

County Lines, Drugs & Gangs – 7 Minute Briefing

1. Background

County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend.

2. Definition

The 2018 Home Office Serious Crime Strategy states the NPCC definition of a County Line is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

3. Why it matters:

A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers will frequently target children and adults - often with mental health or addiction problems - to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement. In some cases the dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing. People exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business. As we have seen in child sexual exploitation, children often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. So it's important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

4. Indicators of County Lines

Some signs to look out for include:

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g. different accents compared to local accent)
- Change in resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g. clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries

5. Law Enforcement Response

Tackling county lines, and the supply gangs responsible for high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse of vulnerable adults and children, is a priority for UK law enforcement, who have collectively been stepping up its response, working to identify and take effective action in areas of the country with the most significant problems. To enhance the law enforcement response still further, a multi-agency County Lines coordination centre has been established, bringing together officers from the NCA, Police and regional organised crime units to develop the national intelligence picture, prioritise action against the most serious offenders, and engage with partners across government, including in the health, welfare and education spheres, to tackle the wider issues.

5. Further Information

More information can be found at:

- [National Crime Agency Report \(January 2019\)](#)
- [Home Office Guidance: Criminal exploitation of children & vulnerable adults: county lines \(Updated February 2020\)](#)
- [Trapped GM Challenger 2019 Partner Pack & Campaign Materials](#)

6. Who can help?

The best advice is to trust your instincts. Even if someone isn't involved in county lines drug dealing, they may be being exploited in some other way. You can contact:

- Local Police by dialling 101, or in an emergency 999
- British Transport Police by texting 61016 from your mobile (If you notice something linked to the railways)
- Catch 22 (who work with children and young people of any age to help get them out of situations they're worried about, and have helped lots of children and young people involved in County Lines)
- Childline on 0800 1111 (for children & young people)

7. Recognise, Record and Refer

If you are worried that a child is being exploited or involved with county lines, discuss with your line manager immediately and/or the Bridge on 0161 603 4500. Referrals can be made online at <https://www.salford.gov.uk/worriedaboutachild>

If you think a young person may be at immediate risk of harm ring 999

Additional Information

Visit: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/>

Email: SSCP@salford.gov.uk

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