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Former NCA Officer Jailed for Stealing Bitcoin from Dark Web Seizure

July 17, 2025

— Categories: Crime



A former intelligence officer with the National Crime Agency (NCA) has been sentenced to five years and six months in prison after he admitted to stealing bitcoin from a dark web investigation. The stolen cryptocurrency, worth around £60,000 at the time, has since soared in value to over £4 million.

Paul Chowles, 42, exploited his position while working on the high-profile investigation into Silk Road 2.0, a dark web marketplace used for the sale of illegal drugs and goods. The site emerged after the original Silk Road was shut down by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2013. Chowles accessed private information about Thomas White, the

site's Liverpool-based operator, who was arrested by the NCA in 2014, and quietly took 50 bitcoin from White's digital "retirement wallet".

Chowles attempted to cover his tracks by using Bitcoin Fog, a cryptocurrency "mixer" service designed to make digital transactions harder to trace. But he came under suspicion after White, who was later jailed in 2019, insisted he had not accessed his cryptocurrency while behind bars.

Breach of Trust

It was only in 2022 that the truth came to light. While searching Chowles' property, investigators discovered notebooks containing login credentials linked to White's cryptocurrency accounts. Prosecutor Craig Hassall told Liverpool Crown Court that Chowles had managed to cash out just under £145,000, but the full value of the stolen bitcoin had increased dramatically in the years since.

The NCA, believing White had originally taken the missing funds himself, had sold the remaining 47 bitcoin for approximately £500,000 to help meet a £1.5 million confiscation order. When the truth emerged, the NCA moved quickly to suspend Chowles, dismissing him this month for gross misconduct following his guilty pleas.

Appearing in court, Chowles admitted to theft, transferring criminal property, and concealing criminal property. Judge David Aubrey KC condemned the betrayal of public trust, saying: "You succumbed to temptation. You were in a position of privilege, handling sensitive and confidential material. Your actions have damaged the integrity of your agency and the wider justice system."

Police seized bitcoin worth around £470,000 from Chowles, though he likely intended to profit further had he not been caught. The case has raised concerns about the security of digital assets under law enforcement control and the internal checks that failed to prevent a serving officer from exploiting his access.

There has been no public statement from Chowles or his legal team. The NCA confirmed it fully supported the investigation and said it continues to take misconduct by staff extremely seriously.

This case highlights the growing challenges posed by digital currencies and reminds us that even those tasked with upholding the law must be closely monitored. Public confidence in crime-fighting institutions depends on their ability to root out wrongdoing within their own ranks.