



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

19th November 2019

Police and Crime Plan Priority: Responding to National Threats

Title: National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS)

Presented by: Assistant Chief Constable Susan Southern

Purpose of paper

1. This paper compliments the NABIS 2019 Annual Report which is scheduled for public release in November 2019. The purpose of this report is to provide the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner assurance both that: a) NABIS is performing efficiently and effectively, and b) the supporting collaboration agreement is operating effectively. This paper is scheduled for discussion.

UK Inter-operability and Expertise

2. NABIS has direct control over two ballistic forensic hubs in Birmingham, hosted by West Midlands Police (WMP), and Manchester, hosted by Greater Manchester Police (GMP). In addition, ballistic forensic services are provided by the forensic labs in London (Metropolitan Police Service Firearms Forensic Unit (MPSFFU)), Glasgow (Scottish Police Authority (SPA)) and Belfast (Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)).
3. All sites utilise the NABIS Database to record ballistic items for submission to their respective lab and subsequently develop this into creating a rich firearms intelligence picture across the UK.
4. NABIS gathers intelligence from operations, searches, arrests and recoveries made by forces and LEAs daily, establishing new and emerging trends in firearms and associated ammunition, and has assisted the NCA in several firearms operations, helping to provide guidance and direction on forensic and ballistic intelligence expertise.

5. The newly established Head of Quality role leads on achieving industry-standard ISO accreditation in both forensic hubs through cooperative work with quality representatives within the host force forensic departments. Both forensic hubs are seeking accreditation to the new ISO 17025 (2017) standards, with Manchester an early adopter of the UK Forensic Regulator's codes of practice and Birmingham working towards the same standard this year.
6. Forensic staff offer assistance and act as a critical friend to forensic partners in the MPS, SPA and PSNI to assist in gaining ISO 17025 accreditation across all five sites offering ballistic forensic services. In addition, NABIS owns IBIS ballistic comparison equipment in the MPSFFU and has recently supported this unit in obtaining financial support to upgrade the IBIS equipment and other forensic equipment.

The Challenge Facing UK Policing

7. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that recorded offences involving firearms increased by 3% (to 6,684) in the year ending March 2019, compared with the previous year (6,492 offences) (see Fig. 1). These offences have seen rises over the last five years, but the rate of increase was slower over the last two years. Figures reported in the year ending December 2018 showed a small fall (2%) in the number of offences involving firearms, but this has not continued in the latest data.
8. NABIS also identified a rise in firearms discharges across the UK, with the highest number of firearms submissions being seen since 2010, supporting the information around the increase in threat. 2018/2019 saw a 5% increase nationally in the number of incidents involving firearms discharges against the previous reporting year, rising from 568 incidents in 2017/2018, to 594 incidents in 2018/2019. This represents the highest level of firearms discharges reported to NABIS in the decade since NABIS began reporting.

