in specialist training. This can apply to homicide and kidnap investigation, digital forensics and specialist online investigation as well as other specialist areas. Police forces should therefore continue to explore all possible options for regional collaboration in order to enhance their effectiveness in tackling serious and organised crime.

Recommendation 1

By 1 April 2016, all regional organised crime units (ROCU) - except London - should have in place the ‘13 capabilities’ identified within the ROCU development programme [see Annex A for full list of capabilities].

Recommendation 2

By 30 June 2016, the constituent forces of the London ROCU should ensure that they have reliable access to the ‘13 capabilities’ identified within the ROCU development programme [see Annex A for full list of capabilities].

Duplication of capabilities

Partly as a result of the reluctance among forces to join regional arrangements, some capabilities are provided at force and regional levels. Certain types of offending – for example fraud and cyber-crime – require a response from both forces and ROCUs, although there should be a clear delineation between their respective roles. However, there is a strong case for other capabilities which are costly, highly specialist or relatively rarely needed by forces being provided only once, at a regional level.

²² *Reshaping policing for the public: A discussion paper from the advisory group on the national debate on policing in austerity*, National Debate Advisory Group, June 2015, paragraph 4.15.

Forces do not necessarily need to maintain their own specialist capabilities provided that they have proper access to ROCU resources, and the requisite links to enable them to transfer and receive sensitive intelligence for example.

For example, all four constituent forces of the Yorkshire and Humber ROCU maintain their own confidential units and specialist surveillance units.²³ A single regional hub for each of these capabilities would be operationally beneficial, more efficient and could provide better value for money during the current period of austerity. Similarly, data collected from forces by HMIC suggests that some forces have staff working in specialist functions even in regions where the ROCU offers a regional capability.

Force capabilities should be carefully integrated with regional capabilities in order to maximise their effectiveness and minimise costly duplication. Moreover, the retention of capabilities at a force level should not impede the development of regional capabilities. HMIC inspections of forces in autumn 2015 will examine the retention of specialist capabilities at force level in more detail.

Recommendation 3

By 30 June 2016, every police force in England and Wales should publish an action plan that sets out in detail what steps it will take to make maximum use of the ROCU capabilities, minimise duplication at force level, and ensure that the use of shared ROCU resources are prioritised between regional forces. This action plan should be developed:

- in consultation with police and crime commissioners, ROCUs and the ROCU executive board;
- with regard to both local force priorities (in particular, as specified in the relevant police and crime plan) and National Crime Agency (NCA) priorities; and
- with regard to the other recommendations contained in this report.

Chief officers in each police force should ensure that these action plans are fully implemented. This should be a personal responsibility in each case. Police and crime commissioners should hold forces to account in this respect. HMIC will inspect forces' progress as part of its PEEL inspection programme.

²³ Since the time of our inspection, the Yorkshire and Humber forces have begun the process of combining their confidential units into one.

Development of new capabilities

Some ROCUs are developing capabilities beyond those specified within the original set of 13, and in some cases beyond the 'phase three' capabilities described at Annex A. Many of these additional capabilities make sensible additions to existing regional arrangements. For example, several ROCUs are considering the case for authorising covert surveillance activity²⁴ at a regional level, removing the need for every force to ensure that a senior police officer is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to perform this function. Similarly, three ROCUs have small enforcement teams tackling organised acquisitive crime occurring across police force boundaries, or being deployed flexibly to support operational activity.

However, these additional capabilities are not being adopted nationally. Rather, ROCUs are identifying and pursuing opportunities locally in discussions with their constituent forces. This creates a risk that ROCUs will develop the capabilities which forces have least desire to maintain locally, rather than those which are best provided at a regional level. It is also likely to compound the inconsistency of purpose and structure among ROCUs. Better pooling of ideas would ensure that they can be implemented consistently across all regions.

Recommendation 4

By 30 June 2016, the ROCU executive board – working with forces, the NCA and the Home Office – should produce a plan for the development of ROCUs, which includes a clear statement of shared purpose, and ROCUs should thereafter implement it.

Leadership

HMIC found that ROCUs are generally well led and managed at a day to day level by either a superintendent or chief superintendent called Heads of ROCU. They meet regularly to address shared problems and exchange effective solutions. Each ROCU is also overseen by an assistant or deputy chief constable. In most ROCUs, HMIC observed leadership teams working closely together and displaying a clear commitment to maximising the potential of regional units.

However, oversight arrangements differ considerably between ROCUs. The assistant or deputy chief constables responsible for each ROCU have different portfolios, and report to senior officers in different ways.

²⁴ Covert surveillance activity and its authorisation are governed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/23/contents

In two regions (East Midlands and the South East) the chief officer is dedicated full time to ROCU management, but in others they are required to split their time between regional and force responsibilities. This can make it difficult for them to make progress with regional collaboration, and manage complex processes across multiple forces.

Police and crime commissioners (PCCs) participate to varying degrees in ROCU oversight. In one region for example, all PCCs show a high level of interest in ROCU activity and hold views about how it should operate. In other regions, only one or two PCCs show a strong interest in ROCU oversight. In the south east region, one PCC has overall responsibility for scrutinising the ROCU. While each of these models has advantages, a more consistent approach to ensuring that PCCs remain informed and involved in ROCU activity merits careful consideration.

An equally fundamental challenge for ROCUs is that despite capable, committed leadership at chief officer level and among Heads of ROCUs, ROCUs have no formal ways of resolving disagreements or unlocking inertia among their constituent forces. Instead they rely on patient diplomacy and negotiation, for example to persuade forces to contribute undercover or specialist surveillance assets to a regional unit. However, not all force leaders respond to this; a chief constable who refuses to contribute to the development of regional capabilities is ultimately free to do so. As a result, ROCUs are sometimes hampered in their ability to augment regional collaboration and truly maximise its potential.

National policing network

As described in the introduction to this report, 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. HMIC found that opportunities for improved integration between these national networks could be better exploited. The NCA is still a relatively new organisation, and is the subject of a separate HMIC inspection programme.²⁵ However, from a regional perspective there appears 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.

²⁵ *An Inspection of the National Crime Agency*, HMIC, March 2015, www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/an-inspection-of-the-national-crime-agency.pdf

In most regions, HMIC found that 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*.²⁶ However, only four ROCUs are currently co-located with local NCA offices. While it is not straightforward to achieve – and is often dependent on existing estate strategies and the need for capital investment – more co-location would enable better co-ordination of operational activity and enhance the collective ability of law enforcement agencies to tackle serious and organised crime.

HMIC found that significant opportunities also exist to integrate ROCUs more fully with the national counter-terrorism network. Again, this is specified within the *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy* as an explicit aim.²⁷ This integration could relate to infrastructure (for example sharing secure buildings), or buying (for example, purchasing specialist equipment). There are also opportunities for greater operational collaboration, including training specialist operatives in surveillance techniques and co-ordinated monitoring of offenders in prisons who present both a criminal and terrorist threat. However, these possibilities are only being explored actively in a small number of regions. Where ROCUs are co-located with counter-terrorism units, and joint oversight arrangements are in place at chief officer level, there is a greater degree of willingness to identify opportunities for collaboration and pursue shared projects. However, joint oversight arrangements currently exist in just four of the ten ROCUs (EMSOU, ERSOU, SEROCU and Southern Wales). Only three (the West Midlands ROCU, SEROCU and EMSOU) are co-located with both the regional counter-terrorist policing unit (CTU) and the regional NCA office. Other ROCUs may be able to explore collaborative opportunities more easily through similar joint oversight models.

Recommendation 5

By 30 June 2016, the national police lead for serious and organised crime should work with the Assistant Commissioner with national counter-terrorist responsibilities to produce a plan for introducing joint regional management arrangements where this is appropriate and applicable, with the designated assistant or deputy chief constable for each ROCU taking management

²⁶ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715. Page 29, paragraph 4.44,

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

²⁷ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715. Page 10, paragraph 1.13,

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

responsibility for both serious and organised crime and counter-terrorist policing.

Recommendation 6

By 30 June 2016, ROCUs, counter-terrorist units (CTUs), counter-terrorist intelligence units (CTIUs) and the NCA should produce a long term plan for ensuring they are co-located wherever possible, and thereafter implement it.

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. The Home Secretary announced in March 2014 that the total Home Office grant for ROCUs in 2015/16 would be £20m. 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 2015/16 financial year. There is also a (lesser) degree of uncertainty surrounding the 2015/16 grant, part of which is conditional upon the capabilities provided by each ROCU.

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.

The annual grant from the Home Office for the 2015/16 financial year had still not been received by any of the ROCUs when HMIC inspection fieldwork concluded in mid-June 2015. This delayed grant payment has reduced the amount of time available to realise the necessary savings, and increased the risk that ROCUs will cut what is easiest rather than conducting a thorough analysis of anticipated costs and benefits before making decisions.

Recommendation 7

By 31 March 2016, the Home Office – working with the ROCU executive board – should have assessed the benefits and viability of providing ROCUs with a three to five-year funding settlement that puts them in a position to make long-term investment decisions which support the development of efficient and effective regional capabilities.

