# Multi-agency operation targets organised crime in cash-heavy businesses across southern England



A coordinated multi-agency operation targeting serious and organised crime conducted across parts of southern England has led to numerous seizures, arrests, and enforcement actions against cash-intensive businesses including barbershops and vape shops.

Led by the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit, the operation involved collaboration with Trading Standards, Immigration Enforcement, the Department of Work and Pensions, and various local police forces. During March, teams visited 11 premises across Sussex, Hampshire, and the Thames Valley, with individual sites located in Oxford, Slough, Wokingham, Brighton, Hove, and Farnborough.

Among the key outcomes of these visits, Trading Standards confiscated illegal cigarettes valued at approximately £1,000, while police seized 100 wraps of Class B drugs. Two barbershop proprietors received prohibition notices due to unsafe fire practices, and Immigration Enforcement made one arrest linked to illegal working. Additionally, a local authority issued a licence enforcement notice after discovering a business was non-compliant with licensing conditions.

Further investigations remain active concerning allegations of tax evasion, potential benefit fraud, and unauthorised construction of buildings or structures.

Detective Inspector Emily Evans of the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit explained the significance of such operations saying, "Approximately £12 billion of criminal cash is generated in the UK each year, according to estimates. This is usually smuggled out of the country or makes its way into the financial system via money laundering. Premises which tend to be used by organised crime groups in this manner include those which use cash extensively - barbershops, vape shops, and nail salons. Money laundering can be linked to a myriad of other offences so a partnership approach is key to ensuring we can build an intelligence picture so that those who engage in criminal or civil offences can be held to account for their actions."

The visits formed part of the larger Operation Machinize, led by the National Crime Agency’s National Economic Crime Centre, which focused on cash-intensive businesses nationally. Across the entire operation, 265 premises were inspected. Officers secured freezing orders on bank accounts holding over £1 million, executed 84 warrants, and arrested 35 individuals.

Operation Machinize also involved questioning 55 people about their immigration status, safeguarding 97 individuals potentially affected by modern slavery, and seizing over £40,000 in cash alongside nearly 200,000 cigarettes, 7,000 tobacco packs, more than 8,000 illegal vape products, and two vehicles. Two cannabis farms were uncovered, containing a combined total of 150 plants, while ten shops have been closed, with further closures anticipated pending ongoing investigations.

This extensive enforcement activity demonstrates the scale of efforts underway to address the complex challenges posed by organised crime and illicit activities within cash-reliant sectors across the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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