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Home Office

HOME OFFICE EVIDENCE TO THE NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY REMUNERATION REVIEW BODY

2026/27 PAY ROUND

January 2026

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document provides supplementary context from a Home Office perspective in relation to the National Crime Agency's (NCA) 2026/27 pay award evidence. It complements the detailed submission made separately by the NCA to the NCA Remuneration Review Body (NCARRB), ensuring a comprehensive overview of the Agency's needs and priorities.
- 1.2 As a Non-Ministerial Department, the NCA is operationally independent of the Home Office. The Crime and Courts Act 2013 and associated NCA Framework Document set out the mechanisms through which the Director General NCA is accountable to the Home Secretary for the Agency's performance. Additionally, as Principal Accounting Officer, the DG NCA is also accountable to HM Treasury in ensuring departmental spend is neither novel nor contentious and remains within delegated funding limits.
- 1.3 The Home Office is responsible for negotiating the NCA's budget with HM Treasury, in consultation with the NCA Director General, as part of the regular Spending Review cycle. Following the allocations process that succeeded the recent Spending Review the NCA's budget for the period 2026/27-2028/29 has now been confirmed.
- 1.4 The NCA is also subject to further external scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Northern Ireland Policing Board. This reflects the Agency's UK-wide remit and its importance in tackling threats across territorial boundaries.

2. Strategic Context

- 2.1 Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) is a major threat to the national security and prosperity of the UK. It costs lives, blights communities, hampers economic growth, and corrodes the global reputation of the UK and its institutions, with an estimated annual cost running into tens of billions of pounds.
- 2.2 Criminal networks are increasingly adaptive and sophisticated, leveraging advanced technologies to expand their operations and evade detection. The criminal landscape is dynamic, shaped by global challenges and the rapid evolution of technologies.
- 2.3 As the UK's operational leader for tackling SOC, the NCA continues to develop its use of advanced technology and investigative techniques to keep pace with modern threats. It delivers governmental priorities through initiatives such as its

work with the Border Security Command to disrupt and dismantle the gangs facilitating small boats crossings, while leveraging its niche capabilities and highly trained workforce to tackle the most serious organised crime groups and networks.

2.4 The NCA's intelligence-led approach and international reach underscores its critical role in safeguarding the UK from SOC. The Agency has continued to focus on the high end of high harm, utilising its specialised capabilities to target the most complex and impactful criminal networks. In 2021, the Agency set an ambitious target of increasing its highest-impact disruptions by 50% by March 2025; that target was exceeded with a 72% increase. The total disruptions – actions that tangibly degrade or remove a criminal threat – increased to nearly 7,000 in 2024-25, a 34% increase on the previous year and equivalent to 19 disruptions every day. Over 400,000 frauds were prevented and over 400 cyber protect notifications issued, of which 170 related to ransomware and estimated to have prevented costs of approximately £221m to the UK economy. Each month, NCA intelligence helped UK policing make c.800 child sexual abuse related arrests and safeguard approximately 1,100 children, based on online leads. These results highlight the Agency's pivotal role in maintaining the UK's security and prosperity through effective law enforcement.

2.5 The government recognises the valuable work being carried out by the NCA and remains committed to supporting the NCA to fulfil its essential role in tackling serious and organised criminality in and impacting on the United Kingdom.

2.6 The government has made progress in strengthening the NCA so that it can tackle the threat from SOC. The NCA's budget will increase to £1.06bn in 2026/27, with further increases to approximately £1.1Bn by 2028/29. This includes an increase in the Agency's core budget, of at least 5%. This represents the largest funding package the Agency has had since it was established. This significant investment reflects the demands placed on the Agency and the central role it is required to play in delivering the Government's ambitions to tackle illicit migration and other forms of serious and organised crime. Furthermore the Home Office has supported the NCA in increasing its capital investment budget to enable the NCA to address its technology debt and advance its transformation programme, delivering greater efficiencies and productivity gains.