4. Understanding the threat

This section of the report explores the extent to which forces understand the threats posed by serious and organised criminals. Specifically, it explores:

- the effectiveness of methods used to assess serious and organised crime threats;
- how effectively intelligence is gathered and used to support operational activity aimed at tackling serious and organised crime; and
- how well organised crime groups (OCGs) are ‘mapped’ using national tools and techniques.

Main findings

- ROCUs’ understanding of regional threats is improving but remains incomplete, particularly in relation to child sexual exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery.
- The ‘mapping’ of organised crime groups (OCGs) by forces is inconsistent, and could be carried out by ROCUs on their behalf.
- The Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) is a good concept, but needs to be strengthened significantly for its full potential to be realised.

Threat assessment

ROCUs play a vital part in helping forces and their partner organisations to understand serious and organised criminal threats. In addition to intelligence held by forces, ROCUs have access to NCA intelligence, data belonging to partner agencies and international information sources such as Europol.²⁸ They are able to identify patterns occurring across different force areas – for example where individuals belonging to the same organised crime group are being investigated by more than one police force, or where illegal drugs are being moved between different counties. This regional intelligence collation is beginning to provide police and partner agencies with a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the threat posed by serious and organised crime.

There is some rigour – and growing consistency – in the application of risk assessment approaches among ROCUs. This allows ROCUs and the NCA to use a common language to describe threats, and to compare risks more reliably. The

²⁸ Europol is the European Union’s law enforcement branch. It supports member states in the fight against organised crime, www.europol.europa.eu/content/page/about-us

majority of ROCUs are using the same risk assessment tool, known as MoRiLE.²⁹ This is one of several threat assessment tools used in policing, and is currently being evaluated by police leaders.³⁰ If all forces, ROCUs, the NCA and partner agencies were to adopt the same approach to threat assessment, it would become easier to compare threats and articulate a clear approach to their prioritisation from the local level to the national level.

Recommendation 8

By 30 June 2016, all ROCUs, forces and the NCA should adopt a common approach to the assessment of serious and organised criminal threats.

Use of intelligence

Most ROCUs have a good intelligence capability, and almost all are now part of an effective national network of accredited units for sharing sensitive and confidential material. However, not all forces have joined these arrangements. For example, Cumbria Constabulary and Devon and Cornwall Police maintain their own confidential intelligence units 'in house'.³¹ As a result, the ability of the North West ROCU (TITAN) and the South West ROCU (ZEPHYR) to provide a comprehensive, single intelligence picture for their respective regions is impaired. Their constituent forces are also unable to benefit fully from the regional intelligence capability which is available.

British Transport Police (BTP) and the City of London Police have maintained their own confidential units, although the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has a much larger unit which BTP and the City of London Police could share as part of a regional arrangement. As discussed in chapter 3, there are also multiple confidential units among the Yorkshire and Humber forces, although these are in the process of being combined into one. This will enhance their collective understanding of regional threats and minimise duplication of effort, as well as produce financial savings.

While ROCUs have increased their intelligence capability, there has not been a correspondingly swift alignment of ROCU assets to understand so-called 'newer' threats such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), human trafficking and modern slavery. These types of crime are often unreported and are relatively poorly understood by law enforcement agencies. This stems partly from limitations of the

²⁹ Management of Risk in Law Enforcement

³⁰ National Crime Operations Co-ordination Committee, a sub-group of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)

³¹ Plans exist for Devon and Cornwall Police to join the regional confidential unit, but this transfer had not taken place at the time of inspection in spring 2015

computerised software used to support the 'mapping' of organised crime groups,³² which is more sensitive to some crime types than others. ROCUs have also been slow to apply established covert intelligence collection methods to threats such as child sexual exploitation. For instance, organised criminals suspected of sexually exploiting children (or facilitating their exploitation) can be placed under surveillance to allow the police to monitor their activity. ROCUs are not considering covert intelligence gathering methods as routinely as they could to tackle this type of offending. As a result, they may be missing intelligence-gathering opportunities as well as opportunities to prevent crime from being committed.

However, it is positive that ROCUs are confronting the difficulty of understanding newer and more complex types of offending, in addition to more 'traditional' threats such as drug trafficking and gun crime. Many ROCUs have assessed child sexual exploitation as the most serious threat facing their region and – alongside the NCA and police forces – are taking steps to develop an improved picture of this type of offending. *The Strategic Policing Requirement* defines child sexual abuse as a national threat requiring a co-ordinated response,³³ so it is appropriate that ROCUs use their considerable intelligence gathering capabilities to uncover and understand this activity. While forces retain responsibility for local investigation and child safeguarding, ROCUs have an important part to play in using specialist techniques. In particular, they should assume responsibility for online investigations aimed at identifying those who abuse children.

This type of work poses operational problems for policing, for instance how long to allow surveillance activity to continue in order to gather evidence before intervening to safeguard a potential victim. It may also lead to situations where ROCUs have to deal with a victim who is also a perpetrator (for example vulnerable victims of CSE who are 'recruiting' other victims). Not all of the skills which these situations demand – for example specialist training to obtain the best possible evidence when interviewing children – are provided ROCUs, which have not traditionally focused on victims or vulnerability but rather on the investigation and prosecution of offenders. None of these problems is insurmountable; they require a clarification of the role which ROCUs should play, and a means of ensuring that this role is carefully co-ordinated with that of police forces, where child safeguarding and interviewing skills are concentrated.

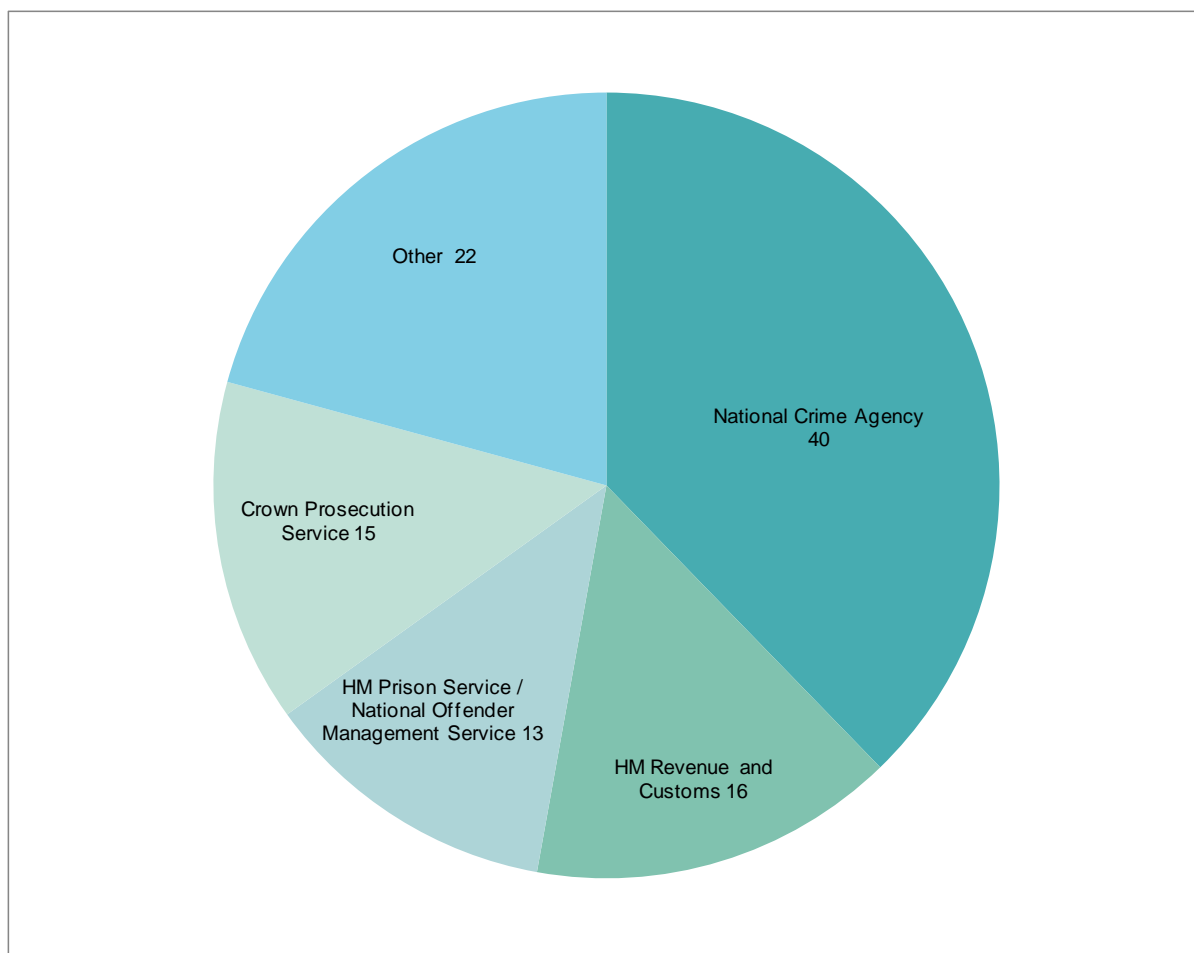
The gathering and use of intelligence within ROCUs is well supported by the regular presence of staff from partner agencies such as HM Revenue and Customs

³² See Chapter 5 for a full explanation of OCG mapping.