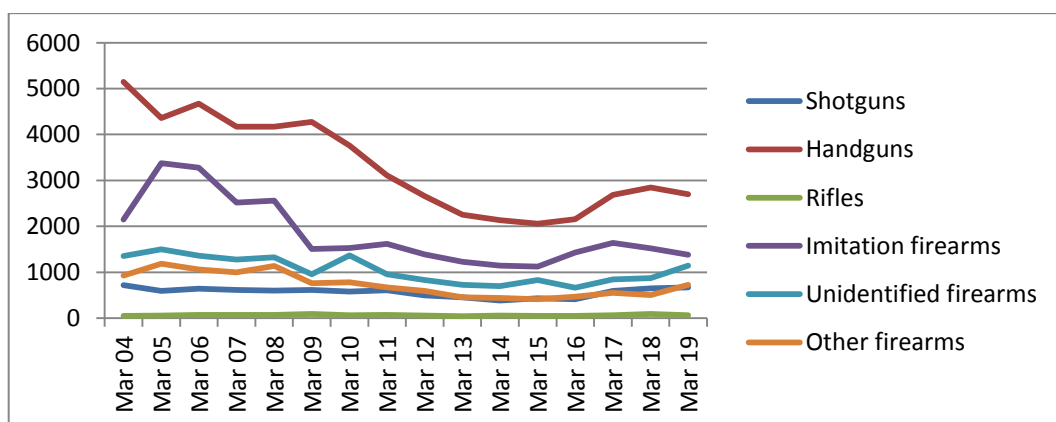
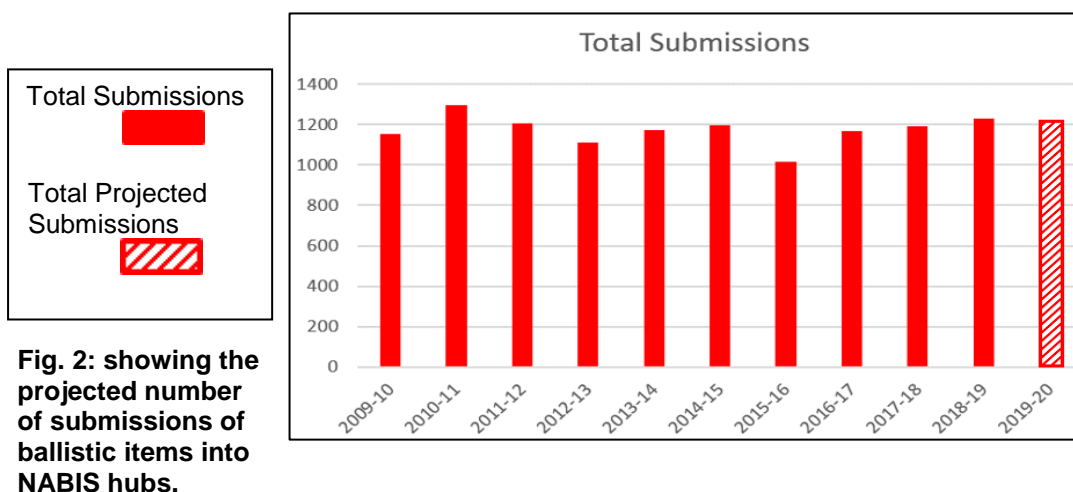


Fig 1. Extract from ONS Offences involving firearms showed a 3% rise in gun crime in the year ending March '19 compared to the previous year.

9. Changes in firearms investigation techniques, such as those seen in the West Midlands, have resulted in new dimensions to enquiries, adding value to the investigation process as well as helping track a previously unidentified criminal ammunition supply network. A good example of such an investigation was Operation Golddust, which identified an individual who was supplying the criminal market with both antique firearms and the bespoke ammunition to discharge in them. A registered firearms dealer, Paul Edmunds, was sentenced to 30 years at Birmingham Crown Court for the supply of these firearms and ammunition, with conclusive links being established by NABIS to over 100 criminal incidents. The investigation, arrest and conviction has supported the consultation by the Home Office into the review of the Obsolete Calibre List.
10. This increase in discharges and firearms offences more generally is supported by the number of submissions seen in the NABIS forensic hubs (see Fig.2). There have been 504 submissions so far this year, giving a *projected* number of submissions for the year of 1,209. Over 60% of submissions come from five police forces.



West Midlands Police and Host Force Arrangements

11. WMP act as the lead host force for NABIS, with GMP hosting the forensic hub in Manchester.
12. As host force, WMP provide critical support to NABIS from enabling departments such as finance, HR, IT&D, estates and security.
13. In return, the NABIS Central Hub is co-located with the WMP Forensics Department enabling fast turnaround times of forensic items and expertise and knowledge base on their doorstep. Analytical support is provided by the NABIS Intelligence Cell, who have an effective working relationship with WMP analysts and intelligence staff.

14. The West Midlands PCC's Office is represented on the NABIS Governance Board via the Chief Executive to hold NABIS to account on financial and operational activity.
15. The West Midlands PCC is the national firearms lead on behalf of the APCC and NABIS is grateful for the support and enthusiasm shown by PCC Jamieson over the years in this critical area of policing.

What NABIS Does: A Focus on Performance

16. The newly created NABIS Performance Team interrogate data sources to ensure data quality both within forces and NABIS. The team includes two additional Force Liaison Officers (FLOs) to enable a transition from a national to a regionally-focused force liaison approach.
17. Proactive engagement from FLOs with forces, Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) and LEAs enables a wide variety of support and early intervention to be provided at the point of need either in relation to the management of day to day issues (for example process mapping, knowledge sharing, Firearms Property Reviews and Firearms Surrenders) to the escalation of issues around adherence to the MOU.
18. Additionally, the FLOs deliver training in support of the College of Policing for Management of Serious Crime Investigators Development Programme as well as completing direct inputs to forces to equip investigators, forensic staff and intelligence departments with the awareness and tools to identify ballistics material ensuring all opportunities for recovery of ballistics material are optimised.
19. Chief Constables have agreed to adhere to the NABIS MOU by appointing a NABIS SPOC at Chief Officer level to support a new national governance arrangement to provide clarity of responsibility and accountability within forces via the NPCC Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) board.
20. A new national performance framework is being developed using software to equip forces with the information they need, to actively monitor their adherence to the NABIS MOU by assessing their level of submissions and identify any items not submitted to NABIS.
21. The Force Property Review and the improved engagement via the FLOs will inform the review of the NABIS MOU and NABIS S.22 Collaboration Agreement which is due to take place in early 2020.
22. NABIS engages with police forces and law enforcement agencies (LEA) more generally on a daily basis by providing telephone advice, attending regional and