3. Economic Context

3.1 Please refer to [HM Treasury's Economic Evidence for the Pay Review Bodies as part of the 2026-27 Pay Round](#).

4. The NCA's Proposals

NCARRB's 2025 Recommendations

4.1 The NCARRB 2025 report made the following three recommendations:

- 1) A consolidated pay award of 4.4% for all NCA officers from 1 August 2025. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by 4.4%.
- 2) An increase of 4.4% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers from 1 August 2025.
- 3) The allowances of International Liaison Officers in the NCA be reviewed.

4.2 Recommendations one and two were accepted in full and implemented in August 2025. The Home Office recognises the importance of pay awards tied to location allowances in supporting the Agency's recruitment and retention of skilled officers. These measures have strengthened the NCA's position in the competitive labour markets.

4.3 The intention remains for the review of the International Liaison Officer (ILO) allowance to be taken forward following related reviews of international platforms led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Recruitment and Retention Challenges

4.4 The NCA's workforce requirements are complex and require a wide range of skillsets and specialisms, with candidates needed from a variety of labour markets. Since 2022, the NCA has recruited 25% from policing, 24% from the private sector and 28% from the Civil Service. The Home Office agrees with the NCA, that operational skills are a key element for roles and that officers should be able to move between commands. Future pay arrangements must support the recruitment and retention of officers with wide-ranging skills, from a wide range of competitors and with different labour market pricing.

4.5 Between August 2024 and August 2025, the NCA's workforce decreased slightly from 6,264 to 6,215. While overall turnover remained broadly stable at 6.96%, the Agency has noted that this apparent stability masks persistent challenges in recruitment and retention, particularly in specialist and technical roles.

4.6 Workforce data also shows that the Agency continues to face difficulties in filling specialist posts, particularly within Intelligence, Investigations, and Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) commands, all of which have seen further reductions in headcount over the past year. The NCA's evidence notes that market rates for DDaT roles can exceed the Agency's pay by up to £15,000, especially at senior

levels, making it challenging to attract and retain the skilled professionals required to counter increasingly sophisticated criminality. This has resulted in a continued reliance on contingent labour, with DDaT remaining one of the Agency's largest areas of contingent labour spend despite its relatively small size. While contingent labour provides an immediate solution, it is costly and unsustainable in the long term.

4.7 The NCA recognises that addressing these challenges will require more than pay uplifts alone. The Agency is investing in upskilling and training existing officers, expanding apprenticeship pathways, and increasing the junior officer pipeline to support career progression and improve retention. These initiatives aim to help reduce dependency on external contractors and strengthen the Agency's long-term capability and resilience. The main cost pressures affecting the NCA's affordability ceiling remain pay awards (the 2025 pay award was 4.4%, exceeding affordability by 1.5%), changes in the grade mix with higher proportions of specialist and operational roles, attracting spot-rate pay, and contingent labour, alongside procured services. With contingent labour and professional services together accounting for around 17% of the Agency's pay bill, it is essential that workforce spend is targeted and cost-effective to ensure value for money for the taxpayer. The Agency acknowledges that these issues require ongoing strategic intervention.

NCA's 2026/27 recommendations

4.8 The NCA proposes that NCA officers (both powered and non-powered) should receive a pay award cognisant of the police pay award for 2026-27. The Agency believes this will improve the shortfall in officer pay at each grade compared to policing colleagues, due to the lack of pay progression in the NCA. The International Liaison Officer Allowance and Diplomatic Compensation Allowance should also be uplifted by the same percentage. This should address ongoing difficulties in recruiting from policing, as well as attracting and retaining officers from other law enforcement partners.

4.9 The Agency recommends that location allowances be increased by a higher percentage than basic pay, particularly to narrow the gap with the Metropolitan Police Service, where total location payments are significantly higher. The NCA's evidence notes that while location allowances are an important tool for supporting recruitment and retention in high-cost areas, their primary purpose should remain to compensate for the cost of living, and not to serve as a substitute for targeted recruitment or retention strategies. The Agency recognises that a more sustainable approach to addressing pay disparities would involve a combination of pay reform and role-specific incentives, rather than relying solely on location-based payments.

