



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

24th January 2023

Title: National Ballistics Intelligence Service (NABIS) Annual Report

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Purpose of paper

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) 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, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
3. The West Midlands PCC is the national firearms lead on behalf of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (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

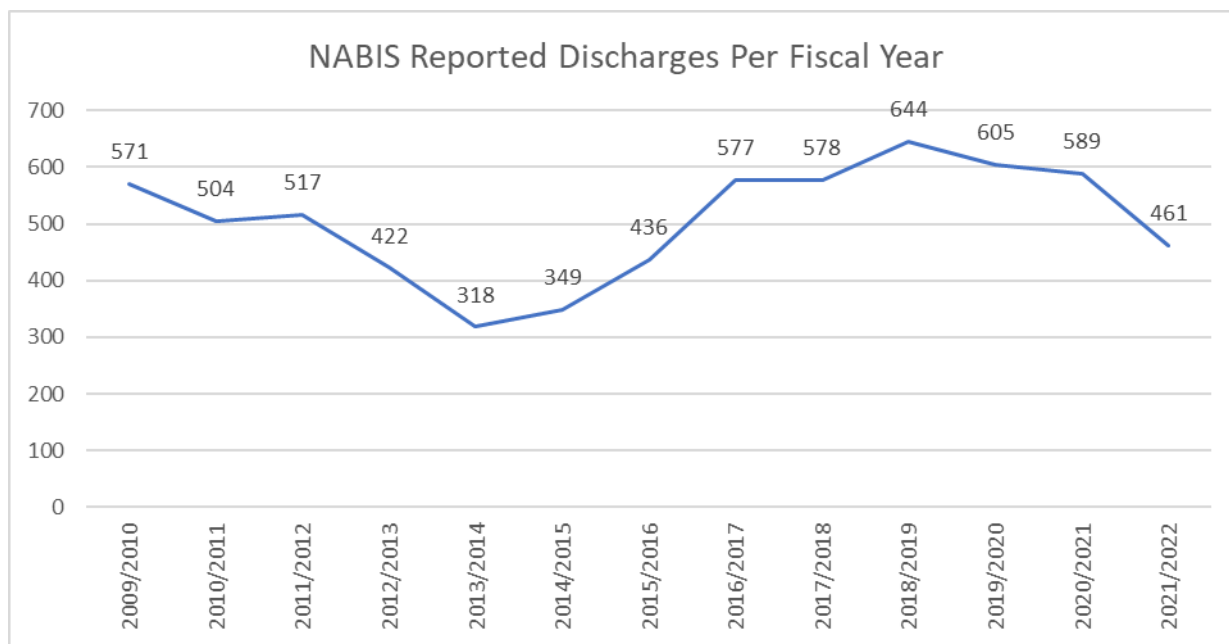
submitted by police forces. The Metropolitan Police Service, Scottish Police Authority and Police Service of Northern Ireland have further forensic capabilities that work closely with the central NABIS team.

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 based on their doorstep. Analytical support is provided by the NABIS Intelligence Cell, who have an effective working relationship with WMP and Regional Organised Crime Unit for the West Midlands (ROCU-WM) analysts and intelligence staff.

Firearms offences in the UK

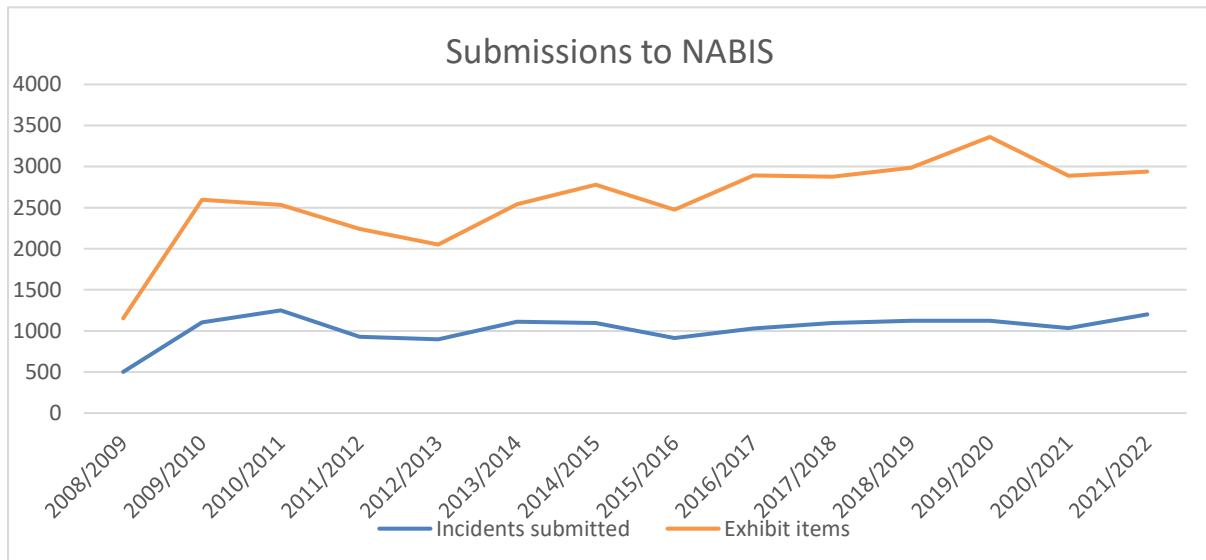
9. In the UK the criminal use of firearms continues to account for a very small proportion of the overall crime rate, however the harm caused remains disproportionate. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that recorded offences involving firearms increased by 1% to 5,750 offences in the year ending March 2022 compared with 5,715 offences in the previous year. This slight increase can be largely attributed to national lockdown restrictions that occurred the previous year.