national meetings and the provision of direct consultation during specific operations.

Support for the NPCC Criminal Use of Firearms Portfolio

23. NABIS coordinates and supports the national NPCC CUF Practitioners Group meetings which are held on a quarterly basis. The overall aim is to provide assurance that the threat to the UK from serious and organised crime in respect of firearms is understood, and to ensure that key threats are identified and activity is being planned and delivered to reduce that threat.
24. The group is chaired by the NPCC CUF Lead ACC Helen McMillan and sits within the NPCC Portfolio of Serious and Organised Crime.
25. NABIS coordinates and supports the National Gun Crime Intelligence Managers' (NGCIM) meetings which are held quarterly in line with the national CUF meetings to support taskings as a result of the CUF workstreams, and share good practice amongst forces and agencies.
26. NABIS hosts a quarterly Themed National Independent Advisory Group (TNIAG) which was established to support the NPCC CUF Strategic Group by offering independent advice in tackling gun crime within the UK. The group is comprised of representatives from communities and professional bodies with an interest in tackling the criminal use of firearms. The group advises, consults and reviews emerging issues and topics relating to the criminal use of firearms, reporting directly into the NPCC Lead.
27. In addition, NABIS staff are represented at Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group (FELWG) and other national firearms meetings held by other LEAs.

NABIS Intelligence Cell

28. The NABIS Intelligence Cell has written and produced restricted intelligence products from 1st April to the end of September 2019 including:
 - Firearms link packages
 - Quarterley bulletins – national, regional and individual force
 - Intelligence Assessments
 - The National Annual Strategic Assessment for 2018/19
29. These products are utilised by forces to assist in the recovery of Active Linked Series Firearms and also in supporting strategic assessments at a National, Regional and Force level.

30. In addition, the Intelligence Cell routinely carries out UK and international firearms tracing and illicit arms tracing services on behalf of UK Policing.

European Engagement

31. The NABIS Head of Intelligence continues to represent the UK on Forensic Firearms issues in Europe and attends the EU EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) Firearms meetings.
32. NABIS currently chairs the European Firearms Experts (EFE) meeting which is one of the EU Law Enforcement Working Party (LEWP) expert groups.
33. NABIS continues to be involved in the planning of the EU Operational Action Plans for 2020 and the NABIS Head of Intelligence will continue as the Action Leader for two specific actions:
- OA 1.2 - A feasibility study into the setting up of National Firearms Focal Points (NFP) across the EU, which includes Firearms Tracing.
 - OA 1.3 - Promote the use of ballistic analysis and explore the use of a single networked automated ballistic analysis system for use by all EU Member States.

Home Office funding for the Western Balkans

34. NABIS continues activity through Home Office Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) within the Western Balkans region. The overall aim of the project is to develop the capability and capacity in the region to combat the threat from the international trafficking of firearms.
35. Key activities within this project are to:
- liaise with ballistics labs in the region to support progress towards ISO 17025 accreditation.
 - support the EMPACT firearms work aimed at providing greater synergy between EU and Western Balkans.
 - develop a multi-partner firearms 'roadmap' within the Western Balkans region, including the development of firearms focal points within each country in the region.
 - provide advice and guidance to the South Eastern European Firearms Experts Network (SEEFEN) on ballistics forensics and intelligence, including training and reciprocal visits from ballistics experts.

NABIS Operating Costs

36. Funding from NPCC forces in the financial year 2019/20 for NABIS is **£2,993,754**, this rises to **£3,295,754** when the contribution from PSNI, Police Scotland and the NCA is included.

