



Title: National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) Annual Report

Presented by: Chief Supt. Joanne Clews

Purpose of paper

1. 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 for information.

Background

2. The National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) has been operational for over a decade and supports UK Law Enforcement at a local, regional and national level as well as offering support internationally through engagement with Europol, Interpol, UNODC and UNDP.
3. 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 PCCs over the years in this critical area of policing.
4. The West Midlands PCC's Office is represented by the Chief Executive on the NABIS Governance Board, which holds NABIS to account on financial and operational activity.

National Ballistics Intelligence Service

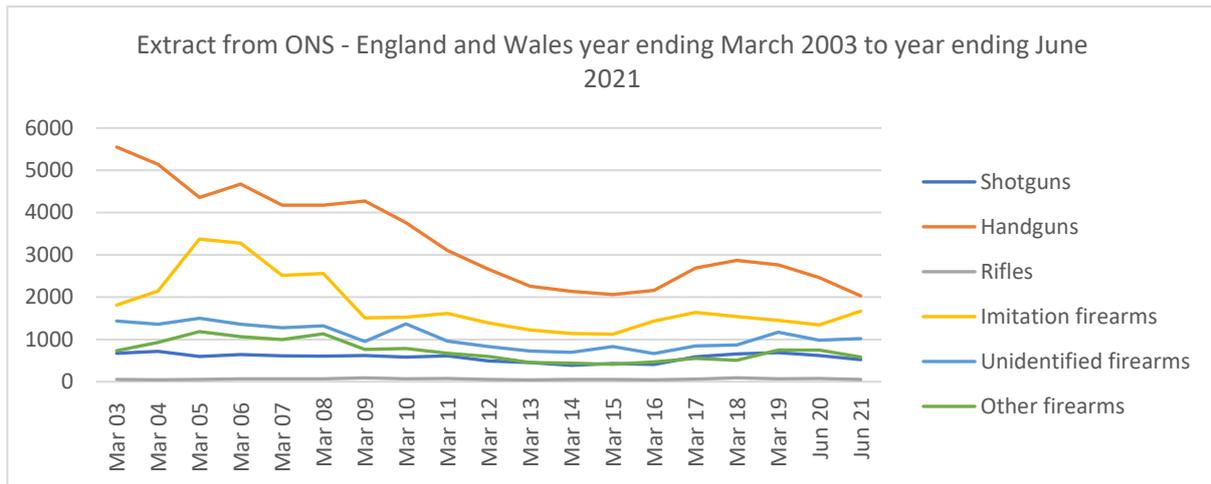
5. NABIS forensic ballistics hubs in both Birmingham and Manchester have teams of Experts and Technicians, who examine items from crime scenes. This may be a whole firearm or just a fragment of ammunition, and with specially equipped firing ranges in both locations, NABIS experts can test fire weapons which have been submitted by police forces. The Metropolitan Police Service, Scottish Police

Authority and Police Service of Northern Ireland have further forensic capabilities that work closely with the central NABIS team.

6. NABIS develops Intelligence from the five UK forensic ballistics hubs to ensure NABIS are in the best possible position to allow UK law enforcement agencies to quickly solve crimes where firearms have been used. NABIS is committed to identifying the few individuals who actively import, store and supply illegal firearms and to understand the people involved in illegally converting or adapting them.
7. West Midlands Police (WMP) act as the lead host force for NABIS, with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) hosting the forensic hub in Manchester as detailed in the National Police Collaboration Agreement under Section 22A of the Police Act 1996. As host force, WMP provide critical support to NABIS from enabling departments such as finance, HR, IT&Digital, estates and security.
8. The NABIS Central Hub is co-located with WMP Forensics Department enabling fast turnaround times of forensic items with forensic ballistics expertise and knowledge base on their doorstep. Analytical support is provided by the NABIS Intelligence Cell, who have an effective working relationship with WMP and WMROCU analysts and intelligence staff.

