

Committee(s): Police Authority Board	Date(s): 27/04/2020
Subject: Economic Crime Public Update	Public
Report of: Commissioner of Police Pol 31-20	For Information
Report author: Alix Newbold, Economic Crime Directorate	

Summary

This report highlights key work, challenges and opportunities of the Economic Crime Directorate during the COVID-19 crisis. Business continuity plans have been successfully implemented and City of London Police is leading the police response to COVID-19 related fraud resulting in notable operational success and high profile crime prevention messaging to the public.

Work to establish a new phishing reporting tool in partnership with the National Cyber Security Centre, a new Action Fraud contact centre site in Newcastle and a Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit in the North West have all continued at pace and without interruption.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. This report highlights key work, challenges and opportunities of the Economic Crime Directorate during the COVID-19 crisis.

Current Position

2. Business continuity plans have been effectively implemented across all economic crime functions and a majority of staff are working from home. This is in line with government recommendations and to enable those who are self-isolating without symptoms to continue working. This includes staff within the Action Fraud contact centre operated by Concentrix.

National reporting

3. Telephone calls to the contact centre initially reduced in the lockdown period but the volume of online reports remained largely consistent and is rising. This reduction in telephone contact is not expected to be a long term trend but has

resulted in improved performance in the contact centre, reducing average speeds to answer and abandonment rates.

MONTH (Week Commencing)	Offered Calls (Core Service)	Abn %	* Average Speed to Answer in minutes (ASA)	* Average Call Handling Time (AHT)	Website reports
BASELINE: Weekly Average: from Jan/Feb	10,403	48.2%	15.79	21.30	7,322
Week 3: 30/03/2020	4,817	11.3%	3.08	14.15	7,164
Week 4: 06/04/2020	4,936	4.0%	0.52	11.62	7,509
Week 5: 13/04/2020	6,189	10.8%	2.30	11.32	9,394

* Figures in red represent the average figure across both months. Call volumes reflect the core service (8am - 8pm) Mon - Sun

- Despite the reduction in telephone contact, in the week commencing 13 April fraud and cyber crime reports¹ recorded by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau were only 2% below weekly averages in January and February indicating that crime reporting is returning to usual levels.
- As at 19 April, there had been 960 COVID-19 related fraud and cyber reports to Action Fraud representing £2.25m in losses and over 3,900 phishing email reports. COVID-19 related fraud and cybercrimes are less than 3% of all other fraud and cyber crime reports.

Key work

- City of London Police has been working with the Home Office to identify funding to open a second contact centre site in Newcastle and increase the overall Action Fraud headcount to 94FTE following the review by Sir Craig Mackey. 15 new staff will commence providing Action Fraud services, working from their homes, on 1 May.
- City of London Police has played a leading role in establishing Project Etherin, the overarching law enforcement response to fraud during the crisis, led by the National Economic Crime Centre. Under Project Etherin, City of London Police is leading and coordinating the police response in England and Wales. Project Etherin objectives are to:
 - Deliver consistent public messaging which will reassure, educate and protect
 - Support vulnerable victims at most risk
 - Anticipate, identify and respond to changes in offending behaviour
 - Reduce the opportunity for crime
 - Identify and disrupt offenders who are seeking to take advantage of the crisis
- City of London Police worked with the National Cyber Security Centre to expedite the launch of a new public phishing reporting tool which in its first day received 4,416 reports and resulted in the takedown of 69 phishing sites.

¹ Note that telephone calls to Action Fraud result in both crime and information reports based upon definitions within National Crime Reporting Standards and Home Office Counting Rules. Action Fraud also receives telephone calls from victims following up on previous reports. Therefore, the level of reduction in telephone contact is not mirrored by the same level of reduction in recorded crime

9. The City of London Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit has extended its remit and is providing essential support to Operation Surfacer (the National Crime Agency operation targeting the illicit supply or offering of personal protection equipment and cures/testing kits).
10. Within 24 hours of the receiving information from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority and the United States Food and Drug Administration, a British man making and selling counterfeit treatment kits internationally was arrested, charged and remanded in custody. 300 treatment kits and 20 litres of chemicals used to produce the kits were seized during the arrest. The treatment kits are thought to contain potassium thiocyanate and hydrogen peroxide, which are extremely harmful chemicals when the user is instructed to wash and rinse their mouth with them. The unit has also been issuing cease and desist notices to stop the selling of fake NHS lanyards and other IP infringing products for sale online.
11. Following agreement from the Intellectual Property Office, recruitment for officers for a Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit Northern Hub continues in partnership with the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit.
12. The Dedicated Card and Payment Crime Unit has incorporated COVID-19 fraud into its current priorities. Over the past two weeks, the unit has successfully targeted and disrupted several criminal gangs involved in sending COVID-19 related scam texts and emails to unsuspecting members of the public. It has executed warrants in London, Leicestershire and Dorset seizing devices used to send bulk scam messages including fake HMRC text messages offering financial support and refunds. The unit is actively progressing another 6 investigations to executive action.
13. City of London Police has undertaken engagement with the media to raise public awareness of the threat from COVID-19 fraud. The first press release was issued in March. This was covered by a number of national outlets including the Telegraph, Guardian, Independent, Daily Mail, Sun, Metro and Daily Express. The story was also picked up by nearly 20 regional titles. A follow-up release was issued two weeks later. This, again, received widespread coverage in print and online. City of London Police officers took part in interviews across BBC Breakfast, BBC Evening TV news and local BBC radio stations including Tees, Somerset, Manchester, Norfolk, Nottingham, Yorkshire and Jersey.
14. City of London Police has provided regular alerts to policing and other law enforcement partners on the types of offending being perpetrated to inform crime prevention advice. The Action Fraud website and social media pages are frequently updated with the latest advice. COVID-19 fraud prevention messaging has resulted in 20.6m social media impressions and 9.3m social media accounts reached as its content has been shared by numerous police forces, police and crime commissioners, local councils, banks and journalists.
15. The social media content has generated a constant level of press coverage in all types of media from more finance-focused outlets like the Financial Times to more consumer-based titles like the Daily Mirror. To help reach audiences that may not

be online as much, we have taken part in further interviews on radio and TV including BBC's The One Show, ITV News, The Steph Show on Channel 4 and LBC.

Conclusion

16. Business continuity plans have been successfully implemented.
17. City of London Police is leading the police response to COVID-19 related fraud resulting in notable operational success and high profile crime prevention messaging to the public.
18. Work to establish a new phishing reporting tool in partnership with the National Cyber Security Centre, a new Action Fraud contact centre site in Newcastle and a Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit in the North West have all continued at pace and without interruption.

Appendices

None