



Joint Agency Task Force - Strategic Oversight Group

Report January – June 2016



In November 2015, the British and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland Executive agreed a series of measures in *A Fresh Start, The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan*, one of which was the creation of a Joint Agency Task Force as part of “a concerted and enhanced effort to tackle organised and cross jurisdictional crime.”

In accordance with the provisions of the Agreement, this is the first report of the work of the Task Force and is presented to the meeting of Justice Ministers in the framework of the Intergovernmental Agreement on co-operation on criminal justice matters.

The Joint Agency Task Force is led by senior officers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and HM Revenue and Customs. A number of other organisations including the National Crime Agency and the Criminal Assets Bureau are also involved in operational activity.

The ‘Cross Border Policing Strategy’ will act as the over-arching Delivery Strategy for the work of the Task Force, which consists of a Strategic Oversight Group and an Operations Co-ordination Group.

The Joint Agency Task Force Strategic Oversight Group is jointly chaired by Deputy Commissioner John Twomey (An Garda Síochána) and Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr (Police Service of Northern Ireland) in order to provide strong strategic direction and oversight to front-line operational activities. The Joint Agency Task Force Operations Co-ordination Group is jointly chaired by senior officers from An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Following the establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force Strategic Oversight Group, a Cross Border Strategic Assessment was prepared and completed, with input from the multi-agency partners, to review the extent and impact of organised crime. Based on threat, harm and risk it was recommended that consideration be given to adopting six priorities for the Joint Agency Task Force. The following six priority areas for the Joint Agency Task Force have been formally ratified by the Strategic Oversight Group and will be subject of review.

- Rural Crime
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Financial Crime
- Illicit Trade
- Excise Fraud
- Human Trafficking

The Joint Agency Task Force Strategic Oversight Group has formally convened on two occasions namely on 4th March and 23rd May, 2016.

The Joint Agency Task Force reports on its work in accordance with the statutory arrangements in place for the law enforcement agencies.

A Joint Task Force Operations Co-ordination Group (comprised of senior operational management personnel from the relevant law enforcement agencies) has been functioning operationally since 4th April, 2016 and is coordinating joint operations and directing relevant resources.

Over the past number of months extensive work has been undertaken to establish structures and arrangements to enable the various partner agencies to agree priorities and share information in this important area of activity.

At an operational level, partner agencies are working on delivering results on the ground in the months ahead. The objective of the Joint Agency Task Force is to build on existing frameworks and to increase the collective effectiveness within existing operational and financial parameters.

In the first weeks of operational activity, attention focussed on Rural Crime and Child Sexual Exploitation. The following is an illustration of operational activity undertaken to date by the Joint Agency Task Force:

April 2016 was designated as a 'month of action' for activities and policing operations to be employed by both An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, supported by additional statutory agencies, to tackle rural crime. This joint partnership approach included the deployment of targeted high visibility operational resources on both sides of the border, with sixteen cross-border vehicle checkpoints taking place along the open land-border with Northern Ireland. A further ten multi-agency checkpoints also took place, with the Revenue Commissioners / HM Revenue and Customs; the Road Safety Authority; the respective Departments of Social Protection and Departments of Agriculture.

Also during April, 2016 a number of other intelligence-led operations took place, particularly targeting organised crime gangs involved in ‘creeper’ burglaries and thefts of high-end plant-equipment and vehicles, which resulted in drug seizures, cash and other items, on both sides of the border and the arrest of three men. Three items of plant equipment, including a JCB and digger, were also recovered during this period.

The emphasis, particularly during this month, was in addressing rural crime through overt road policing operations, overt / covert intelligence-led operations and the delivery of a range of crime prevention advice, activities and awareness in rural communities. Crime Prevention Officers on both sides of the border delivered crime prevention advice, with a number of agricultural marts being visited during this period; ‘slots’ on local radio being used for providing crime prevention advice and leaflet drops being organised during this time also.

In May, 2016 An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland participated in a joint cross-border operation targeting persons suspected of being involved in downloading indecent images of children. Twenty-two searches were conducted on both sides of the border, during which seven people were arrested in Northern Ireland, with further enquiries being conducted in respect of seven people in Ireland.

A further cross-border joint ‘day of action’ was also conducted on 31st May, 2016 concentrating on Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation. Again, searches were conducted on both sides of the border, in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners and HM Revenue and Customs, during which two vehicles were seized and a number of unregistered business interests were identified during these searches.

Organised crime poses a threat to everyone on this island. Law enforcement agencies are determined not to allow criminals to use the border to their advantage. The Joint Agency Task Force is committed to working with each other, at every level and in every location, to build on existing operational arrangements to tackle organised crime on a cross border basis. As well as working closely with our law enforcement partners, the Joint Agency Task Force will work closely with communities to encourage people to come forward with information, using whatever channels they feel comfortable with, to provide a collective approach to this important issue.