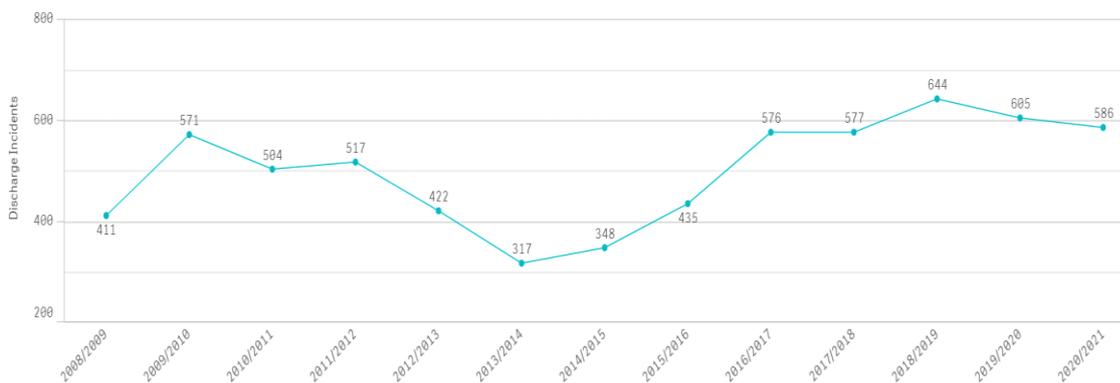
Firearms offences in the UK

9. In the UK the criminal use of firearms continues to account for a very small proportion of the overall crime rate, however the harm caused remains disproportionate. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that recorded offences involving firearms decreased by 6% to 5,867 offences in the year ending June 2021 compared with 6,231 offences in the previous year. This decrease can be largely attributed to national lockdown restrictions that occurred throughout the year. Offences involving firearms were at their lowest level since the year ending March 2016.



- NABIS reported firearms discharges had been on an upward trend, rising to a peak in 2018/2019 of 644 offences. This appears to have levelled off and reduced slightly over the last two years, with national lockdowns and restrictions as a result of the pandemic thought to have impacted on recorded discharges.

NABIS Reported Discharges Per Fiscal Year

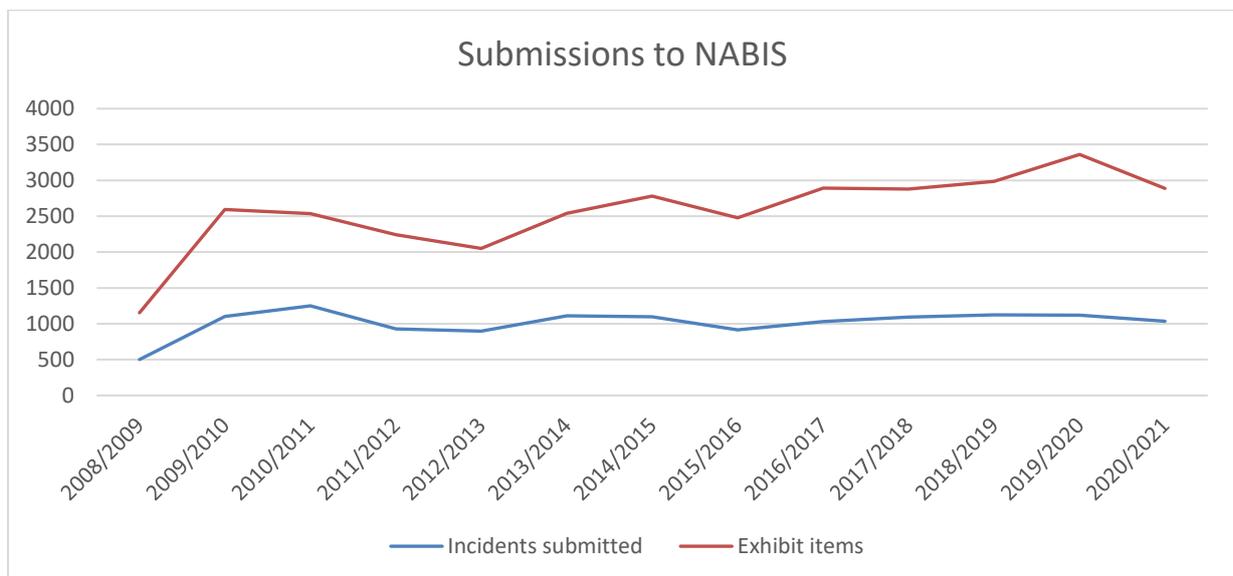


- Self-loading pistols and shotguns continue to be the most common firearm types used. Converted firearms continue to be a major threat in terms of availability and use in the UK, with top venting blank firing pistols being legally imported into the UK and then converted to fire live rounds.
- In November 2018 the NCA Director General required all forces to improve their contribution to national intelligence requirements relating to firearms, citing 'current intelligence gaps significantly reduce our effectiveness both in understanding the firearms threat at a strategic level and developing intelligence to enable a tactical response'.

