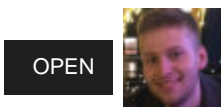


**INTERVIEW:**

# Det Supt Ian Kirby: ‘Working in cybercrime, I’ve helped more people than in the rest of my career’



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**James Sweetland, Policing Insight**



**After his first six months leading the National Cyber Resilience Centre Group – a not-for-profit partnership that enhances the cyber resilience of small businesses – Detective Superintendent Ian Kirby has ambitious plans for growth and a call to arms for police officers around cyber prevention, as Policing Insight’s James Sweetland reports.**

To understand why Detective Superintendent Ian Kirby decided to take the plunge and move from operational policing to becoming the CEO of the [National Cyber Resilience Centre Group](#) (NCRCG), it's helpful to know a little about his background in policing. In fact, you need to go back to the reason he joined policing in the first place.

“I joined the police to help people – helping that little old lady cross the road or someone in the community that maybe doesn't have a voice and has even been assaulted,” explained Det Supt Kirby.

“My feeling of duty, of public service, of wanting to help the community was really strong. But quite quickly, after you've been in policing for a short period of time – even just a year or two – you realise the reality is very different.

“You spend your time running from job to job. You don't really have the time or the resources to stop and help that little old lady cross the road.” It's a sentiment many readers of Policing Insight may identify with.

His subsequent switch to working on cybercrime had a powerful impact. “I went through my career in traditional organised crime and then as Head of Cyber for the East of England, running the investigations for the region.

“I was really empowered there by the fact that as well as the traditional pursue and arrest stuff, I had the Cyber Prevent programme which offered diversionary programmes for young people.

“I really saw the impact it could have. I sat with parents who were in tears, telling me that the day we arrested their son for cybercrime was actually the best thing that ever happened to them as a family, because their son is now on a diversionary programme, his neurodiversity needs are recognised, and it has revolutionised their home life. Whereas before, he'd dropped out of education and had no support. Until Cyber Prevent became involved, they had nothing.

“As a senior investigating officer, I saw the devastating effect that cybercrime has on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). I was sitting across the board table with CEOs or directors of family firms who were basically saying they were finished.

“They didn’t know how they were going to survive until the next day, let alone rebuild their company. It really brought home to me that I can revert back to what I always joined the job to do and help people in this type of work.”

Prevention is often the only effective answer, he added: “It’s rare we get a positive result in which we arrest someone. Our prevention and our work to boost cyber resilience is far more powerful than we’ve ever had before. And actually, working in cybercrime, I’ve helped more people than I’ve ever helped in the rest of my career.”

For D/Supt Kirby, becoming CEO of the NCRCG meant doing more of what made him want to join the police, even without an operational focus. “What inspired me to go for this role was, again, that desire to maximise reach to victims. That’s what I do every day. I get up to support all my regional cyber resilience centres knowing that we are helping businesses on the high street.”

## **The National Cyber Resilience Centre Group**

The NCRCG sits at the heart of a network of nine regional cyber resilience centres, distributed across England and Wales. Its job is to co-ordinate the work of these centres, which engage with small businesses in their area to provide training and support around better cybersecurity.

Crucially, the goal is to enhance the resilience of SMEs to future threats. Unlike other bodies which can provide immediate and reactive support when a cyberattack takes place – such as the [National Cyber Security Centre](#) – regional cyber resilience centres are about prevention.

That might mean providing training sessions covering basic cybersecurity advice – how to create strong passwords and secure systems – or assessments of where small businesses are currently facing cyber risks. It’s about stopping the next breach, rather than responding to one that’s already taken place.

The NCRCG model is an interesting example of public-private collaboration. Cyber resilience centres are all not-for-profits with funding provided by the Home Office, but there’s close working with nine private-sector ‘ambassadors’ – the likes of Aviva, Microsoft and NatWest.

These ambassadors work with the NCRCG on programmes like [Cyber PATH](#), and contribute to the group's wider mission: boosting the cyber resilience of small businesses.

Having made the transition from cop to CEO, how does Det Supt Kirby view his first six months at the head of the NCRCG? "I joined in June and began learning the business side of running the NCRCG; that was important for me obviously as a detective and a career police officer," he told Policing Insight. "Running a business is entirely new and it's a completely different way of thinking, managing and leading.

"When I first came in, I reviewed the current network, identified areas for improvement, the current direction and all those sorts of things. But what I've been struck with is the positivity and the pride in each centre as they try to do crime prevention in the modern, connected world.

"Everybody has a desire to maximise their reach to those SMEs and the spread of their advice, because the vast majority of cybercrime can be prevented by a few simple steps. It's really heart-warming to be a part of that."

## **Consistency and growth**

Just a few months into Det Supt Kirby's tenure, the NCRCG hosted its second annual [National Cyber Resilience Centre Summit](#). Bringing together NCRCG staff, senior law enforcement officials, government, and the centre's private sector ambassadors, it's the landmark event in the organisation's calendar.