³³ The Strategic Policing Requirement, Home Office, March 2015, Part A, page 4, paragraphs 1.4 to 1.5,
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417116/The_Strategic_Policing_Requirement.pdf

(HMRC), the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and Border Force. This provides ROCU investigators with access to a broader range of valuable information as well as a wider range of tactical options for disrupting organised crime. Certain agencies such as the NCA are based within almost all of the ROCUs, while others including Immigration Enforcement and the Department for Work and Pensions are less well represented.

Figure 4: Number of staff from partner organisations based in all of the ROCUs (as of 1 April 2015)



Source: HMIC data collection

Note: 'Other' includes: Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, other police forces/ROCUs, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Courts and Tribunals Service and Safer Cash

While the growing involvement of partner organisations is positive, there is scope for ROCUs to work more extensively with other agencies. HMIC found that some ROCUs have better access to intelligence from partner agencies than others. The North West ROCU (TITAN) has 23 staff from partner agencies based on its premises, while ERSOU has just four. There is also scope for better intelligence sharing between forces and ROCUs. For example, HMIC found that intelligence analysts working in ROCUs often have to log into as many as five or six force intelligence systems every day in order to obtain information. The time which staff

spend doing this would be much better spent gathering further intelligence, or conducting analysis.

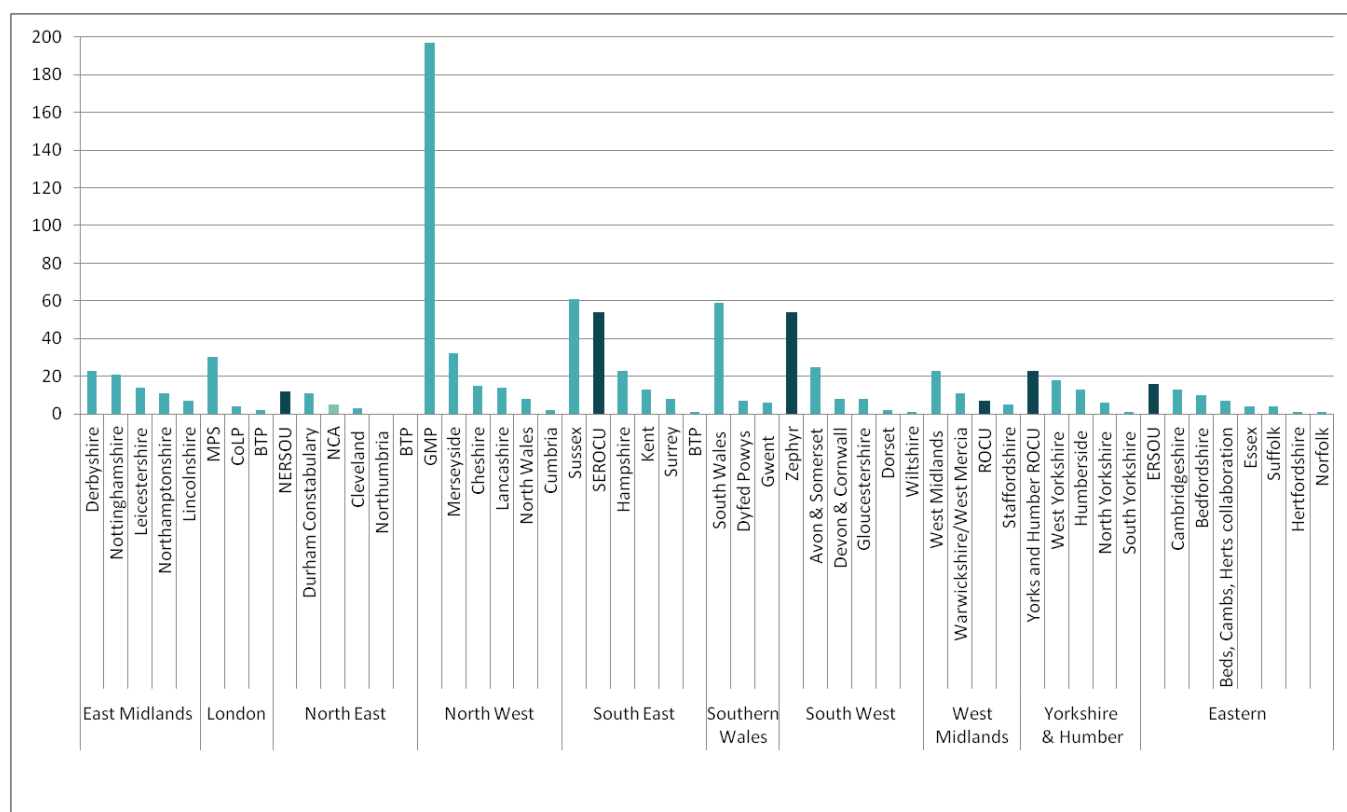
Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN)

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 ROCUs have 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). GAIN works through a system of referrals – information requests relating to specific OCG members – between GAIN agencies.

GAIN provides an important route for the police and partner agencies to exchange intelligence with one another in order to manage risk and combat serious and organised crime more effectively. Originally designed to be used in a targeted way where intelligence suggested that a particular agency may hold information about an individual offender, in fact it has also proved beneficial as a wider means of searching partner agency databases for potential leads. It is vital that GAIN co-ordination continues as a ROCU capability. However, while the concept of GAIN is sound, it could be used much more by forces, ROCUs and partner agencies. Moreover, the current configuration of GAIN is not sufficiently sophisticated or integrated to support the partnership approach to tackling serious and organised crime envisaged by the national strategy.

HMIC found that both forces and ROCUs make little use of GAIN. In the year to 31 March 2015, only four forces made more than 30 referrals to GAIN co-ordinators in ROCUs, and many forces made fewer than ten.

Figure 5: Requests received from forces to access GAIN in the 12 months to 31 March 2015
(light blue bars are police forces; dark blue bars are ROCUs)



Source: HMIC data collection

There are a number of reasons for this. Awareness of GAIN within forces is sometimes minimal, and the intelligence that other agencies can provide is not always widely understood or advertised. Some forces may prefer to use local relationships to seek information from partner organisations. However, where GAIN referrals have been made the results are often promising. For example, Greater Manchester Police has participated in a pilot scheme to refer all identified OCG members to the ROCU GAIN co-ordinator. South Wales Police also routinely submits referrals to the GAIN co-ordinator in the Southern Wales ROCU when it considers action against an OCG, or believes a new OCG member has been identified.

The under-use of GAIN is not solely a policing problem. ROCUs reported to HMIC that some GAIN agencies are reluctant to share intelligence that they hold with the police through the network due to internal policies and procedures. Others may not have the capacity or willingness to respond to large volumes of referrals which relate to activity beyond their immediate area of interest. Yet the under-use of GAIN represents a missed opportunity for the police and partner organisations to improve their collective understanding of serious and organised crime, and enhance their ability to protect the public from this threat.

While GAIN is an important existing resource for ROCUs and forces, it could also provide a future platform for intelligence sharing between government agencies and the private sector. However, if this is to be achieved, GAIN needs to be strengthened and developed into a future operating model which is capable of supporting data and intelligence exchange on an increased scale which is in line with the ambition of the *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*.³⁴

In its current form, it will not be able to cope with the sustained increase in cross-agency intelligence sharing which will be necessary to keep pace with organised crime. There is only one individual responsible for co-ordinating GAIN referrals in most ROCUs, and in many regions this individual has no administrative support. The way in which referrals are made is cumbersome and slow, with only around a quarter of GAIN agencies having adopted an IT platform designed to automate and speed up the task. Most referrals have to be made by email, which is time-consuming and ill suited to the high volumes which could be anticipated. These limitations mean that the system is barely able to support the current low usage of GAIN; it cannot be expected to cater to future needs.

Recommendation 9

By 30 June 2016, the ROCU executive board should produce a plan for improving the Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) operating model to enable large scale intelligence-sharing between government departments, agencies and the private sector, and this plan should thereafter be implemented.

³⁴ *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, HM Government, October 2013, Cmnd 8715, paragraph 4.12

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

Case study – Operation Lava

Organised criminals were growing cannabis on 14 plots within a Traveller site near Merthyr Tydfil with a history of offending. Occupants were refusing to allow entry to the authorities.

South Wales Police made a referral to the GAIN co-ordinator in the Southern Wales ROCU. This resulted in a wealth of intelligence being shared, prompting one of the largest ever operations in Wales involving different agencies working together. A 'day of action' involved 22 GAIN member organisations. .

In this operation, the use of GAIN ensured a better flow of information and intelligence sharing. It also meant that offences were detected which might have otherwise been missed. This operation led to:

- The seizure of 460 cannabis plants, with a street value estimated at £493,000;
- 22 arrests, with 16 people charged.
- The freezing of £60,000 worth of assets belonging to one of the perpetrators;
- 1 child found to be at risk of neglect being referred to social services;
- The discovery that site occupants were exploiting vulnerable people by subjecting them to forced labour;
- 10 prohibition orders being issued for vehicles at the site, and two investigations being launched into related MOT garages;
- Smartwater (a private forensic property marking company) – examining property on site and identifying stolen BT cables; and
- Testing all vehicles on site for 'red diesel', which is illegal to use in road vehicles.