13. NABIS analysis of the response to firearms criminality identified that the primary issues hindering an efficient and effective response to the firearms threat are the “Recovery Gap” and the “Submissions Lag”. In September 2021 this resulted in clarification of the Crime and Courts Act Directed Tasking to refocus on ensuring that (a) proportionate efforts are made to maximise the recovery of ballistic material from confirmed firearms discharges, (b) all relevant recovered firearms and ballistic material are registered on the NABIS database within 10 days of the incident and (c) all relevant recovered firearms and ballistic material are submitted to NABIS for examination within 28 days from date of registration.

NABIS service delivery

14. The number of discharges and firearms offences is supported by the number of submissions seen in the NABIS forensic hubs. The average number of items for examination for each incident has been increasing over recent years.



15. The Memorandum of Understanding between NABIS and forces details the expected forensic turnaround times. From April 2021 to August 2021 NABIS achieved 100% compliance across the most urgent 2-day and 7-day turnaround times; and whilst 28-day turnarounds achieved 67% compliance, this is an improvement on the same period last year.
16. An End to End Review of the NABIS forensic hubs identified a number of opportunities for continuous improvement. As a result of this review, an independent review of quality processes is being progressed to identify efficiencies for both hubs. Current processes rely heavily on paperwork, and duplication of data entries. An interim solution to this inefficiency could be resolved by using a

simple electronic case management system however long term, the NABIS Database needs to be replaced.

17. The NABIS Intelligence Cell analyses the hub reports from all five UK forensic ballistics hubs from which a number of intelligence products are written including:
 - NABIS Annual Strategic Assessment
 - Quarterly bulletins – national, regional and individual force
 - Firearms link packages
 - Problem profiles
 - Emerging trends bulletins
18. Closer working between NABIS intelligence, NABIS forensics, NCA and the Home Office is creating more opportunities for enforcement and proactive work. Following NABIS identification of emerging trends of lawfully held top venting blank firing pistols being converted in to lethal purpose firearms, joint work overseas is being undertaken to influence legislative and manufacturing changes to reduce the threat within the UK.
19. The NABIS Performance Team identify and interrogate suitable data sources and are developing dashboards to enable appropriate governance of NABIS performance and progress against the NABIS Delivery Plans. Similar dashboards to support forces in understanding their contribution to the overall UK firearms intelligence through engagement with NABIS are also being developed.
20. Data quality issues and challenges in extracting data from the NABIS Database impact on the ability of the Performance Team to progress this work.
21. NABIS information and products support both improved Strategic and Tactical understanding of the threat from CUF and provide direction for operational activity across Law Enforcement agencies
22. The Force Liaison Officers continue to provide a valuable bridge between NABIS, forces, regional and national agencies, proactively supporting forces with new threats and sharing of good practice
23. NABIS continues to provide training and awareness to a range of agencies. A Training & Awareness Task & Finish Group has commenced to identify a range of training and awareness packages that will be accessible by Law Enforcement to reduce the face to face training requirement and offer more effective and efficient alternatives.
24. NABIS coordinates and supports the national NPCC CUF Practitioners Group meetings which are held on a quarterly basis, the aim of which 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. The group is chaired by the NPCC CUF Lead DCC Helen McMillan and sits within the NPCC Portfolio of

Serious and Organised Crime. The Criminal Use of Firearms annual conference was hosted virtually on the 12th October and was well received

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. In addition, NABIS are represented at the NCA Firearms Strategic Governance Group, NCA Prevent Board, Home Office Illicit Commodities Board, Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group and other national firearms meetings held by other LEAs.
27. NABIS continues to participate and support a number of European forums; staff have presented and facilitated a CEPOL Firearms Trafficking course on the benefits of combining criminal and ballistic intelligence, and the role and purpose of National Firearms Focal Points.
28. 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.

