

**DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AUTHORITY**

**9 JULY 2004**

(Open for the purposes of FOI)

Report by Chief Constable

**DRUGS POLICY: CRACK COCAINE IN DEVON AND CORNWALL**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. This report is intended to inform the Police Authority of Crack cocaine within Devon and Cornwall and the Force's response to it.

**BACKGROUND**

2. Cocaine is a Class A drug regulated by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. It mainly originates from South America, where it is produced and all supplies in the UK are illegally imported. cocaine is a powerful stimulant, which comes in the form of a white powder and is usually snorted. cocaine gives the user a feeling of exhilaration, confidence and excitement and the effects last for about thirty minutes. Continued use can often lead to addiction
3. Crack is Cocaine which has been taken back to its base format which makes the purity greater and allows it to be smoked. The smokeable form is known as rocks. As a result of the increased purity, crack is absorbed into the blood stream very quickly creating an extremely intense but short-lived euphoria. The effects last approximately 10 minutes. There is a danger of this leading to almost immediate addiction.
4. The risks of prolonged use of crack cocaine include severe depression, extreme anti-social behaviour, increased aggression and paranoia. The drug has a major corrosive impact on communities, characterised by extreme violence and escalating crime.

**THE GROWTH OF CRACK COCAINE**

5. Since the early 1990's the price of cocaine has reduced considerably making it available to a wider group of people and there has been a substantial increase in the use of the base format crack.
6. During the late 1990's crack cocaine has become more prevalent in cities of the United Kingdom, including London and Bristol A growing trade in the importation of cocaine from Jamaica took hold in these areas with cocaine being 'cooked' into crack in safe houses, then being distributed to street dealers. During this time the price of crack continued to reduce with a single rock of about 0.2 gm costing £20, (A gm is therefore £100, compare this to Heroin which is £60 a gm) making it widely available. These inner city areas saw a steep rise in violence including escalation in the use of firearms. This led to a rise in shootings and murders amongst competing dealerships and against those who had built up drug debts. In London the Metropolitan Police Service [M.P.S.] set up

Operation Trident to try to combat this criminality, which is predominately focused on 'black on black' shootings. It is believed this operation in conjunction with Operation Crackdown [an initiative to disrupt crack cocaine dealers in the London area] has led to displacement of criminality out to the provinces.

7. Avon & Somerset is one such provincial force, which has suffered from this displacement. The Bristol area in particular has seen a high increase in acquisitive crime and street robbery – all of which can be attributed to the open sale and supply of crack cocaine.
8. Initially very little crack was seen in Devon and Cornwall; however, in 2001 the Force began to see an increase in seizures. Early in 2001, as a result of the growing problem and intelligence from Avon and Somerset and other police areas the Force began to monitor all items of intelligence and crime relating to crack. It soon became clear the drug had a firm foothold in the area and the problem was increasing.

## **THE POLICE RESPONSE**

9. In January 2001, as a result of the emerging crack problem across the country, the Force set up Operation Ovidian to monitor and collate intelligence predominantly relating to crack. This continues as an intelligence gathering cell based in the Force Intelligence Centre.
10. Intelligence identifies that crack is readily available across Devon and Cornwall. The intelligence picture suggests that crack imported into the Force area, is mainly organised by Liverpool, London or Jamaican based criminals. In the main London and Jamaican based criminals have only supplied crack and cocaine in and around Plymouth, although more recently a Jamaican was deported from an address in Totnes after being involved in the supply of crack. Liverpool criminals who have previously controlled the heroin distribution in the Force have diversified into crack and cocaine. They are now responsible for much of the Class A drug supply across the Force. This group poses a major threat to the Force as their market places and networks are well defined and commercially viable.
11. In April 2004 Operation Pelican was established as a Forcewide initiative to gather intelligence on Class A drug supply and monitor the criminal activity of Organised Crime Groups from Merseyside. This operation has already seen a number of successful warrants executed, quantities of Class A drugs seized and arrests made.
12. At present there are a number of operations across the force targeting class A drug dealers. To mention a few Cornwall and Isles of Scilly BCU has Operation Trull which, is an investigation into Class A drug supply from Merseyside. Within Plymouth BCU Operation Revelin is designed to target street level dealers and has resulted in 32 prosecutions. Operation Oak, is a long-term investigation that concentrates on Level 2 Class A suppliers. South and West Devon BCU runs Operation Fundamental which is designed to disrupt street level dealers and cause constant low level irritation to main dealers and suppliers. Drug mapping using police and multi-agency data is utilised to target areas where dealing takes place and improve quality of life for local communities. North and East Devon BCU Operation Nightjar is a joint operation run with West

Midlands Police to target a Class A Supplier bringing drugs into Exeter. A number of publicity campaigns are being run across the peninsula under the “Rat on a Rat” initiative which seeks intelligence on drug dealing and has resulted on a number of successful warrants.

13. The Force statistics show that during the period 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004 there were 176 seizures of cocaine and 14 seizures of crack compared to the previous year, 1 April 2002 – 31 March 2003 when there were 134 seizures of cocaine and 11 of crack. The increases in seizures show that cocaine and crack are readily available and prevalent in the Force area. For approximately the last twelve months crack has been routinely tested by the Forensic Science Service so the figures now produced for seizures should be accurate.

#### **DRUG ARREST REFERRAL SCHEME**

14. The Force Drug Arrest Referral Scheme is a partnership initiative that uses the point of arrest as an opportunity for those arrested to take up the offer of help and access to treatment interventions earlier than they might otherwise have done. Involvement with arrest referral is voluntary and is not an alternative to prosecution. The scheme is a rich source of anonymous information on drug misuse across the peninsula, providing details on offending behaviour, socio-demographic characteristics and treatment history. From information available through this source the number of people currently seeking treatment for ‘crack cocaine’ addiction is low and statistics demonstrate that opiates remain the main problem for drug treatment providers across the peninsula. It should be borne in mind that Drug Arrest Referral Scheme data is available from only those who have agreed to see an arrest referral worker and consequently a worker will not see all problem drug using individuals.
15. Crack is part of the Force Control Strategy under the umbrella of Class A drugs which means all BCUs are committed to collating information and addressing the problem. To this end, it is hoped that by focusing activity we will prevent continued escalation as experienced by other Forces. We seek the support of the Police Authority and the wider community to enable us to identify and disrupt those dealing in this highly addictive and dangerous drug, with its associated violence and escalating crime.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

16. The authority is invited to note the contents of this report.

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