

Serious and Organised Crime

Purpose of report

For information and discussion.

Summary

Charles Farr, Director General of the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism at the Home Office will speak to Councillors' Forum about serious and organised crime issues and the government's reworking of the organised crime strategy 'Local to Global: Reducing the Risk from Organised Crime'. It is an opportunity for members to raise any issues for local government.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the presentation and discuss issues for local government.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Serious and Organised Crime

Background

1. Organised crime has a national dimension but it also causes harm locally. It is felt across neighbourhoods – both urban and rural – through a wide range of activities including illegal drugs and bootleg alcohol supply, violence, illegal gun possession, gangs and internet fraud. Because organised crime transcends boundaries, it must be tackled by local policing, strongly grounded in communities, but also by police forces and other agencies working collaboratively across force and institutional boundaries.
2. The overall cost to the UK from organised crime is estimated as between £20 billion to £40 billion a year. It involves around 38,000 individuals operating as part of around 6,000 criminal gangs, about half of which are involved in the illegal drugs trade.
3. Organised crime poses a particular threat through its scale and organisation, international connections, willingness to use violence and intimidation, the corruption that often results from it, and its links with legitimate businesses often as a means of laundering money. Organised crime groups operating in the UK involved in drugs trafficking, supply and use of firearms, cyber-crime, fraud, people trafficking, money laundering, organised acquisitive crime (such as metal theft) and child sexual exploitation. As a result organised crime will now be treated as a national security risk.
4. The Government's Strategic Policing Requirement sets out the national threats that the police must address in strategic terms and all forces in England and Wales and Police and Crime Commissioners must have regard to this when drawing up their Police and Crime Plan. Subject to the passage of the Crime and Courts Bill, the new National Crime Agency will be fully operational by December 2013 and will tackle organised crime; strengthen our borders; fight fraud and cyber crime; protect children and young people. It will build on the work of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and will incorporate some of the functions of the National Policing Improvement Agency.
5. In May, the Home Secretary transferred responsibility for serious and organised crime within the Home Office to the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT). At the same time OSCT were asked to rework the government's organised crime strategy 'Local to Global: Reducing the Risk from Organised Crime', which was last updated in 2011. As well as proposing the establishment of the National Crime Agency, this earlier document placed an emphasis on preventative work alongside a focus on enforcement activity, and a section on improving intelligence gathering and enhanced international co-operation.

The review of the Strategy

6. OSCT's aim is to develop a strategy to tackle organised crime that is clear, practical and effective. They are looking to bring central and local government together with law enforcement and security agencies, the private sector and communities. The counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) will provide a model for the structure of the new strategy in setting out the threats serious and organised crime pose to the country.
7. In developing the strategy OSCT want to include initiatives and programmes that meet the needs of organisations and bodies at the forefront of the work against organised crime. Senior Officials are therefore keen to hear from a wide range of partners about

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what the new strategy should contain so that there is a clearly defined set of objectives and programmes.

The role of local government

8. OSCT feels that the relationships they have built up with local authorities as part of their work under CONTEST has been one of the reasons for success in delivery of this strategy. The impact of organised crime on councils and the communities they serve is more widespread, so the OSCT would like to explore how they can work with councils, how any good practice can be identified and circulated, and what can be done to assist councils in their work that relates to tackling organised crime.

Biography

9. Charles Farr took up his post as Director General of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) in July 2007. Charles joined the diplomatic service in 1985 and has served at British embassies in South Africa and Jordan. Since 2003, he has held a number of senior posts in Whitehall dealing with security and counter-terrorism.