Strategic direction of NABIS

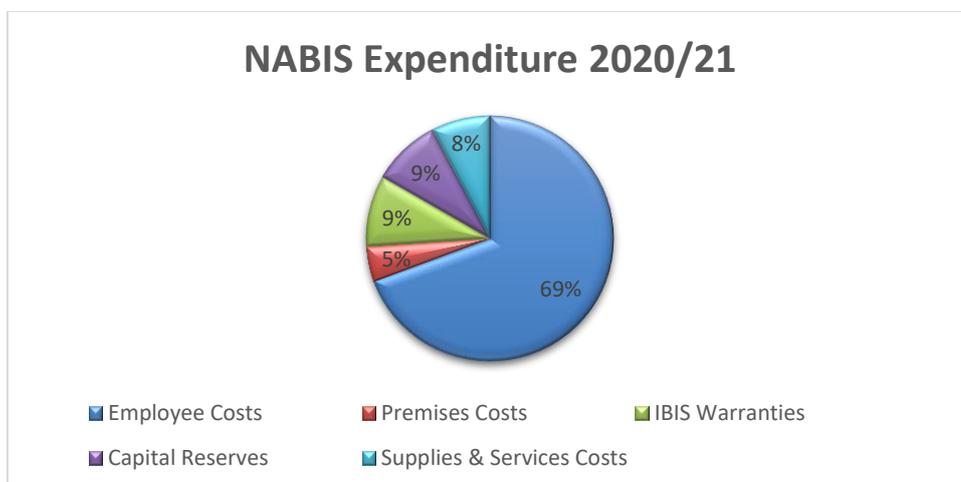
29. The recent and future developments for NABIS are summarised within the new NABIS Strategy 2020-2025 that was launched in September 2020. This will be supported by a refreshed NABIS Memorandum of Understanding due to be presented for approval at NABIS Governance Board in May 2022 and subsequently a review of the Section 22A Police Act 1996 Collaboration agreement.
30. Continuous improvement methodology within NABIS forensic hubs continues to identify efficiencies enabling greater capacity for progression of fast time ballistics intelligence and the development of intelligence links (such as similar home loaded ammunition and firearm conversion techniques). Although these examinations are more time consuming, there is significant benefit to upstream Prevent and Pursue activity.
31. NABIS continues to develop understanding of where intelligence gaps exist, the cause of those gaps and proactively support UK Law Enforcement in closing those gaps.
32. The National Transforming Forensics programme is considering options for the future structure and functionality of forensic services across the UK. NABIS leads the firearms work package which is focussed on the best way to deliver ballistic

forensics to ensure evidential and intelligence opportunities are maximised and the aspiration that all forensic examinations of firearms and ballistic material are completed within two-four weeks.

33. Through close engagement with the Home Office, the Home Office agreed to fund discovery work to scope a potential replacement solution to the NABIS Database due to the identified limitations of access to intelligence and lack of interoperability. This discovery work resulted in a joint Spending Review bid for a replacement for the NABIS Database with a Ballistic Evidence Analytical and Management Solution (BEAMS) and the National Firearms Licencing Management System (NFLMS) used by Firearms Licensing Units across England and Wales, the result of which is awaited.
34. As a result of the transformational activity being undertaken, the NABIS staffing structure is being reviewed under Career Pathways to ensure it is fit for purpose and provides suitable opportunities for vertical and lateral career progression across NABIS.

NABIS operating costs

35. Funding from NPCC forces in the financial year 2021/22 for NABIS is £3,060,151, this rises to £3,499,437 when contributions from PSNI, Police Scotland, NCA and other income is included.
36. The majority of expenditure is spent on staffing costs (69%). NABIS Capital Reserves (9%) were previously agreed at Chief Constables Council as essential for NABIS to be self-sufficient with a capital replacement programme, including the Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) equipment. Other expenditure consists of the IBIS Warranties (9%), contribution to the rental of premises from host forces estate (5%) and other operating costs (8%).



37. NABIS is on track to meet its budget obligations for 2020/21 and the accrued unspent funding will be used to underpin the ambitious transformational activity contained within the five-year NABIS Strategy, as well as an IT modernisation programme to improve business processes.
38. The next NABIS three-year funding paper is due to be presented to NPCC Chiefs' Council in February 2022 along with proposals for a revised Funding Formula to determine the contributions from individual England and Wales forces.

Impact of BREXIT

39. As a consequence of BREXIT, NABIS has not been able to continue to lead on a number of European workstreams, however continues to be a valued and active participant. NABIS participation in the CSSF Western Balkans has not been affected.
40. NABIS continues to share ballistic data across the EU and beyond particularly with those countries who use IBIS. NABIS has continued to effectively share intelligence with Europol, Interpol and bi-laterally with countries to good effect.

Author: Joanne Clews

Job Title: Detective Chief Superintendent, Head of NABIS