10. 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 has reduced slightly over the last three years, with national lockdowns and restrictions as a result of the pandemic thought to have impacted on recorded discharges.



11. 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.
12. In November 2018 the National Crime Agency (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.

14. The number of discharges and firearms incidents directly impacts on the number of submissions seen in the NABIS forensic hubs. The overall trend of items for examination for each incident had been increasing over recent years, however has now levelled off.



NABIS service delivery

15. The Career Pathways work has been completed and following extensive consultation with NABIS Staff, support from HR departments and Trade Unions new structures and roles were introduced in September 2022. All roles have been reviewed and new job descriptions have been issued to all staff. All vacancies have been advertised and recruitment is being progressed.
16. The Memorandum of Understanding between NABIS and forces details the expected forensic turnaround times. From April 2021 to March 2022 NABIS achieved 100% compliance across the most urgent 2-day and 7-day turnaround times. The 28-day turnarounds achieved 57% compliance, this is an improvement on the same reporting period last year. The period April 2022 to September 2022 is showing an improving picture with 65% compliance.
17. The implementation of the new career pathway structures has provided a number of opportunities within the forensic function which in the long term will enable NABIS to provide a better service. The promotion of experts into key roles has reduced the number of staff available to undertake examinations in the short term at the Central Hub. The Northern Hub has also relocated during this time period which has impacted on the ability to meet all 28-day turnaround cases. This is a short-term challenge as the career pathways has increased the expert capacity within the hubs.

18. 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
19. Close working between NABIS intelligence, NABIS forensics, NCA and the Home Office continues to create opportunities for enforcement and proactive work. Following NABIS identification of emerging trends of lawfully held top venting blank firing pistols being converted into lethal purpose firearms, joint work overseas is being undertaken to influence legislative and manufacturing changes to reduce the threat within the UK.
20. The NABIS Performance Team continue to support forces in understanding the recovery gap and submissions lag. Internally they identify and interrogate suitable data sources to enable appropriate governance of NABIS performance and progress against the NABIS Delivery Plans.
21. Data quality issues and challenges in extracting data from the NABIS Database continue to impact on the ability of the Performance Team to progress this work but direction outlined at paragraph 32 of this paper will address these issues.
22. NABIS information and products support both improved Strategic and Tactical understanding of the threat from the Criminal Use of Firearms (CUF) and provide direction for operational activity across Law Enforcement agencies
23. 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
24. NABIS coordinates and supports the national NPCC CUF 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 new NPCC CUF lead ACC Tim Metcalfe and sits within the NPCC Portfolio of Serious and Organised Crime. The Criminal use of Firearms annual conference was hosted on the 14th November 2022 and received excellent feedback.
25. The NPCC led firearms surrender was co-ordinated by NABIS and all police forces in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were invited to participate in the 2022, National Firearm Surrender and 43 out of 45 did. The surrender successfully saw the removal of over 3,400 items including 185 lethal weapons and over 820 items of ammunition, a 56% increase on the previous surrender in 2019.

26. 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.
27. In addition, NABIS are represented at the NCA Firearms Strategic Governance Group, NCA Prevent Board, Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group and other national firearms meetings held by other Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).
28. Internationally, NABIS continues to participate and support a number of European forums; presenting at a European Multi-disciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) Operational Action Meeting on Firearms Focal Points, participating in an European Firearms experts meeting and an EMPACT 2023 Planning meeting.
29. NABIS continues activity through Home Office Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) within the Western Balkans region to develop the capability and capacity in the region to combat the threat from the international trafficking of firearms. NABIS in conjunction with the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearing house for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) held a two-day conference with representatives of the Firearms Focal Points from the six Western Balkan Jurisdictions and Moldova.
30. NABIS is supporting online UNLIREC in the Caribbean in relation to their Firearms Roadmap.

