

Press release: Specialist financial crime unit to crack down on prison gangs

- unit staffed by members of Police and Prison Service will be able to freeze bank accounts and make arrests
- action will cut supply of drugs to prisoners and prevent money reaching criminal kingpins
- part of wider drive to tackle the supply and demand for drugs in prison

In the latest measure to tackle the criminal kingpins who fuel drug dealing and violence in our jails, specially-trained prison and police officers will use intelligence to monitor bank accounts for signs of illicit transactions.

Bank accounts on the outside world are being used by inmates to pay for drugs. These are usually identified through paper notes found in cells which contain account details, or on phones seized from prisoners with instructions to make transfers.

Such transactions, which amount to money laundering, are to be targeted by the unit, who will be able to freeze bank accounts and initiate criminal proceedings against those involved.

This effort to disrupt the flow of illicit money from prisoners to criminal networks adds to existing measures designed to hinder their activity. As announced in July, a new £1 million digital tool is helping to identify, disrupt and disable gangs, with leaders being moved to different prisons if necessary to stymie their influence.

This formed part of an additional £40 million investment in prisons, announced over the summer, that will improve safety and security in prisons, as well as improving the fabric of the estate. Meanwhile more than 3,500 extra officers have been recruited and will have a central role to play in efforts to tackle gangs and contraband behind bars.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said in his speech to the Conservative party conference earlier today:

My message to kingpins is this: we are already blocking your phones, putting you in isolation and now we will make sure you can't access your money.

Dealing drugs in prison will no longer be profitable because we will find your assets and we will seize them.

Money laundering in prisons is widespread, with much of the activity taking

place through individual, low-value transactions between external bank accounts as offenders settle debts generated illicitly, such as through the supply of drugs.

The unit, which will become fully operational in October, will home in on this activity through the analysis of intelligence and work to quickly act against offenders suspected of involvement in criminal activity.

The unit has drawn on support from the police's Eastern Region Special Operations Unit to develop strategies which will enable it to quickly identify and act against money laundering from the outset.

Data analysis of prison intelligence will be used to identify common or significant bank accounts being used to launder money, allowing the unit to build a profile of the prisoners connected to them.

The unit will then be able to act against those involved, with sanctions ranging from the closure of accounts, to freezing assets or more significant criminal sanctions such as Confiscation Orders and arrest.

Combined with other measures, this will disrupt the movement of illegal goods in prison and reduce the drivers of self-harm and violence. This will allow prisons to focus on becoming places of rehabilitation and reform where prisoners are given a genuine chance to turn their backs on crime for good.

During today's speech, the Justice Secretary also announced the allocation of £5 million to create the first secure school in Medway, Kent. This new provision will place education and healthcare at the heart of youth custody and will be run by not-for-profit academy trusts with expertise in the youth custody sector.

The application and selection process for the provider of the first establishment will be launched later this month, with more purpose-built secure schools to be constructed in the coming years.

Also, over the next 2 years, the MoJ will provide up to £2.6 million for governors in the Youth Custody Service to purchase additional educational and vocational programmes. The highly successful Unlocked graduate scheme will also be expanded into the youth estate, bringing even more talented and motivated staff to our frontline.

The Justice Secretary added:

Together this package of reforms and investment will crack down on the drugs and violence in prisons, further support offenders in turning their backs on crime and, crucially, help young offenders find a path out of criminality into education and responsibility.

Notes to editors

- The unit will be based in Peterborough and will be operational from

October.

- The team will investigate evidence of prisoners using external bank accounts to pay for drugs, something which we believe is common in prisons but has yet to be fully addressed given our focus up to now on more high-level organised crime in prisons.
- In summer we announced a £40 million prisons improvement package targeting crime in prisons. This included a £7 million investment in safety to fund a range of new security measures, including airport-style scanners, improved searching techniques and phone-blocking technology.
- A £1 million digital tool is also enabling prisons to build a more detailed picture of the kind of risk an offender is likely to present, including the likelihood of involvement in organised crime. This intelligence is allowing police and prison staff to better target their activity to prevent, disrupt and disable criminal networks, including moving prisoners when necessary.
- The Ministry of Justice outlined its [vision for secure schools](#) in June 2018