- 4.10 The evidence highlights the persistent and growing median pay gap between NCA and police officers, which continues to present challenges for recruitment and retention, particularly for mid-career officers. For example, the pay differential for NCA Grade 5 officers in receipt of spot rate payments remains substantial compared to police constables, and similar disparities exist at other grades. The NCA's workforce profile shows that while the Agency draws on a diverse range of sources, including the Civil Service, policing, and the private sector, the increasing pay gap with policing risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise. Addressing this divide is essential to sustaining the Agency's operational capacity. NCA's evidence recognises the importance of movement between commands and supports the development of a multi-skilled workforce, enabling the Agency to respond to emerging threats in an agile and effective manner.
- 4.11 The NCA's evidence also demonstrates that, in a direct comparison, the Agency's pay bands at median salary are above Civil Service comparisons at all grades. As NCA pay seeks to be competitive with policing on the one hand it risks imbalance with Civil Service pay on the other. Many NCA roles are directly comparable to those in other government departments, which do not offer pay progression. The Agency benefits from broader opportunities available within the Civil Service that are not typically offered within policing. There is a need for balance between aligning with police pay and maintaining competitiveness within the Civil Service, recognising that satisfying both comparators may not be possible without significant long-term reform, a concern also noted by the NCARRB in previous recommendations.

Affordability

- 4.12 The NCA's budget has continued to grow in recent years, with the Agency receiving additional investment to support government priorities, including tackling organised immigration crime and enhancing digital and data capabilities. For 2026/27, the Agency's budget will continue to grow and will be nearly £200m higher than it was in 2023/24, under the previous government. However, despite these uplifts, the Agency continues to face significant affordability challenges. Rising operational costs, higher pay awards—driven by both recruitment and retention pressures and wider economic factors—and increased commercial and programme expenditure all contribute to ongoing budgetary strain. The NCA highlights that recent pay awards have exceeded the levels originally budgeted for, requiring the reprioritisation of budgets and the implementation of challenging efficiency and savings targets across the organisation.
- 4.13 The Home Office budget remains under considerable pressure, leaving limited scope for supplementary financial support to the Agency. The NCA's evidence emphasises the importance of ensuring that any pay award recommendations are affordable and sustainable, not only for 2026/27 but also in future years. The Agency has budgeted for a pay award in 2026/27 but notes that the economic

and financial landscape remains uncertain, and that any increase above the planned level would require further cost reduction measures or risk impacting operational delivery. As HMT make clear through their economic evidence, public finances remain under pressure and pay awards must continue to be funded from departmental budgets. Any recommendations above the level departments have set out as affordable will require careful consideration, particularly given the Budget 2025 commitment to make further efficiencies and savings from 2028-29 onwards. Any increase above the planned level for the NCA's pay award will need to be met from NCA's existing budget.

- 4.14 Pay reform is a crucial part of the delivery of the NCA's strategy. The ambition remains to build on the previous years of progress, to be able to compete with its comparator markets, so that it can attract and retain the skills needed to lead the fight against serious and organised crime. The Agency states its proposals will be cost neutral, as a targeted pay award is expected to strengthen retention in specialist and operational roles, reducing staff turnover and the need for contingent labour, and that it will implement contractual reform via collective agreement.
- 4.15 The NCA's overall pay bill has continued to rise, reflecting both pay uplifts and the costs associated with contingent labour and professional services, which together account for a significant proportion of the Agency's expenditure. These pressures are compounded by the need to invest in technology and modernise the workforce, as well as to baseline multiple and complex funding streams to drive efficiency and operational flexibility. The Agency's evidence underscores the need for robust financial management and careful workforce planning to ensure value for money and maintain operational effectiveness.
- 4.16 Looking ahead, the NCA recognises the importance of leveraging technology, including digital infrastructure upgrades and the adoption of artificial intelligence, to drive productivity and offset rising costs. The Agency is also mindful of the need to maintain a balanced and agile workforce, ensuring that resources are targeted effectively to support frontline operations while managing growth in corporate and enabling functions. These measures will be critical to ensuring the long-term affordability and sustainability of the NCA's mission.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Home Office continues to be committed to supporting the NCA in its critical mission to tackle serious and organised crime, including the growing challenges posed by crime moving online. The Agency continues to deliver strong operational outcomes, but it is essential that it maintains workforce capability, cohesion, and morale in the face of ongoing pressures. Ensuring the NCA is equipped with the tools and resources needed to enhance productivity, recruit and retain specialist skills, and deliver value for money remains a key priority.