The Government Agency Intelligence Network

Prison intelligence

Prisons represent a further, critical source of intelligence for ROCUs which is not being exploited fully. OCG members are known to maintain and develop criminal networks within prisons, and some continue to commit or enable serious and organised crime even while they are imprisoned. A national project is under way to improve the co-ordination of prison intelligence, which is a necessary and positive development. However, HMIC identified easier and more immediate options for improvements to the regional prison intelligence function.

Much of the information exchanged about activity or alliances in prisons can provide ROCUs with vital intelligence as well as opportunities to disrupt or dismantle organised criminal networks. There are a number of ways in which ROCUs can collect intelligence from prisons, although this activity is not always well co-ordinated at a regional level. However in most regions, intelligence collection in prisons and line management arrangements for prison intelligence officers, are split between ROCUs and forces. Bringing these responsibilities together at a regional level will improve both coverage and co-ordination, and forces should therefore consider moving prison intelligence resources held at a local level into ROCUs.

HMIC also found that ROCUs do not always know which OCG members are being held in prisons within their region. This occurs when those individuals were originally identified – or are currently being managed – in a different region. EMSOU, for example, knows where all organised crime group members which it manages are currently imprisoned, including those which have been moved to a different region. However, it is not necessarily aware of all organised crime group members managed by other regions being held in East Midlands' prisons. As a result ROCUs cannot be confident that all necessary measures have been taken to manage risk within prisons and to prevent re-offending following the release of high risk offenders.

Recommendation 10

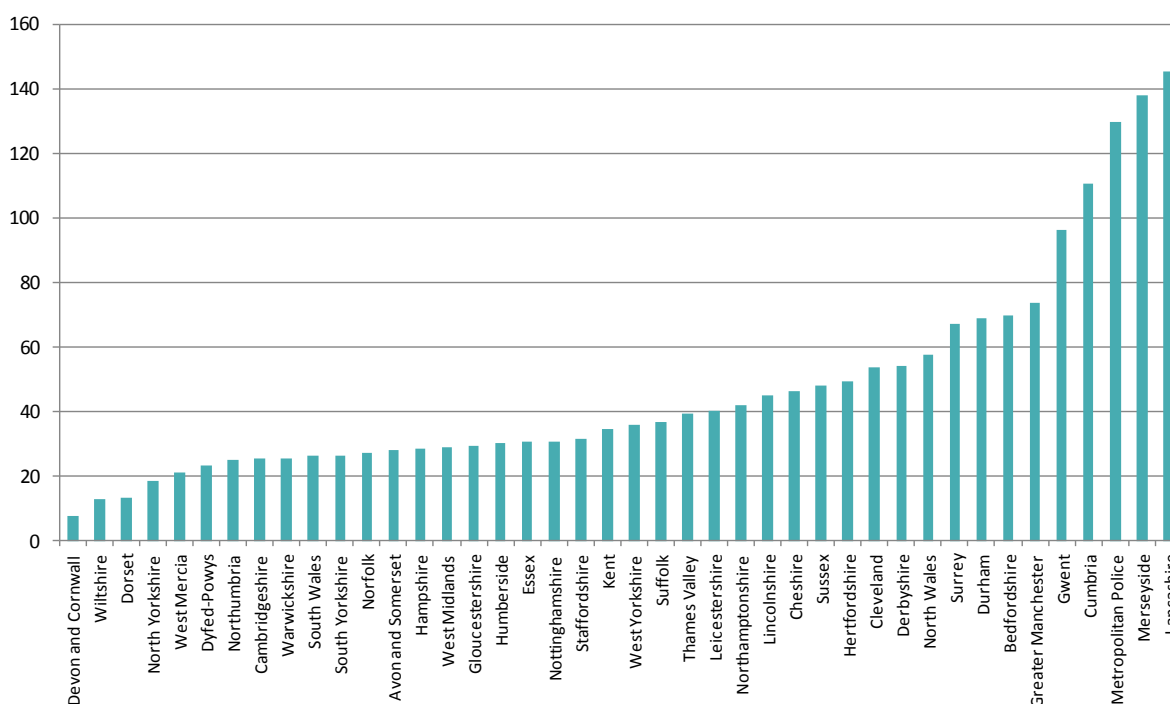
Beginning immediately, ROCUs, the NCA, National Offender Management Service and the national counter-terrorism network should exchange information routinely about all organised crime group members serving prison sentences to ensure the risks they pose are properly managed.

Organised crime group mapping

When a police force identifies a group of individuals whom it suspects may be involved in organised crime, they go through a nationally standardised ‘mapping’ procedure. This involves entering details of the group’s known and suspected activity, associates and capability on computer software, which assigns a numerical score to each organised crime group (OCG). It also places each OCG into one of several ‘bands’ which reflect the range and severity of crime in which a group is involved as well as its level of capability and sophistication. OCG mapping is used by forces, ROCUs, the NCA and a number of non-police organisations such as Border Force.

The number of active OCGs for which police forces are responsible (as of 31 March 2015) varies from 9 (Wiltshire Police) to 1,108 (Metropolitan Police Service). These have been adjusted by the size of the force area population in the graph below, ranging from fewer than 8 per million of the population in Devon and Cornwall to over 145 per million of the population in Lancashire.

Figure 6: Active organised crime groups by force per million population, as at 31 March 2015 ³⁵



Source: Police force OCG mapping data. Population data obtained from the Office for National Statistics

³⁵ The City of London is excluded here due to the nature of the force area, which has a low resident population but a high transient population. It also has a national responsibility for OCGs which commit fraud and economic crime. These factors mean that mapping data is not directly comparable with other forces.

Despite the use of standard software and methods, OCG mapping is carried out inconsistently by forces. For example in the graph above, Gwent Police and Cumbria Constabulary have almost as many active OCGs mapped per million of the population as the MPS, and more than Greater Manchester Police. Forces take different approaches to OCG mapping, and it is therefore not straightforward to make direct comparisons between them. A multi-agency exercise was co-ordinated by the Home Office in 2014 to test how effectively high priority organised crime groups are identified, and whether an appropriate local, regional and national response could be put in place. ROCUs, police forces and other law enforcement agencies in three regions were given simulated operations with the same underlying intelligence. The results indicated a wide variance in the scores assigned to the OCGs. A post exercise review concluded that it was likely that this inconsistency resulted from the different roles of officers carrying out the mapping process, their familiarity with the supporting intelligence, the inherent complexity of the mapping software and the need to develop formal training for the mapping system in order to establish a common set of standards.

Mapping inconsistency is partly due to the unavoidably subjective nature of some aspects of the mapping procedure, which relies on human judgment as well as computer algorithms. Groups exhibiting similar characteristics are sometimes scored in different ways, and forces do not always use the full range of information available to generate OCG scores which can compromise their accuracy and usefulness. ROCUs occasionally change the scores initially assigned to OCGs by forces if they have access to a greater volume or higher quality of intelligence than the originating force. As a result of inconsistent OCG mapping, decision making is not as well informed by mapping as it could be, and resources are not systematically deployed in a way which maximises their effect.

If ROCUs were to carry out OCG mapping on behalf of their constituent forces, this would allow OCGs to be mapped more consistently and would better inform local, regional and national assessment of risk as well as the prioritisation of activity. Access to confidential intelligence and GAIN means that ROCUs are well placed to draw on a range of sources to inform the mapping process. ROCUs could also carry out OCG re-scoring following disruptive activity, or when new intelligence emerges which alters the risk posed by an OCG.

Only one ROCU (EMSOU) currently maps OCGs on behalf of its constituent forces. HMIC found this to be effective in reducing the inconsistency with which it is conducted, although excessive delays sometimes occur, which can lead to forces having to pursue OCG investigations without scores having been assigned. Organised crime group mapping is among the 'phase three' capabilities identified by the ROCU programme development team as suitable for regional provision. Should this proposal be implemented, ROCUs need to ensure that tight controls are imposed on the way it carries out OCG mapping to ensure that force-led OCG investigations are not unnecessarily delayed.

Recommendation 11

By 30 June 2016, ROCUs should assume responsibility for organised crime group mapping on behalf of their constituent forces, working closely with their constituent forces to ensure that this process is informed by local intelligence.

OCG mapping is not an exact science, but it does yield valuable data which can be analysed to detect trends, patterns or linked individuals and groups. However, ROCUs conduct relatively little detailed analysis of OCG mapping data to enable their constituent forces to act upon previously unidentified connections between OCGs, for example. All ROCUs aggregate OCG mapping data submitted to them by forces, and this in turn is aggregated by the NCA, analysed and returned to ROCUs for dissemination to their constituent forces. This aggregation responsibility puts ROCUs in a good position to go a step further and conduct more detailed and sophisticated analysis of organised criminal activity which draws on local, regional, national and international sources of intelligence such as Europol.

However, HMIC found that ROCUs are not routinely conducting this kind of analysis. Four ROCUs do not conduct any of their own analysis of OCG mapping data for dissemination to their constituent forces. In those that do, analysis is often limited to relatively infrequent pieces of ad hoc work. More regular and in-depth regional analysis could be developed in consultation with forces to ensure that it meets their needs and complements their analytical activity. This would enhance the ability of both ROCUs and forces to understand serious and organised crime.

