

## An overview of the work of the Serious Organised Crime (SOC) Taskforce

### Introduction

The Scottish Government and its partners on the SOC Taskforce are fully committed to tackling serious organised crime and reducing the harm it causes to our communities.

The Taskforce was established in 2007 and had its first meeting in October 2007. Its initial task was to oversee the development of the first Serious Organised Crime Strategy: *Letting Our Communities Flourish* which was published in June 2009. Membership of the Taskforce was largely restricted to law enforcement agencies but has evolved to include other organisations and sectors. The 2009 strategy introduced the four 'D' strands which aim to:

- Divert** people from becoming involved in SOC and using its products;
- Deter** SOCGs by supporting private, public and third sector organisations to protect themselves and each other;
- Detect**, identify and prosecute those involved in SOC; and
- Disrupt** SOCGs.

Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs) exist to maximise their members' wealth and sphere of influence. They will utilise any means to achieve this and are not bound by rules or civic sensitivities. They look to exploit every opportunity that presents itself targeting the most vulnerable in society as has been evidenced during the pandemic where they have exploited individuals' concerns and the various support schemes developed by government.

The multi-partnership approach in Scotland to tackling SOC is set out in the SOC Strategy and overseen by the SOC Taskforce. The latest Progress Report was published in March 2020 and is available here: [SOC-Task-Force-Progress-Report-2020.pdf \(socaware.scot\)](https://www.socaware.scot/SOC-Task-Force-Progress-Report-2020.pdf)

### The Taskforce

A number of organisations (see list below) are represented on the SOC Taskforce and is bolstered by a wider range of organisations working across the Strategy's four strands. The Taskforce meets three times a year.

Members:

- Cabinet Secretary for Justice and veterans (Chair)
- Lord Advocate
- Solicitor General
- Police Scotland (*DCC Malcolm Graham is Strand lead for Detect*)
- COPFS (*Stephen McGowan is Strand lead for Disrupt*)
- National Crime Agency
- Scottish Prison Service
- Third Sector *representative (Paul Carberry, Action for Children, is Strand lead for Divert)*
- SOLACE (*Robert Steenson of North Lanarkshire Council is Strand lead for Deter*)

- COSLA
- NHS Scotland
- Border Force
- HMRC
- Private Sector representative (*Alasdair MacFarlane of RBS*)
- HMICS

## **The Strategy**

The Strategy was revised in 2015 and is currently in the process of a further refresh. While the aims and objectives remain broadly the same, the fundamental issue to be addressed is the potential gap between intelligence and tasking (particularly in the preventative strands of Deter and Divert where the targets are more nebulous and the action required may be spread more widely across a range of organisations whose functions may not primarily be about tackling SOC).

This overarching strategy will set the framework for what we are seeking to achieve and encourage coherent, joined up activity to deliver against the aims and objectives.

## **SOCG picture in Scotland**

Latest assessments suggest that while the geographical spread of SOCGs operating in Scotland remains much as before (with a majority located in the West of Scotland), these groups operate across country boundaries and, in some cases, globally (SOCGs based elsewhere also operate in Scotland).

Drug trafficking remains the largest criminal market in Scotland, with a majority of SOCGs involved in drug crime. Two thirds of SOCGs are involved in multiple crime types, including drugs, violence, money laundering, fraud, human trafficking, counterfeiting, the illicit puppy trade, rogue trading and environmental crime.

SOCGs are involved in the use of seemingly legitimate businesses including pubs, restaurants, shops, garages, nail bars, hairdressers, construction, and property development. The Taskforce has developed guidance (<https://socaware.scot/enforcement/>) which highlights indicators where SOC may be present. Guidance has been provided to local authorities on exploitation of businesses by SOCGs. A small number of local authorities have also utilised the licensing regime to require nail bars to be licensed.

## **Examples of current Taskforce activity**

- The Taskforce is developing a proof of concept pilot to test the potential for establishing partnerships to offer rapid support and advice to areas which are identified as having a particular SOC-related challenge. This will focus on harnessing a range of multi-agency inputs to realise our collective goals to reduce harm, prevent exploitation and build resilience at all levels.
- Human Trafficking is a priority area for action. The Taskforce agreed at its most recent meeting to consider the interface between policy on victims of human trafficking and serious organised crime and to provide leadership in identifying

areas where the Taskforce could work collaboratively to tackle human trafficking.

- The Taskforce previously established a Short life Working Group on Information Sharing. The group concluded that there was a clear and evolving problem with SOCG involvement in public sector contracts and that the main barrier to improving information sharing within public sector procurement was the absence of a clear legal basis for using police intelligence to exclude SOC-related bids. A range of action is ongoing including analysis to determine the current scale of the problem, development of resources and training materials for public sector bodies, and exploring the requirement for legislative change.
- The Scottish Government funds and runs a small grant scheme (£150,000 in total) on behalf of the Taskforce, providing grants of up to £10,000 for projects that could be utilised to help support communities in the fight against SOC. Applications are open to any Taskforce member and must be supported by the relevant strand lead. All projects must contribute to the aims set out in the SOC Strategy. Projects supported so far include the creation of a focused training programme that will be available for every Scottish public sector professional involved in procurement. The training aims to raise awareness on how to spot, deal with, discourage and reduce criminal activity in the contract and supply chain management process.