

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025**

**SOC, Exploitation and ROCU**  
**Presented by: ACC Ian Parnell**

### **Cover Report**

#### **1. Police and Crime Plan**

This paper provides an update on how the West Midlands Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCUWM) makes a significant contribution to the national effort to prevent and tackle Serious and Organised Crime (SOC). It is the first report of its type into the Accountability and Governance Board (AGB), will outline key performance over the past financial year, and highlight how the ROCU works with regional police forces and national agencies to deliver a coordinated response across the region.

#### **2. Achievements and Challenges**

##### Achievements

- **Disruption volumes**

For the financial year 24/25 ROCUWM recorded 2929 disruptions against SOC across threats including drugs, firearms, modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), organised immigration crime (OIC), serious and organised acquisitive crime (SOAC), child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE), economic and cyber-crime. This represented a 17% increase on figures for FY 23/24.

Of particular note, this included 168 major and moderate CSAE disruptions (a 47% increase on FY 23/24), 31 MSHT disruptions (a 35% increase), 134 major and moderate drugs disruptions (a 19% increase) and 53 major and moderate economic crime disruptions (a 43% increase).

- **Criminal justice outcomes and seizures**

ROCU recorded 617 arrests of SOC nominals over the financial year, with 260 individuals charged with offences and 290 convicted at court over the year, with total sentences of over 1650 years.

In terms of seizures, ROCU were involved in the recovery of 42 firearms over the year and 683 rounds of ammunition, plus 379kg of class A drugs.

A total of 677 adults and children were safeguarded as a result of ROCU activity.

The regional economic crime unit recorded strong financial figures for FY 24/25, including £9.69m in confiscation orders, £2.83m in initial account freezing orders and £1.7m in forfeited assets.

- Support to force SOC activity

The 2023 HMICFRS inspection of the West Midlands region highlighted one area for improvement as being for the ROCU and its constituent forces to improve how they work together to tackle SOC.

Effective daily and monthly regional meeting structures within the region ensure a clear process for tasking into the ROCU and improved connectivity and understanding of the threat landscape across the region, meaning forces are better placed to make requests for ROCU support, and the ROCU has a greater understanding of the threats being managed at a force level to be able to proactively offer support.

Quarterly ROCU 'discovery days' are held across the regional forces with senior investigating officers, local responsible officers and others involved in policing SOC to raise awareness of the suite of capabilities in the ROCU, tasking processes and how the forces and ROCU can work more closely together.

The above measures have contributed to increased demand for support into the ROCU in FY 24/25, with a 35% rise in resource requests for ROCU capabilities from forces and other agencies when compared with FY 23/24.

- Coordination role

ROCUM also plays a key coordination role in the regional response to SOC threats and coordinating national intensification events.

Examples of this include:

- The Turkish top venting blank firer amnesty in February 2025. ROCUM coordinated a consistent regional response to raise awareness of the amnesty and engage with both individual purchasers (where known) and retailers to remove weapons from circulation, which could be readily converted into live and viable firearms. This resulted in the West Midlands region having the highest number of surrenders outside of the Metropolitan Police Service.
- Op MACHINIZE, a national intensification targeting barbershops and other cash intensive businesses in March 2025. ROCUM developed intelligence and supported forces with the targeting of locations within the region, resulting in combined account freezing orders by ROCU and regional forces of nearly £1m, by far the highest amount of any region in the country.

## Challenges

- Funding streams

There are a high number of independent national funding streams for certain roles / teams within the unit, which are on a fixed term basis. This poses challenges for long term capability development and risks a higher turnover of staff and officers due to a perceived lack of job security.

- Competing demands (national to local)

ROCU's sit between the National Crime Agency (NCA) and local police forces. Demand into the ROCU is therefore disproportionately affected both by changing demands placed on the NCA and demands placed on local forces, which can pose considerable challenges in terms of managing demand for resources. This, coupled with national tasking directives and national intensifications (such as those highlighted above) require clear lines of communication between organisations and robust tasking processes to manage demand.

One example of the increasing demand in recent years has been the importation of drugs via the postal system, so called 'fast parcels'. This has created significant demand as a result of changing tactics by organised criminals, with over 6500 parcels being intercepted destined for the West Midlands region in 2024.

### 3. Actions undertaken

The above challenges in relation to demand are met through a robust structure of meetings and tasking processes. Every month a regional tasking meeting is held with key stakeholders from all regional forces and partner agencies to ensure the most significant SOC threats are managed appropriately and ROCU resources allocated as required. Quarterly there are thematic delivery groups for each SOC threat area, offering an opportunity to escalate issues into national forums where appropriate.

Daily meetings are held with key force representatives to discuss immediate tactical issues and the NCA embed a liaison officer within the ROCU to facilitate links between the two agencies.

### 4. Future Work

There is an increase in focus on vulnerability threats in the ROCU and across regional forces in FY 25/26, targeting those involved in human trafficking, organised immigration, criminal exploitation, child abuse and other SOC offending linked to high harm, such as courier fraud.

In addition, drugs threats are focusing on those drugs causing the greatest harm to communities, such as heroin.

This work involves a range of different ROCU capabilities through intelligence, undercover policing, investigation teams and nationally funded functions such as the Tackling Organised Exploitation (TOEx) team.