5. Investigating and disrupting serious and organised crime

This section of the report focuses on:

- the way in which activity aimed at tackling serious and organised crime is managed and prioritised;
- the tactics used to investigate and disrupt serious and organised crime; and
- the effect of ROCU activity on serious and organised crime.

Main findings

- The quality of ROCU-led investigations is generally good, although two ROCUs have no investigative capability.
- The ability of most ROCUs to respond to cyber-crime is limited; better co-ordination is needed to improve this.
- Some ROCUs have yet to resolve fully questions about how their activity should be focused and prioritised.
- ROCUs need to do more to understand and measure the effect of their activity on organised crime.
- significantly for its full potential to be realised.

Prioritising ROCU activity

The intelligence gathering and analysis conducted by ROCUs guides and informs their operational activity. This activity involves a broad range of covert and overt tactics aimed at disrupting organised crime. ROCUs manage a large proportion of this investigative activity through a monthly meeting structure, which is used to assign tasks and scrutinise progress in dealing with regional threats and priorities. This structure also provides forces with an opportunity to bid for regional support and resources. HMIC found that these meeting structures are growing in maturity and effectiveness, although they are further advanced in some ROCUs than others.

The seniority of people who attend from constituent forces varies, but meetings are most effective when assistant chief constables from all constituent forces attend on a regular basis, as agreed by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). HMIC found that this currently happens in only a small number of ROCUs; elsewhere, meetings are attended by more junior ranking officers such as chief superintendents. Assistant chief constables have the level of authority and influence necessary to build

consensus and set the direction in a forum where forces will frequently hold opposing views about what the ROCU should prioritise or how it should operate. Assistant chief constables are also responsible for managing the risk from serious and organised crime, and should therefore be part of the process that determines which operations receive ROCU support.

In most ROCUs, partner organisations including the NCA also attend these monthly management meetings and participate actively in decision making. They are well briefed on ROCU operations, provide updates on their own work and contribute to enforcement activity by making additional tools and powers available to ROCUs. This enhances the collective visibility of problems among participating agencies, as well as their ability to tackle organised crime using the best possible range of methods. In a small number of ROCUs however, HMIC found that the involvement of partner organisations is more limited, with scope for them to be more closely involved in management meetings as well as wider discussions about the most beneficial tactical approaches.

HMIC found that ROCUs adopt a variety of different approaches to prioritising their operational activity and deciding – through discussion with their constituent forces – which operations to support. Some ROCUs identify the OCGs which the mapping procedure indicates present the most serious threat to the region. Others focus on those OCGs which they feel best equipped to disrupt, or which commit crime across multiple force areas. Some ROCUs identify 'themes' rather than crime types as a way of focusing their activity – foreign national offending is a priority in London, for example. Most ROCUs consider national priorities specified within the *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2015*³⁶ when deciding which operations to support. It is not uncommon for ROCUs to use more than one of these factors as part of their prioritisation process.

Several ROCUs also take into account force priorities, and aim to maintain the support of their constituent forces by distributing their activity geographically. This dynamic is most prominent where there are large differences in the size of constituent forces, and corresponding disparities in the nature of the threats they face. For example, the north west region contains three large forces, (Greater Manchester Police, Merseyside Police and Lancashire Constabulary) and three smaller forces (Cheshire Police, Cumbria Constabulary and North Wales Police). Large metropolitan forces such as Greater Manchester Police and Merseyside Police experience significantly higher levels of organised crime than smaller rural forces, and tend to be responsible for investigating many more OCGs.

³⁶ *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2015*, National Crime Agency, June 2015, www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/560-national-strategic-assessment-of-serious-and-organised-crime-2015/file

The types of crime that each classifies as a priority will therefore also differ. The most harmful OCG in Cumbria may present a relatively low risk from the perspective of Merseyside Police or Greater Manchester Police.

If ROCU resources were consistently directed towards the most serious threats, irrespective of where they occur, this would have the effect of concentrating almost all ROCU activity in Manchester and Liverpool. Cumbria Constabulary, for example, might secure regional support on just a handful of occasions each year despite having contributed financially to the development of the ROCU capabilities (albeit proportionately less than the larger forces). It is also the case that smaller forces are able to access bigger and better specialist capabilities through regional collaboration than they could on their own.

ROCUs are collective enterprises which depend on the investment and support of their constituent forces; it is more difficult for them to maintain that support if regional resources are constantly directed towards urban centres while other force areas attract little or no attention. On the other hand, there is often an incentive for smaller forces to support regional activity even if it is targeted at city centres as this may prevent or discourage criminals from travelling into smaller, more rural force areas. ROCUs need to identify and prioritise the most serious regional threats. But they should also dedicate specialist resources towards tackling an agreed proportion of the most serious threats to individual forces (regardless of their relative seriousness within the region). This would encourage forces to commit more fully to the regionalisation project, and promote greater consistency of approach across the country.

Investigating and disrupting serious and organised crime

HMIC found that the ability of ROCUs to disrupt, dismantle and investigate OCGs is generally good. ROCUs use specialist equipment and techniques to pursue criminals who are often sophisticated and resourceful in their attempts to launder the proceeds of crime and evade justice. ROCU detectives and staff are highly trained and motivated professionals who undertake high quality investigations. Investigations often involve agencies working together, close supervision and good scrutiny of progress.

However, while ROCU investigations are often extremely effective in securing convictions for the criminals they target, they are not always closely co-ordinated with the NCA or police forces to ensure that the effect of this activity is maximised. For example, ROCUs are extremely competent at using surveillance techniques in order to catch and convict drug suppliers operating across police force boundaries. HMIC found that these investigations are normally concluded once defined objectives have been met. At this point, however, the NCA or partner organisations may need to pursue higher tier criminals facilitating drug importation who have fled overseas. Simultaneously, force activity may need to be directed towards disrupting

street level drug dealers at the lower end of a drug distribution network. HMIC found that this alignment of activity does not always occur, which means that ROCU activity is not as effective as it could be in sustaining a long-term positive effect on organised criminal networks.

Case study – Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU)



Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies noticed that Class A drug dealers were operating in towns across both force areas, behaving violently and exploiting vulnerable drug users. A local response was put in place, but it became clear that the Somali organised crime network behind this activity was based in London - beyond the geographical reach of the two forces.

They approached ERSOU for specialist support in identifying and locating those OCG members responsible for the upstream drug supply. ERSOU intelligence gathering and analysis established that several towns were affected across the region. Financial investigators from ERSOU identified suspected links between the OCG profits and the funding of terrorist activity.

Using specialist covert methods and working alongside both local forces and the Metropolitan Police Service, ERSOU investigators identified the entire OCG network. Sixteen individuals were charged and remanded in prison for conspiracy to supply Class A drugs. 38,500 'wraps' of crack cocaine and heroin were seized, alongside an 'Uzi' sub-machine gun and £61,000 in cash. One victim who had been kidnapped and held hostage was safely rescued.

'Lifetime' offender management plans were put in place by ERSOU for all 16 OCG members to ensure that they do not continue their criminal activity while in prison, or upon release.

This case study illustrates the value of a specialist regional unit capable of responding to a highly capable and extremely violent organised crime group which forces alone may not have been able to dismantle. It also shows the benefits of ROCUs aligning their activity with that of forces in order to maximise its impact.



There is also scope for more ambitious and continual innovation within ROCU functions such as undercover policing and specialist surveillance, where established tactics could be further developed or adapted to tackle threats such as human trafficking, cyber-crime and online child sexual exploitation or fraud. HMIC found that ROCUs are beginning to use new techniques to detect and disrupt child sexual exploitation, but this work remains in its relative infancy. EMSOU has recently formed a 'disruptions team' to explore these kinds of options. While it is too early to judge how successful this team has been, the concept is a promising one whose suitability for national adoption should be evaluated. If proved successful, this could provide a platform for addressing some of the problems described in chapter three, such as co-ordinating activity with the NCA, developing a consistent role for ROCUs in tackling CSE or harnessing specialist knowledge across ROCUs. Pooling the best ideas being developed would mean that they could be applied across the country. This would ensure that ROCUs, forces and ultimately the public could benefit from more cutting edge policies and practices in this swiftly moving field.

Financial investigation and asset recovery

Most ROCUs have the ability to investigate financial crime effectively, and routinely explore avenues for disrupting OCGs using financial investigation methods. For example, a group involved in drug importation may be targeted for evading tax. Several ROCUs are actively targeting estate agents, solicitors, accountants and other professionals who have been corrupted by OCGs and are helping to enable criminal activity such as money laundering. This approach makes it more difficult to commit – and conceal the proceeds of – organised crime.

The recovery of criminal assets is also a well established and mature ROCU function. Many regional asset recovery teams (RARTs) have co-located specialist lawyers from the Crown Prosecution Service, which helps to secure successful prosecutions. In addition, all ROCUs have recently formed dedicated asset confiscation enforcement (ACE) teams to enforce confiscation orders issued by courts. These orders require criminals to repay money which they have acquired through illegal means. ACE teams generally recover more money than they cost, and ROCUs should therefore seek to retain these teams despite the short term ACE funding currently confirmed.

