

June 2, 2010

## Taking on the gangsters

### Campaigns will help the public help the police

As new figures are published today showing that over £5.5 million of assets and criminal profits were recovered for taxpayers last year, the public are to be asked to play a bigger role in stripping gangsters of their ill-gotten gains.

Plans for a new public campaign that will make it easier for decent members of the public to inform the authorities about criminals who are living lavish lifestyles funded by crime are one element in a range of initiatives set out today by Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill.

Speaking in Dundee where the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce published its first progress report on Scotland's national strategy to tackle serious organised crime, Mr MacAskill said that the campaign, one of four to be organised by the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency with Crimestoppers over the next 12 months, would give ordinary people opportunities to 'hit both the status and wallets' of the more than 4,000 individuals associated with serious organised crime in Scotland.

Key initiatives and actions set out for the year ahead include:

- campaigns to encourage the public to call the anonymous Crimestoppers hotline with information on cannabis cultivation, fake goods, and drug dealing as well as lavish lifestyles funded by crime;
- active investigation by a coalition of law enforcement agencies of the Top 20 'most harmful' serious organised crime groups in Scotland;
- action against the Top 10 specialist 'facilitators' who act as the financial 'brains' that advise serious organised crime;
- completion of recruitment of 80 additional staff within the SCDEA, and;
- opening discussions with the new Home Secretary to devolve responsibility for the proceeds of drug trafficking to Scotland.

Mr MacAskill outlined the plans as he heard how Tayside Police have responded since every Scottish Force made tackling serious organised crime one of its top priorities.

The Lord Advocate has made a separate but related announcement today that more than £5.5 million had been recovered using Proceeds of Crime legislation last year, which can be used to fund worthwhile activities in Scottish communities (see COPFS news release).

Mr MacAskill said:

"Serious organised crime affects us all. It brings violence and intimidation to our communities – from people who don't care what they peddle or who it costs as long as it brings them profit and power.

"I know that decent people are sick of seeing these gangsters speed around their streets in flash cars, living the kind of lifestyle they could only dream about. People who don't seem to be forced to tighten their belts in the way that others are having to do at the moment. Lifestyles that are being funded through crime, hidden behind supposedly respectable business fronts.

"There can't be many people who haven't had suspicions when they see conspicuous wealth being flaunted in their streets. Doubts as to whether the wealth has been earned honestly. A suspicion that something just doesn't add up. Yet those observations might just be the piece of information about an individual's lifestyle or activity can be the key that unlocks the door to disrupting an entire criminal empire. Let's hit their status, and their wallets.

"That is why a campaign that allows the public to provide information anonymously about such activities could make a difference – and why such a campaign will be one of four to run over the next 12 months.

"Our brave and resourceful police officers and staff – overt and covert – have made huge strides in the last year. Hundreds of arrests made, hundreds of kilos of hard drugs seized, millions of pounds of cash and assets seized. More organisations in the public and private sectors are joining the fight – making it harder for these groups to infiltrate and corrupt. But all of us have a role to play in tackling serious organised crime. By sharing information we can make Scotland an increasingly difficult place for these criminals to operate.

"We have made significant progress in recent times – but with the help of decent people choosing to do the right thing, we can beat those who bring misery to our communities and make Scotland a safer, stronger place."

Stephen House, Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police said:

"We have had successes, but we can have more.

"That is why we have to be prepared to go even further with our work. As the criminals become more sophisticated and more adept at changing tack, so must we. As the gangs find new ways of wreaking havoc in Glasgow, in Edinburgh, in Stirling and in Dundee, we must find new ways of driving them out of our communities.

"In short, we cannot afford to stand still. We owe it to the people we serve to help them break free from the stranglehold of organised crime."

Justine Curran, Chief Constable of Tayside Police, said:

"We will continue to work with and support our colleagues in the SCDEA to destroy those groups and individuals whose pursuit of profit and power threatens public safety. Tayside Police, along with every other Scottish Police Force, is determined to tackle serious and organised crime. By working with others, building up and developing our intelligence information, and carrying out enforcement operations, we can make a real difference to the lives of people living in Tayside."

Deputy Chief Constable Gordon Meldrum, Director General of the SCDEA said:

"The last 12 months has seen evidence of a 'broader alliance' between the public, private, and voluntary sectors to working together to make life more difficult for serious organised

crime groups in Scotland. We are stronger, we have more capacity, we have more capability, and we have had some serious successes.

“But the groups we are up against are well resourced, well motivated, and very flexible and opportunistic. We need to continue to step up our efforts in the coming years if Scotland is going to be regarded as ‘hostile territory’ by these violent, greedy, and extraordinarily callous people.”

## **Background**

The progress report on Scotland’s first multi-agency national strategy to tackle serious organised crime – Letting Our Communities Flourish - is available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/01111748/0>

The SCDEA has committed to delivering four public-facing campaigns with Crimestoppers over the next 12 months to raise public confidence in providing information and intelligence on issues associated with serious organised crime. The first of these will be on cannabis cultivations and is expected to launch before the Autumn. The campaign on lavish lifestyles funded by crime is expected in early 2011.

The Serious Organised Crime Taskforce Strategy was published on June 2, 2009 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2009/06/02105118>

The figures published today by COPFS do not include the civil recovery last month of £6.5 million by the Crown – the largest ever sum recovered by the authorities in Scotland.

Last month, the Justice Secretary announced that the amount of cash that can be retained by Scottish Ministers from cases under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) is being increased - from £17 million to £30 million each year. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/05/05152534>

## **Contact**

Murray Meikle : 0131-244-2642 / 07771 555 603