As highlighted in the key successes section of this report, performance in the vulnerabilities space improved considerably in FY 24/25. A key challenge this FY is to maintain disruption / performance levels year on year despite reductions in funding and headcount within the unit.

## 5. Financial Implications

The ROCU budget for FY 25/26 and the breakdown of force contributions is shown below:

	25/26 Budget
<b>West Midlands</b>	£16,952,200
<b>Warwickshire</b>	£2,528,000
<b>West Mercia</b>	£5,204,700
<b>Staffordshire</b>	£5,056,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£29,740,900</b>

## 6. Legal Implications

None identified.

## 7. Equality Implications

Data as at May 2025 for the ROCU shows:

Gender breakdown:

Type	Male	Female
Officer	72.3%	27.7%
Staff	44.9%	55.1%

Ethnicity breakdown:

Type	White British	White other	Ethnic minority groups	Prefer not to say	Not stated
Officer	72.1%	1.0%	9.1%	1.7%	16.0%
Staff	77.2%	5.9%	8.1%	0.7%	8.1%
Other	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Disability breakdown:

Type	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Not stated
Officer	4.9%	56.5%	5.9%	32.6%
Staff	9.6%	64.0%	2.2%	24.3%
Other	0.0%	100%	0.0%	0.0%

ROCUWM has a diversity and inclusion lead and champions within each department to deliver the ROCU D&I strategy. Current focus in this area includes:

- Discovery days to increase diversity in undercover unit, this has included linking with various staff networks e.g. women in policy, BAPA, neurodiversity network

- Reviewing our working environment to ensure we are doing all we can to support those who are neurodivergent including break out spaces, noise levels and lighting
- Looking to review our recruitment policy in relation to all areas of diversity and inclusion

## 8. Background Report

### **How the force and WM ROCU tackle SOC and exploitation**

The Force and the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU) work in close partnership to combat Serious Organised Crime (SOC) and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE), adopting a coordinated '4P' whole-system approach (Pursue, Protect, Prevent, Prepare).

The ROCU has three strategic priorities, each supported by specific KPI's that support its commitment to protect communities. The first, Vulnerabilities focuses on safeguarding children and adults by increasing the number of CSAE disruptions and enhancing protective measures for those most at risk. The second, Commodities aims to reduce the availability of illegal firearms and controlled drugs through increased seizures, thereby preventing harm and protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Thirdly, Undermining the Economy seeks to strengthen resilience against criminal exploitation by increasing economic disruptions and promoting early intervention with a focus on directing young individuals towards positive pathways through the Cyber Choice Pathway, deterring them from entering criminality.

Following the HMICFRS thematic inspection into group-based child sexual exploitation, all regional forces produced CSE profiles, which were shared with the ROCU. Drawing on these profiles, along with findings from the national HYDRANT programme, the ROCU produced a regional overview and a national-to-local profile at the request of senior officers. This analysis was disseminated across the region.

In addition, ROCU produces a quarterly CSAE threat assessment, based on crime and intelligence reporting, Organised Crime Group (OCG) data, and SOC threat data. This document is shared widely and forms the basis of the threat briefing at the quarterly CSAE Thematic Delivery Group (TDG). The TDG owns and implements Strategic Action Plans (SAPs), deconflicting and aligning national plans with local priorities. Through coordinated engagement, the TDG ensures local perspectives inform national plans and policy, while delivering a unified response to CSAE using an identify, assess, respond approach to threats and risks.

ROCU has two specialist teams focused on safeguarding children and bringing offenders to justice:

1. Regional Undercover Unit (RUU) – Deploys operatives both online and in person to gather evidence and intelligence on CSE. These officers target group-based CSAE gangs despite the challenges of infiltration, aiming to identify offenders and safeguard children. From first contact with an offender, the goal is to secure arrest and charge as quickly as possible. The RUU also works closely with other technical teams to disrupt online CSAE activity and proactively target high-risk sex offenders.

2. Regional Crime Investigation Unit (RCIU) – Converts intelligence and evidence from undercover operations into material that operational teams can act upon, enabling arrests, charges, and safeguarding interventions.

In response to the HMICFRS 2024 report, ROCU has taken forward identified improvement areas. This includes holding quarterly Local Response Officer (LRO) discovery days which rotated across force areas in order to raise the awareness of ROCU's capabilities and build collaborative working. A dedicated SOC coordinator has been appointed, with forces identifying lead LROs to attend regional meetings, ensuring consistency in SOC approaches and sharing best practice.

To enhance operational planning, forces and ROCU are exploring the introduction of a digital 4P app to share and manage plans. Training is underway, IT leads are engaged, and 4P planning requirements are being embedded into regional tasking processes, with compliance reviewed at LRO briefings.

Recent work has focused on strengthening intelligence gathering in prisons to combat corruption, raising awareness of the MARSOC framework, and increasing referrals. ROCU is also implementing recommendations from the NPCC review of Serious Crime Prevention Orders, with a regional coordinator in place to support forces in managing and restricting SOC offenders effectively.

Through this multi-layered approach—intelligence-led profiling, specialist operational capability, regional coordination, and continual improvement—the Force and ROCU are delivering a joined-up, strategic, and operational response to SOC and CSAE across the region.

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