Cyber-crime

Cyber-crime units based in ROCUs undertake different types of activities aimed at tackling cyber-crime, and provide different types of support to their constituent forces. These roles include specialist support for forces during cyber-crime investigations and advice aimed at industry and the public about how to increase protection from cyber-criminals. In some cases, the roles of ROCUs in relation to cyber-crime have evolved through local discussions with forces rather than being directed centrally.

ROCUs recognise that cyber-crime is an important and growing area, and many are developing a bigger and better regional capability. HMIC found that some ROCUs have developed good local arrangements with businesses, universities and law enforcement partners in order to heighten awareness of cyber-crime, and share techniques for dealing with it more effectively. Specialist officers are being recruited in many regions to lead work aimed at educating businesses, schools and the public about the dangers of cyber-crime. It is essential that this work is harnessed and replicated across the country if ROCUs are to tackle cyber-crime successfully.

While pockets of effective practice exist and progress has been made to establish regional cyber capability, HMIC found that ROCUs' ability to respond to cyber-crime is generally limited. Most have only recently established and small teams of investigators in place; seven ROCUs have the equivalent of fewer than ten full-time staff dedicated to cyber-crime, and two have only the equivalent of only four. HMIC found that the work of cyber-crime teams in ROCUs is also sometimes isolated from other units and detached from activity aimed at tackling other types of organised crime. Only a small number of mapped OCGs are linked to cyber-crime, and the way in which mapping is done does not lend itself to assessing cyber-crime accurately, which reinforces this sense of detachment. Cyber-crime teams must work closely with other ROCU teams – particularly those responsible for investigating fraud, supporting specialist online investigations and conducting surveillance activity – in order to maximise their impact.

ROCU cyber-crime teams have good relationships with the National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU). However, it is less clear how ROCUs and forces work alongside one another as part of a co-ordinated national effort to deal with cyber-crime. ROCU cyber-crime teams reported consistently to HMIC inspectors that the majority of their work is currently generated by the NCA rather than police forces. HMIC found some examples of cyber-crime investigations which could have benefited from ROCU involvement not being referred by forces. In one region, ROCU cyber-crime specialists reported that there unclear structures in their constituent forces for tackling cyber-crime. These findings indicate that the roles and responsibilities of forces and ROCUs in relation to cyber-crime are not consistently well understood.

Disruptive effect

ROCUs have begun to assess the effect of their activity by counting the number of times that they have been able to disrupt an OCG. This new national performance framework has been developed by ROCUs, the NPCC and the NCA, although it is not yet well established. As part of this, ROCUs assess the extent to which each police operation has limited the ability of an OCG to continue committing crime. For example, the imprisonment of a leading OCG member might be categorised as a 'major' disruption, while a drug seizure might be classed as a 'minor' or 'moderate' disruption depending on the type and volume of drugs seized. A 'negative' disruption is also possible, where for example the position of an OCG has actually been strengthened as a result of a police operation – perhaps if an intelligence source has been compromised. Assessing the effect of disruptive activity is a positive step towards the adoption of a consistent NCA-endorsed approach to measuring the effectiveness of ROCUs and forces across England and Wales.

While ROCUs have started to adopt the 'currency' of disruptions, HMIC found that beyond this basic quantification, ROCUs' assessment of their own effect on organised crime is not yet fully mature or systematic. Few ROCUs use task assignment meetings as an opportunity to scrutinise the cumulative medium or long-term disruptive effects of their activity – or that of constituent forces – on OCGs. Nor are they systematic or rigorous in their approach to using internal management information to understand the effect of their activity on serious and organised crime. Collecting and analysing this sort of information would improve ROCUs' understanding of the most effective tactics, and enable sustained improvement in services to the public.

Protecting victims and witnesses

Many serious and organised criminals are prepared to intimidate victims and witnesses in order to discourage them from reporting crimes or giving evidence in court. Some go to great lengths and use threatening behaviour or violence to influence victims and witnesses so as to minimise the chance of conviction. It is therefore essential that the police have the ability to protect those who may be targeted by organised criminals.

HMIC found that ROCUs generally offer a high level of protection to those victims and witnesses of serious and organised crime who are at most risk of serious harm. Teams located within ROCUs form part of the UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS). Before, during and long after investigations, victims, witnesses and other people at risk of serious harm are provided with specialist protection by ROCUs. The Protected Persons Service can provide re-location, identity changes or other types of support for individuals and their families. The number of people who receive this type of protection is small, but the quality of service is generally good and the Protected Persons Service is closely governed by national standards and procedures.

The protection of those at risk of serious harm is a 'natural fit' as a regional capability, as it is often advantageous for victims and witnesses to move to an area away from where they live in order to reduce the risk that they will be located by organised criminals seeking to intimidate or harm them. Agreements are in place between ROCUs to allow those under protection to be referred to a different area, which can be a good way of reducing the risk of them being harmed. Forces therefore do not need to retain a protected persons' service; they only need the ability to identify a person who may be at risk of serious harm and refer them to the UKPPS.

ROCUs also support people at risk of harm but who either do not quite meet the criteria for full 'protected person' status,³⁷ or who decline the offer of protection – perhaps because they prefer to avoid the disruption that witness protection often necessarily entails, or in some cases because a victim or witness may also be a criminal who is unwilling to engage with the criminal justice system. This is highly complex and specialist work which is carried out by experienced and capable professionals. It is critical both to protect people from being harmed, and also to support victims and witnesses in order to ensure that they give evidence in court which can help to secure convictions.

³⁷ Protected person status is defined in the Serious and Organised Crime Prevention Act 2005, section 82, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/15/section/82

6. Preventing serious and organised crime

This section of the report examines:

- how effectively ROCUs deter people from committing serious and organised crime; and
- how well ROCUs communicate with the public about serious and organised crime.

Main findings

- ROCUs could assume a more active role in preventing serious and organised crime and managing organised criminals while they are in prison to reduce re-offending.
- ROCUs are starting to communicate more effectively with the public, but there is scope for further improvement to ensure that communities are aware of successful operations and learn more about how to increase protection from organised crime.

Deterrence

ROCUs were created as – and largely remain – ‘pursue-focused’ organisations. That is to say, the majority of their effort falls within the ‘pursue’ strand of the government’s *Serious and Organised Crime Strategy*, which includes the disruption, investigation and prosecution of those who commit organised criminal offences. This ‘pursue’ philosophy is engrained in the culture and working practices of ROCUs, and rightly forms a core part of their activity. Yet prevention is increasingly part of how ROCUs manage organised crime groups as well as their longer-term regional strategies for tackling serious and organised crime. There is scope for ROCUs to build on this by assuming wider responsibilities for preventing serious and organised crime, as well as responding when it occurs.

There are a number of ways in which ROCUs can help to prevent serious and organised crime, for example by providing messages to communities and businesses about how to make it more difficult for cyber-criminals to attack computer systems, hack into email accounts or steal personal data. HMIC also found positive examples of ROCUs helping to prevent and reduce fraud being committed by organised criminals posing as police officers or bank workers in order to persuade people to hand over credit card details and cash.

Those who commit serious and organised crime are rarely first-time offenders; the vast majority will already have committed crime. It is therefore vital that ROCUs as well as forces adopt a 'lifetime' approach to the management of offenders. This means implementing a plan to deal with the behaviour of organised criminals and mitigate its effects before, during and after a prison sentence. In other words, the responsibility of investigators to manage offenders does not stop at the point where a criminal charge or conviction is secured, but continues over a prolonged period of time to prevent re-offending.

A range of specific powers can be used by the police to restrict the movement or activity of organised criminals. For example, Financial Reporting Orders and enforcement of confiscation orders can prevent organised criminals from being able to access or move the money they need to perpetrate further crimes. Similarly, Serious Crime Prevention Orders can be used to impose a variety of measures designed to limit the ability of organised criminals to re-offend, such as restrictions on movement or association with others. A breach of this order is a criminal offence, although monitoring this can be resource-intensive for forces. There is an opportunity for ROCUs to assume an expanded role in this field to ensure that high-risk offenders are being properly managed and prevented from re-offending when they are released.

Communicating with the public

Serious and organised crime is not often the subject of public debate. By its nature it can be invisible to most communities, who may only experience the indirect results at a local level. For example, drug importation is not normally witnessed directly by members of the public, although many communities express concern about street level drug dealing and the threat it poses to public safety and social cohesion.

HMIC found that ROCUs take different approaches to public communication. Many now use social media platforms such as Twitter to provide advice to the public, for example on how to increase protection from cyber-crime, to encourage the reporting of online fraud, and to communicate some of their biggest success stories. Some ROCUs such as TITAN have a strong 'brand' and highly visible media presence, while others including EMSOU and the London ROCU have little or no public profile. Either of these approaches can work effectively, provided that the public receive messages about serious and organised crime in a way that balances the importance of reassuring and informing communities with the need to avoid unnecessary scaremongering or exposure of policing tactics.