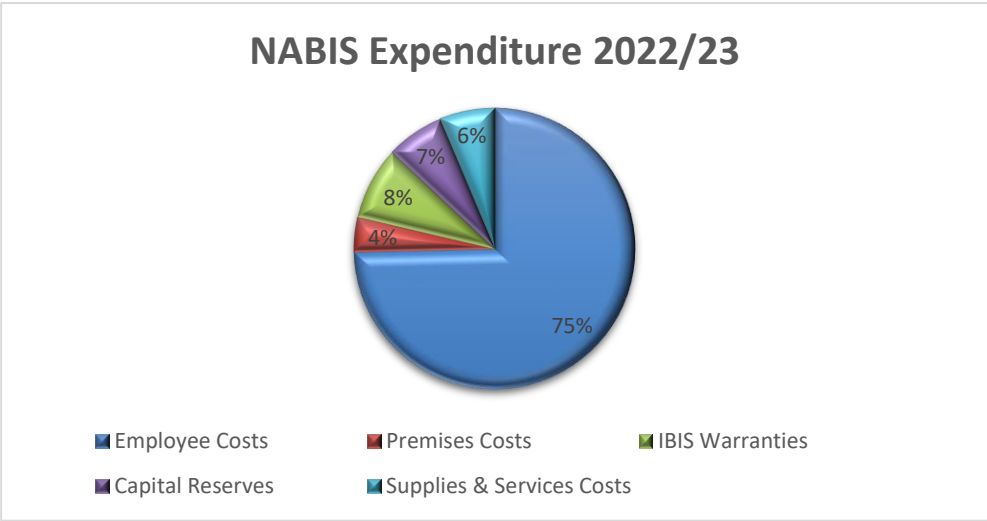
Strategic direction of NABIS

31. An electronic Case Management System (CMS) and new standard operating procedures will now be introduced in early 2023. This is the first stage towards a paperless forensic function and streamlined processes resulting in a more efficient forensic provision.
32. CMS will inform development of Ballistic Evidence Analytical Management Solution (BEAMS) which is planned to replace the current NABIS Database. BEAMS is part of a whole system approach to ensure law enforcement have the tools they need to tackle the criminal use of firearms. The Home Office secured funding for BEAMS and NABIS is working closely with the Home Office and LEAs on this transformational programme of work.
33. NABIS continues to provide training and awareness to a range of agencies and is currently preparing a number of virtual packages that will be accessible to Law Enforcement to reduce the face to face training requirement and offer a more efficient and effective alternative.

34. This NABIS Memorandum of Understanding has been refreshed and will be piloted in early 2023 prior to the final version being taken for approval. A review of the Section 22A Police Act 1996 Collaboration agreement will be commenced in 2023.
35. Through continuous improvement methodology, opportunities for further efficiencies within the NABIS forensic hubs are being identified. This will enable greater capacity for NABIS to not only progress fast time ballistics intelligence, (primarily connecting firearms discharge to firearms discharge to firearm), but to also develop greater 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.
36. 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.
37. The National Transforming Forensics programme considered options for the future structure and functionality of the firearms work package. This 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.
38. Following the presentation of options to the Transforming Forensics Board, the preferred option was to introduce a 'One Stop Shop' Clearing House for the full forensic examination of firearms and ballistic material. It has been agreed that this option will be developed to test feasibility with a plan to pilot.

NABIS operating costs

39. National Police Chiefs' Council in February 2022 agreed an upper funding level of £3,630,684 for NABIS and a revised Funding Formula to determine the contributions from individual England and Wales. NABIS Governance Board approved a recommendation in May 2022 to invoice forces at a lower level of £3,342,360 anticipating a number of vacancies for the first six months of the financial year following a move to the new NABIS Structure in September 2022.
40. Funding is also received from the NCA, Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Police Scotland resulting in total NABIS funding of £3,750,149.
41. The majority of expenditure is spent on staffing costs (75%). Other expenditure consists of Capital Reserves (7%) IBIS Warranties (8%), contribution to the rental of premises from host forces estate (4%) and other operating costs (6%).



42. NABIS is on track to meet its budget obligations for 2022/2023 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.

Impact of BREXIT

- 43. NABIS continues to be a valued and active participant within the European EMPACT. NABIS participation in the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) Western Balkans has not been affected.
- 44. 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.

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