According to Det Supt Kirby, the latest event set the stage for a new phase in the organisation's development. "The summit considered what we have gone through as a network. Some regional centres are now four years old, while our newest is just past its first birthday – there's a huge difference in experience and knowledge. And the national centre is there to provide all those central functions which help the regions to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

"The big takeaway from the meeting was consistency in delivering a single, collective message, so that those in Devon and Cornwall receive the same baseline level of consistent advice and messaging as they would get in Newcastle or London. There should be no difference, aside from the local nuances that can be tailored to a particular geographical area. It shouldn't be a

postcode lottery.

“We want it to be consistent because we want to try and declutter the landscape. There’s so much advice out there – some of which is similar, some of which is contradictory – that we want the voice of the police to be the one strong, resounding message in amongst all the noise that’s going on.”

That also means spreading the message much wider: “The second takeaway is around growth,” said Det Supt Kirby. “The NCRCG is still really in its period of infancy, we’re only a few years old now. We’re really going to elevate our positioning in the year ahead.

We’re working with a number of our national ambassadors – Mastercard, NatWest, Aviva – large companies who are supporting us to really take it to the next level. It’s about maximising that reach, our marketing, our publicity, and our strategic collaboration.

“At the moment, we’ve currently got around 10,500 SMEs registered with us. We want to increase that. I would like to reach every SME, so that every one of those organisations has some sort of cyber resilience advice.

“I want everybody to know about our brand and view it as a trusted brand, recognising the words ‘cyber resilience centre’ and knowing that there is one within their region.”

It’s a bold ambition, but how can it be achieved? “I don’t mean that we need more regional centres, we’ve got enough of those. It’s about growing the client base in each of those regions.

“One of the really exciting things for the NCRCG is that I’m engaged with a large corporate comms firm, who are working through a new strategic communications strategy for the network.

“They’re going to introduce consistent messaging that will revolutionise how we present ourselves and maximise our reach to the customer. That’s coming in around February or March.”

## **The cyber resilience journey**

When one of the regional cyber resilience centres begins working with an SME for the first time, the goal is to take this small company on a 'journey' towards greater cyber resilience – as Det Supt Kirby told Policing Insight.

“When we first engage with them and they become a member, our job is to take them on an educational journey. Maybe six months down the line, after they’ve received our newsletters or attended some webinars, they start to think, ‘Oh, OK, I run a website, maybe I should get someone to look at it now.’

“Before they’ve reached that educational point in their journey, they probably assume that the website will be safe because they hired someone and paid them £50 to set it up. What they won’t realise is that the person probably hasn’t looked at the security side at all, because they just did what they were asked and set up the website.

“When they begin to understand a bit more about the cybersecurity threats they’re facing, they might decide they want to take up services from us. Our most popular offers are the staff awareness training – if they have, for example, five to 10 employees in their business – and the vulnerability assessments.

“That’s where we sit; not the short-term stuff in the immediate aftermath of an incident, but the medium-to-long term educational journey, with technical services provided along the way.”

A second area the NCRCG is trying to develop further is in its intelligence-sharing function.

“Working with my national ambassadors, I have a specific workstream looking at enriching the intelligence picture. We do that by trying to join up the police-led organisations – such as Action Fraud and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau – with those large companies like Mastercard and NatWest,” explained Det Supt Kirby.

“If I can introduce a method of intelligence sharing – sharing attacks reported to policing and those experienced by large organisations on their networks – we can feed that data into policing.

“That’ll enrich the reporting stats and our overall intelligence picture... At the moment, it’s not as good as it could be. There’s still a bit of guesswork and, as it’s widely under-reported, we don’t know what’s going on with all that stuff that [isn’t shared with policing].”

It's that public-private element of the NCRCG's structure that means it could play an especially valuable role here. "If we can join up appropriately – which is the benefit for us as that strategic link between policing and industry – that gives us the picture we need to hopefully allocate funding accordingly.

"We can allocate resources if we understand the threat locally, regionally and nationally. It just makes all those political decisions easier."

## **Building out**

A step-change in cyber resilience would offer benefits all round. For businesses, there's lower risk of financial losses and costly data breaches. For employees, keeping the SMEs they work for – and sometimes own – afloat is obviously essential.

And for policing itself, it appears to be the only way that cybercrime can be tackled – arresting your way out of the problem really doesn't work here.

In the second part of this interview, we look in more detail at programmes the NCRCG delivers – including Cyber PATH, a scheme that aims to deliver 'workplace-ready' cyber professionals.

We also examine the scale of cyber threats facing SMEs and hear why Det Supt Kirby, an experienced detective with a long history in policing, believes cyber prevention should be a core skill for every frontline officer today.

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This article can be found here:

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