5.2 The NCA's recommendations for 2026/27 have been developed with affordability in mind, recognising the broader fiscal constraints on public finances. Through ongoing collaboration, targeted investment, and continued development of its workforce and pay framework, the Home Office will ensure the NCA is well positioned to meet current and future challenges. This approach will help safeguard communities and support the delivery of government priorities in the fight against serious and organised crime.

6. Annex – Home Secretary Strategic Priorities for the National Crime Agency

[The following Strategic Priorities were set for period 2024-26. The priorities are currently under review and not yet set for the forthcoming financial year. It is anticipated that the priorities will continue to include tackling these high profile serious and organised crime threats and for the NCA to continue to lead the operational system.]

Home Secretary Strategic Priorities for the National Crime Agency 2024-26

The Government is committed to reducing serious and organised crime. Organised crime groups drive the crime that blights our communities, undermine our border security, put lives at risk, and are a persistent threat to our national security.

The NCA has a crucial role to play as the operational system leader on serious and organised crime in the UK and through its action against organised crime groups in the UK, overseas and online.

The National Crime Agency will:

1. **Lead the law enforcement system on serious and organised crime (SOC) in the UK including by strengthening cooperation with policing and other partners to tackle organised crime groups that impact on the UK.** The NCA will develop and disseminate intelligence, invest in specialist capabilities and technology to ensure no criminals are beyond the reach of law enforcement and provide support to other law enforcement activity to target SOC in our communities and online.
2. **Prioritise the NCA's own operational capabilities against the highest harm individuals, groups and networks operating in or against the UK.** The NCA will focus on criminals beyond the reach of local and regional policing where the Agency's specialist capabilities can have greatest impact on harm to the UK.
3. **Strengthen and protect the UK border by working with the Border Security Command, Border Force and other partners to disrupt and dismantle the organised crime groups that undermine our border security and drive**

cross-border threats, in particular the smuggling of illicit commodities and the facilitation of irregular migration. The NCA will deliver a step change in reducing Organised Immigration Crime in all its forms, with a primary focus on the Organised Crime Groups facilitating small boat crossings. The NCA will have regard to the strategic priorities set by the Border Security Commander's Border Security Strategic Leadership Board.

4. **Lead the law enforcement system to reduce child sexual abuse by tackling the highest harm and most technically sophisticated individuals and organised online networks.** The NCA will ensure effective and timely referral of intelligence about child sexual abuse online to policing and will deliver high impact operations which require national or international co-ordination and/or sensitive capabilities to ensure no CSA offenders are beyond the reach of law enforcement.
5. **Make our streets safer from violent crime by working with policing and other partners, in the UK and overseas, to disrupt and dismantle the organised crime groups and networks that traffic and supply illicit commodities, including drugs and firearms.** This includes the NCA leading the UK law enforcement response to stem the flow of synthetic opioids into the UK and working with partners to reduce the threat posed by SOC offenders operating from prison.
6. **Reduce fraud and combat corrupt elites, cyber and economic crime.** The NCA will lead the law enforcement system in targeting fraud, money laundering, sanctions evasion, corrupt elites and professional enablers. It will investigate and disrupt cyber criminals and the ecosystem that support them, with a particular focus on ransomware.
7. **Reduce the opportunities for organised crime groups to traffic and exploit individuals.** The NCA will ensure effective join up between law enforcement agencies to address the enablers of modern slavery and human trafficking and will disrupt and dismantle the highest harm groups that are trafficking individuals into and around the UK.
8. **Identify, respond, and reduce the impact of emerging threats to the UK in particular the growth in crime taking place online or enabled by technology.**
9. **Enhance bilateral and multilateral international partnerships, including through Europol and INTERPOL, upstream and transit countries to reduce the harm caused by organised crime groups operating against the UK from overseas.** The NCA will work closely with policing through its Joint International Crime Centre to support investigations involving crime with an international dimension.