The fact that some ROCUs' core purpose and identity are not always clearly defined poses problems in terms of communicating with the public and even 'marketing' themselves to their constituent forces. In some forces, staff are not aware that a ROCU exists – or of what it can offer. This is the case for example in London, where the ROCU's identity is weak in comparison to that of the MPS, even among its

constituent forces. EMSOU also keeps a low public profile, although this is a more deliberate strategy designed to ensure that policing tactics are not exposed and also to ensure that constituent forces receive credit for successful operations as the 'public face' of policing in the region. But all ROCUs could do more to ensure that the public understands their considerable value and impact.

Case study – TITAN

The North West ROCU (TITAN) uses simple, bold presentation on its website to communicate the results it has achieved to the public.



Case study – TITAN

The North West ROCU (TITAN) website also contains videos offering protective advice.

PROTECT YOURSELF

A series of videos aimed at protecting you from fraudsters, cyber criminals and those who might seek to use the internet to harm our children.



PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

[READ MORE](#)



PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS

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CYBER ALERTS AND ADVICE

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FRAUD ADVICE

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7. National policing arrangements

This section of the report briefly explores the role of ROCUs in relation to *The Strategic Policing Requirement* (SPR), including:

- the intelligence support provided by ROCUs to help forces to understand SPR threats;
- the national assurance and testing procedures in which ROCUs participate; and
- the provision of specialist training and skills development within ROCUs.

Main findings

- ROCUs could assume much more responsibility for testing national preparedness to deal with threats such as cyber-crime.
- ROCUs are 'natural homes' for harnessing and sharing innovation, as well as the anticipation of future threats; this work should become a prominent part of their remit.
- The recruitment and retention of staff present significant difficulties for ROCUs, and the national co-ordination of specialist police career pathways needs to improve.

The Strategic Policing Requirement

HMIC has reported previously on the arrangements which police forces have in place to ensure that they can fulfil the national policing responsibilities specified in *The Strategic Policing Requirement* (SPR).³⁸ HMIC inspections in autumn 2015 will revisit this subject at a force level. Police forces' responsibilities under the SPR include working alongside fire and ambulance services to respond to civil emergencies such as flooding, loaning officers to other forces dealing with large scale public events and tackling serious terrorist or cyber incidents. The SPR is primarily aimed at forces, but ROCUs also have an important part to play since the SPR specifies serious and organised crime, cyber-crime and child sexual abuse as national threats.

³⁸ *The Strategic Policing Requirement: An inspection of the arrangements that police forces have in place to meet the Strategic Policing Requirement*, HMIC, 2014

The role of ROCUs can encompass threat assessment, specialist training and skills development or national exercises designed to give agencies the chance to practise working together in preparation for a genuine incident.

Threat assessment and preparedness

As discussed in chapter four, ROCUs have improved their ability to assess threats such as child sexual exploitation, and begun to help forces develop their understanding of these complex national threats. This work is linked to the discussion of structures and capabilities in chapter three of this report, since it makes sense for specialist threat assessment capability to be built once at a regional level rather than in every force. Further development of this capability should allow ROCUs to play a more substantial part in anticipating and preparing for future threats.

HMIC found that almost all ROCUs currently play only a narrow role in testing national preparedness to deal with SPR threats, despite being well placed to do so. ROCUs conduct or participate in very few exercises to test the aggregate capability or preparedness of ROCUs, forces and the NCA. HMIC found that only one ROCU (ERSOU) carries out regular exercises. Although this is not a formal responsibility for ROCUs, they have the equipment and experience to either lead or participate in cyber, CSE, counter-terrorist or other exercises. These kinds of exercises can improve the ability of policing and other agencies to work together in order to tackle crime which crosses regional boundaries or which is of a multi-faceted nature – perhaps an international OCG involved in human trafficking and forced labour, but also using cyber methods in order to evade detection or launder the proceeds of crime.

Training and skills development

ROCUs generally ensure that their staff receive the specialist training that they need in order to carry out their work. HMIC found that investigators are well qualified and experienced, as are staff working in regional intelligence functions. However, recruitment and retention difficulties affect all ROCUs, which are staffed by officers and staff on secondment from their constituent forces. Some of these difficulties relate to factors such as regional geography, which can mean that force personnel are reluctant to join a regional unit if it will necessitate a long commute. ROCUs are reluctant to guarantee medium or long term job security for police staff as the annual funding cycle makes it more difficult to predict whether or not these posts will be retained. Other factors are more complex, for example in cyber-crime, where recruitment and retention difficulties are particularly acute for all ROCUs. HMIC found that some ROCUs have started to think more innovatively about how to access the cyber skills that they need – for example by working with local universities. This helps ROCUs to avoid a situation where they invest substantial

amounts in training new recruits, only for them to leave soon after for larger salaries on offer in the private sector. HMIC was concerned by reports from ROCUs that some forces refuse to advertise ROCU vacancies for fear of losing their most capable officers and staff. While this fear is understandable, the system as a whole must allow for the movement of officers and staff between forces and ROCUs in a way which supports the development of regional capabilities without leaving forces unable to meet local needs.

HMIC found that the longer term skills development and career pathways provided by ROCUs need to improve. This is not just a problem for ROCUs, but one which they must address with both forces and the NCA. Officers and staff tend to stay in ROCUs for several years, and this often means that their 'home' force misses out on the skills which they have gained. HMIC found that there is little active management or career planning to ensure that experienced operatives move between ROCUs and forces. HMIC was concerned to find that there have also been occasions when NCA recruitment drives have been poorly co-ordinated with ROCUs. In one region this led to almost an entire team of recently recruited cyber-crime investigators leaving to join the National Cyber Crime Unit. The ROCU had to rebuild its cyber capability virtually from scratch. While the need at the time may have been most acute at the national level, it is symptomatic of poor co-ordination that one part of the national policing network is impoverishing another when it comes to the recruitment of those with the essential specialist skills needed to tackle cyber-crime effectively.

The lack of consistency between ROCUs has compounded some of these capability and talent difficulties, and there is no clear national approach to support all ROCUs (and forces) in filling skills gaps. Better planning and management would allow ROCUs to play a more structured part in the personal development of staff, for the collective benefit of the police service and the public it serves. It could also encourage the exploration and introduction of new 'expert' capabilities of the sort described in chapter three of this report, which will help to ensure the continued effectiveness of ROCUs in the future.

8. Conclusion

Regional organised crime units (ROCUs) form a vital part of the national policing network. They have evolved and grown over the last few years into highly specialist and capable entities which provide important and effective services to police forces. Officers and staff working in ROCUs are among the most highly skilled and experienced in the police service. Working with partner agencies – once the exception in the field of serious and organised crime – is becoming the norm. And there are signs that ROCUs are beginning to improve their understanding of newer threats such as cyber-crime and child sexual exploitation.

Although much of their work takes place out of the public eye, ROCUs help to protect communities and businesses from some of the most serious and organised criminals operating in the UK and beyond. ROCUs also function as a critical link between police forces and the National Crime Agency (NCA). The value of ROCUs is evident, and they must continue to play a substantial, long-term role in tackling serious and organised crime.

It has taken a considerable amount of time and effort for regional policing capabilities to be established. This challenging but worthwhile project has demanded sustained energy and commitment from police forces, ROCUs and the senior officers and support staff responsible for leading and co-ordinating the ROCU development programme.

These efforts are to be commended, and provide a strong foundation for the future development of regional policing capabilities. But there is much more to do. Some ROCUs are considerably more advanced than others, and several lack a clear purpose and identity. Some have yet to implement all of the functions which were part of the original ROCU design in 2012 and now constitute a minimum expectation. This is partly because some forces have been reluctant to commit fully to the regionalisation of specialist services. ROCUs' specialist resources are not being used consistently where they can have the greatest effect, and opportunities to make sustained progress against organised criminality are consequently being missed.

There is now a real opportunity to build on the sound platform that ROCUs provide for regional collaboration, but in an age of austerity we cannot wait years for this to evolve. A shared plan needs to be developed quickly to take ROCUs to the next stage and enhance the provision of shared capability. Continued visible leadership and oversight of this plan will be vital, and must encompass police forces, the NCA and the Home Office as well as the ROCUs.

For the full potential of ROCUs to be harnessed, they need to be part of a co-ordinated system that works from the neighbourhood to the national. That means introducing greater consistency in the way that ROCUs are structured, and how their activity is directed. It also means enhancing co-ordination with other bodies which

form part of the national policing network – principally the NCA and the national counter-terrorist policing network. Finally, it entails a progressive and innovative approach to the development of new policing capabilities which will help ROCUs to further develop and sustain their ability to protect the public from serious and organised crime in the future.

Next steps

HMIC has conducted inspections of all forces in England and Wales during autumn 2015. These included an assessment of how effectively each force tackles serious and organised crime, including its national responsibilities under *The Strategic Policing Requirement*. The initial findings from ROCU inspections have informed these force-level assessments. At a future date, HMIC will re-inspect ROCUs to assess progress against the recommendations made in this report.

9. Recommendations

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

By 1 April 2016, all regional organised crime units (ROCUs) - except London - should have in place the '13 capabilities' identified within the ROCU development programme [see Annex A for full list of capabilities].

Recommendation 2

By 30 June 2016, the constituent forces of the London ROCU should ensure that they have reliable access to the '13 capabilities' identified within the ROCU development programme [see Annex A for full list of capabilities].