37. For NPCC forces, this comprises previously agreed funding plus the first full year's costs for additional funding as a result of the NABIS 2021 proposal approved by NPCC in April 2018.
38. NABIS also receives £35,000 from the Home Office to support administration of the Western Balkans Project.
39. In line with most other organisations, the majority of expenditure is spent on staffing costs (76%) with other expenditure on staff training and development (2%), contribution to the rental of premises from host forces estate (7%) or other operating costs (15%) (see Fig. 3).

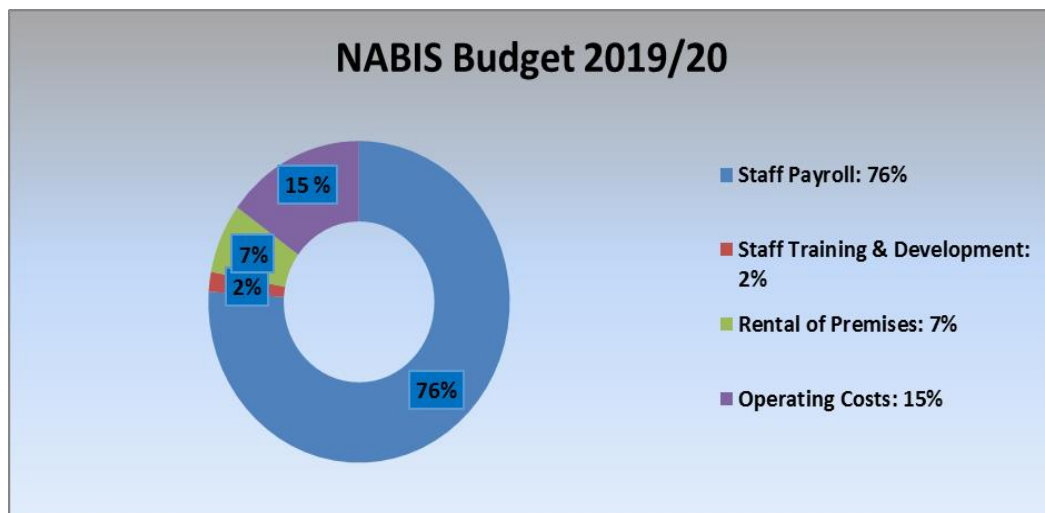


Fig 3. NABIS Budget 2019/20 - broken down by budget use

40. NABIS is on track to meet its budget obligations for 2019/20 due in part to savings on staff pay as a result of vacancies.

What NABIS Has Achieved: A Summary of National Effectiveness

41. As part of the uplift in funding from the new operating model conceived under NABIS 2021, and supported by the national tasking by the NCA in November 2018, NABIS has been working with forces to review processes for ownership, processing and submission of firearms and ballistic material and early indications are that this has provided a positive impact.
42. NABIS took the coordination role for the national firearms surrender held in July and August 2019 as part of work across over 40 police forces across England and Wales to reduce the rise in serious violence.
43. NABIS hosted its first ever National Firearms Surrender Conference at Tally Ho! Birmingham in June 2019 which was attended by APCC Firearms Lead Mr David

Jamieson, WMPCC, NPCC Criminal Use of Firearms (CUF) Lead ACC Helen McMillan as well as almost 100 delegates from over 40 forces and agencies.

44. Results from forces are currently being compiled by NABIS and learning from each force's approach will be captured and shared in order to inform future timings and frequencies of surrenders. A final national report will be available to forces towards the end of 2019.
45. One particular workstrand focuses on completing reviews of force property stores as previously agreed at Chiefs' Council. The reviews are currently in phase two of three, with initial results from the first phase being beneficial for both forces and NABIS. The aim of the review is to assess forces' internal NABIS processes, their compliance to the NABIS MOU, and to identify additional forensic and intelligence opportunities to further detect and prevent firearms crime.
46. Forces have been asked for feedback in all reviews and NABIS will issue a final report on completion of all three phases in March 2020, compiling the results from all force reviews as well as capturing and sharing all learning across forces.

Possible Impact of BREXIT

47. As a consequence of BREXIT the NABIS Head of Intelligence will have to vacate the Chair of the EFE but will continue to represent the UK on the EFE Plenary meetings. It is not known at this stage if the role of the UK as an Action Leader in the EMPACT will continue after BREXIT but continued participation in the EMPACT should not be affected. The NABIS participation in the CSSF Western Balkans will not be affected. It is anticipated that NABIS will be able to continue to share ballistic data across the EU and beyond particularly with those countries who use IBIS.

Author: Joanne Clews

Job Title: Detective Chief Superintendent, Head of NABIS