Police Scotland to establish National Centre of Excellence to tackle cybercrime

Police Scotland is to establish a National Centre of Excellence and boost the number of specially trained officers to staff to tackle the rise in cybercrime, as part of its Cyber Strategy 2020.

The strategy outlines how the service will adapt to the changing nature of crime and recognises the need to provide reassurance, education and enforcement in public, private and digital spaces as the environment we live and work in evolves rapidly.

Keeping People Safe in the Digital World, to be presented to the Scottish Police Authority on Wednesday, 30 September 2020, outlines the plan to tackle the threat, risk and harm from digitally-enabled crimes, particularly online child sexual abuse, fraud and the sharing of indecent images. It also sets

out steps to tackle the threat to individuals, businesses and public sector organisations from cyber-attacks and other online crime.

The centre of excellence will bring together the expertise of around 100 officers and staff already working in this field. It will be boosted with an extra 50 officers and staff in the short-term, but this number will rise over time.

Deputy Chief Constable Malcolm Graham, lead for Crime and Operational Support, said: "The nature of crime is changing and Police Scotland needs to change with it. The online space is becoming a bigger part of the frontline of policing every day.

"As well as keeping people safe on the streets, our officers and staff are keeping children safe on their computers and smartphones in every community in Scotland. While cybercrimes are underreported, we know we are stopping vulnerable people from being defrauded and adapting our techniques in response to criminals who are doing the same.

"These officers may not be visible. They may not be patrolling in cars, but the work they do is just as important, and the threats they are dealing with are on the rise.

"The rapid increase in online abuse and exploitation of vulnerable people and children, either for financial gain or for sexual purposes, underlines the need for change.

"The centre will provide the necessary increased support for the increasing cyber inquiries, investigation and prevention work. This will allow us to deliver support, training and guidance to Local Policing officers, giving them the tools to address the number of concerns raised daily. The additional officers will expand our existing capacity in cybercrime intelligence, investigations, research and development, and digital forensics.

"We know that the service has to have the ability to respond to current and emerging national and international threats and risks. The Cyber Strategy 2020 sets out a clear pathway and underlines our commitment to working with our partners, sharing expertise from all sectors to tackle the threat and harm head on."

The number of traditional crimes has decreased by 27% in the past decade. However, there has been a significant increase in cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crime. The National Crime Agency has seen the number of referrals regarding child sexual abuse imagery to the National Crime Agency increase from 1591 in 2009 to 11,948 by 2018.

Online fraud and bank theft of a bank card or bank account details was the type of cyber fraud and computer misuse reported by most victims (74%). Of this, 95% of online banking thefts crimes were reported to banks/credit card companies, while only 8% were ever reported to the police.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Police Scotland recorded a higher number of online child sexual abuse crimes in June 2020 than in any other month on record. There were 530 online child abuse crimes recorded between April and June, with 226 in June alone. This is an increase of 21% against the same period last year and 34% higher than the five year average.

In March 2020 Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority published a joint strategy for the future of policing in Scotland, Policing for a Safe, Protected and Resilient Scotland. This included the commitment to develop a specific cyber strategy to transform Police Scotland's internal cyber capability and response, whilst enabling the delivery of proactive support to individuals, communities and partners that embeds resilience and aligns to our wider preventative model.