Recommendation 3

By 30 June 2016, every police force in England and Wales should publish an action plan that sets out in detail what steps it will take to make maximum use of the ROCU capabilities, minimise duplication at force level, and ensure that the use of shared ROCU resources are prioritised between regional forces. This action plan should be developed:

- in consultation with police and crime commissioners, ROCUs and the ROCU executive board;
- with regard to both local force priorities (in particular, as specified in the relevant police and crime plan) and National Crime Agency (NCA) priorities; and
- with regard to the other recommendations contained in this report.

Recommendation 4

By 30 June 2016, the ROCU executive board – working with forces, the NCA and the Home Office – should produce a plan for the development of ROCUs, which includes a clear statement of shared purpose, and ROCUs should thereafter implement it.

Recommendation 5

By 30 June 2016, the national police lead for serious and organised crime should work with the Assistant Commissioner with national counter-terrorist responsibilities to produce a plan for introducing joint regional management arrangements where this is appropriate and applicable, with the designated assistant or deputy chief constable for each ROCU taking management

responsibility for both serious and organised crime and counter-terrorist policing.

Recommendation 6

By 30 June 2016, ROCUs, counter-terrorist units (CTUs), counter-terrorist intelligence units (CTIUs) and the NCA should produce a long term plan for ensuring they are co-located wherever possible, and thereafter implement it.

Recommendation 7

By 31 March 2016, the Home Office – working with the ROCU executive board – should have assessed the benefits and viability of providing ROCUs with a three to five-year funding settlement that puts them in a position to make long-term investment decisions which support the development of efficient and effective regional capabilities.

Recommendation 8

By 30 June 2016, all ROCUs, forces and the NCA should adopt a common approach to the assessment of serious and organised criminal threats.

Recommendation 9

By 30 June 2016, the ROCU executive board should produce a plan for improving the Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) operating model to enable large scale intelligence-sharing between government departments, agencies and the private sector, and this plan should thereafter be implemented.

Recommendation 10

Beginning immediately, ROCUs, the NCA, National Offender Management Service and the national counter-terrorism network should exchange information routinely about all organised crime group members serving prison sentences to ensure the risks they pose are properly managed.

Recommendation 11

By 30 June 2016, ROCUs should assume responsibility for organised crime group mapping on behalf of their constituent forces, working closely with their constituent forces to ensure that this process is informed by local intelligence.

Glossary

advanced undercover officer	officer who has passed both the Foundation Undercover Training and Assessment Course and the National Undercover Training and Assessment Course
chief officer	in police forces outside London: assistant chief constable, deputy chief constable and chief constable; in the Metropolitan Police: commander, deputy assistant commissioner, assistant commissioner, deputy commissioner and commissioner; in the City of London Police: commander, assistant commissioner, commissioner; includes a member of police staff who holds equivalent status to a police officer of these ranks
collaboration	arrangement under which two or more parties work together in the interests of their greater efficiency or effectiveness in order to achieve common or complementary objectives; collaboration arrangements extend to co-operation between police forces and with other entities in the public, private and voluntary sectors
confidential unit	organisational unit responsible for managing the sharing of protectively marked information
cyber-crime	crime that involves the use of a computer
cyber-dependent crimes	crimes which can only be committed using computers, computer networks or other forms of information communication technology
cyber-enabled crimes	crimes which can be conducted on or offline, but online they may take place at unprecedented scale and speed
foundation undercover officer	undercover officer who is trained to act in a limited supporting role without necessarily having specific commodity or criminal knowledge
malware	a computer program designed specifically to damage or disrupt a computer, mobile device, computer systems or computer network and can include programs designed to gain unauthorised access to data held on these devices
National Crime Agency	body established in 2013, responsible for tackling organised crime, border security, fraud and cyber-crime, and protecting children and young people

NCCU	National Cyber Crime Unit, part of the National Crime Agency
OCG	organised crime group: a group of people committing organised crime together
online undercover officer	appropriately trained law enforcement officer, deployed on an authorised investigation on the internet
regional organised crime unit	there is a ROCU in each of the National Police Chiefs' Council regions in England and Wales; in eight of the regions there is one region-wide ROCU. In the north east region the ROCU is split into two sub-regional units; ROCUs provide capability to investigate organised crime across police force boundaries
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000	statute the principal purpose of which is to ensure that covert investigatory powers are used in compliance with Article 8, European Convention on Human Rights (the right to respect for private and family life); it requires that authorisations are both necessary and proportionate to one of the legitimate aims set out in Article 8(2), European Convention on Human Rights, which permits interference by a public authority with privacy rights
RIPA	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
ROCU	regional organised crime unit
serious and organised crime	planned, co-ordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis; their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain; includes drug trafficking, human trafficking, and organised illegal immigration, high value fraud and other financial crimes, counterfeiting, organised acquisitive crime and cyber-crime; organised crime is characterised by violence or the threat of violence and by the use of bribery and corruption
SPR	Strategic Policing Requirement
Strategic Policing Requirement	document published in July 2012 (and updated in March 2015) which sets out the Home Secretary's view of the national threats for which the police must prepare

Annex A – ROCU capabilities

ROCU capabilities: Phase one (2012 - 2013)

1. **Regional intelligence units** to gather, analyse and disseminate intelligence relating to organised criminal activity which affects several forces across a region.
2. **Confidential intelligence units** which perform a similar function for sensitive and covertly obtained intelligence.
3. **Prison intelligence units** to manage organised criminals serving prison sentences, co-ordinate the gathering of intelligence from prisons and have direct relationships with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
4. **Regional asset recovery teams** to conduct financial investigations and recover assets obtained through criminal means.
5. **Regional fraud teams** to investigate organised criminals whose fraudulent activity may be their principal vulnerability from a law enforcement perspective.
6. **Cyber-crime teams** specialising in tackling more serious types of cyber-crime such as distributed denial of service attacks.

ROCU capabilities: Phase two (2013 - 2014)

7. **Undercover policing** encompassing both foundation and advanced levels of support. Foundation undercover police officers are trained to act in a supporting role. Advanced undercover police officers are able to undertake more complex investigations
8. **Specialist surveillance** which is the covert installation of audio or video recording equipment in order to gather evidence of criminal activity. This is distinct from 'conventional' or 'human' surveillance, which involves a police officer covertly observing or following a suspect for the same purpose.
9. **The Protected Persons Service** (formerly Witness Protection) to provide those at risk of serious harm with specialist protection such as re-location and identity changes.
10. **Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN)** co-ordinators in each ROCU to provide forces and ROCU investigators with access to intelligence held by partner agencies.

11. **Operational security advisers** to offer expertise to ROCUs and forces relating to the legality, integrity and standards relating to covert law enforcement activities.
12. **E-forensics** services to analyse computers, mobile phones and other digital devices in order support investigations by obtaining evidence of organised criminality.
13. **Asset Confiscation and Enforcement Teams** to enforce confiscation orders issued to convicted criminals by courts. These orders require the repayment of money which has been acquired through illegal means.

ROCU capabilities: Phase three (future development)

14. **Operational investigative teams** of trained investigating officers and surveillance specialists were originally part of the ROCU design, but Chief Constables did not endorse their inclusion as a 'core capability'. All but two of the ROCUs have established operational teams to collect intelligence and conduct enforcement activity against organised crime groups.
15. **International intelligence** and in particular, ROCU staff based within Europol, the European Union's law enforcement agency, to provide ROCUs with a means of accessing European intelligence.
16. **Disruption teams** to innovate and continually develop new ways in which ROCUs can disrupt organised criminality. The disruption team model is currently being piloted by EMSOU.
17. A **digital laboratory** which can explore new, specialist methods of tackling crime which require a specialist or digital response.
18. A clear role for ROCUs in relation to **child sexual exploitation**, specifically focusing on intelligence co-ordination and the use of new online tactics. CSE co-ordinators are being recruited in each ROCU as part of this project.
19. **Organised crime group mapping** teams to place organised crime groups identified by forces into nationally standardised 'bands' depending on the threat that they pose to the public.

Annex B – ROCU inspection methodology

Before fieldwork commenced, all ten ROCUs were asked by HMIC to complete a questionnaire specifying which capabilities they provide, and to which forces. This questionnaire also required ROCUs to provide information relating to staffing numbers, co-location arrangements with other agencies and certain operational practices.

ROCUs also submitted documents to HMIC setting out their assessment of regional threats, their approach to tackling those threats and the formal collaborative agreements in place between their constituent forces. Organised crime group mapping data compiled by ROCUs was collected and analysed.

HMIC inspectors visited all ten ROCUs and conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups over two to three days with the chief officers responsible for each ROCU, senior managers, detectives, intelligence staff and partner agency representatives. In total, over 120 documents were examined and in excess of 200 police officers, police staff and partners were interviewed either individually or as part of focus groups.

HMIC inspectors carried out one detailed assessment in each ROCU of an investigation file to see how effectively an organised crime group had been tackled.³⁹ In addition, one management meeting was observed in each region to examine how well threats are understood, and how resources are assigned in order to respond to those threats.

³⁹ This was not possible in two of the ROCUs – London and the West Midlands – as neither conducts its own investigations.