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Former NCA Officer Imprisoned for Stealing Bitcoin in Silk Road 2.0 Investigation

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– Categories: *Crypto*



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A former officer of the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) has been sentenced to five and a half years in prison after being found guilty of stealing Bitcoin (BTC) currently valued at nearly £4.6 million. Paul Chowles, once entrusted with investigating the notorious Silk Road 2.0 case, exploited his position to misappropriate digital assets seized during the investigation, an act described by prosecutors as a deliberate betrayal of public trust.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the government body responsible for criminal prosecutions in England and Wales, confirmed Chowles' five and a half year sentence following his guilty plea to theft, fraud by abuse of position, and money laundering. Chowles had been assigned to examine data recovered from devices belonging to Thomas White, co-founder of Silk Road 2.0, an illicit online marketplace operating on the dark web after the FBI dismantled the original Silk Road in 2013.

In November 2014, authorities had seized 97 BTC from White, then valued at approximately £60,000. However, in May 2017, 50 of those BTC were illicitly transferred to a different wallet address. Investigators later discovered that the Bitcoin had been routed through Bitcoin Fog, a cryptocurrency mixing service, in a likely attempt to obscure the origin of the funds—a common tactic to launder digital assets.

Blockchain analysis tools were used to trace the stolen funds, which were eventually linked to cryptocurrency-enabled debit cards, though the CPS did not specifically name Chainalysis in its public statements. According to the CPS, Chowles used those cards to spend approximately £109,000, though his total financial gain is estimated at over £613,000.

Chowles had been regarded as one of the NCA's technically proficient officers, particularly in digital forensics, including dark web investigations and cryptocurrencies. CPS special prosecutor Alex Johnson remarked, "He took advantage of his position working on this investigation by lining his own pockets while devising a plan that he believed would ensure that suspicion would never fall upon him."

The break in the case came not from internal oversight, but from the very suspect the NCA had originally targeted. White alerted law enforcement that the Bitcoin theft could not have been executed without access to his crypto wallet keys, which were solely in the possession of the NCA. This prompted a renewed investigation, eventually implicating Chowles. During a joint meeting with Merseyside Police, Chowles was present as a member of the original investigative team, unknowingly participating in the early stages of the inquiry into his crime.

Subsequent searches revealed incriminating evidence, including notebooks in Chowles' office containing login details related to White's cryptocurrency accounts, and a mobile phone linked to transfers from the stolen Bitcoin.

The CPS has confirmed that it will seek to reclaim the financial benefits Chowles obtained through confiscation proceedings. The case marks a rare breach of integrity within the UK's top crime-fighting body and highlights the importance of oversight in digital asset management, particularly as crypto becomes an increasingly central element in criminal investigations.