

Summary Briefing Paper for Partners in relation to, County Lines and Serious Youth Violence and its impact on Safeguarding of Vulnerable People

County Lines typically involves an urban criminal groups travelling to smaller shire and coastal locations to sell heroin and crack cocaine. The group will use a single telephone number, operated from outside the area, for customers ordering drugs, which is the 'county line'; and becomes their 'brand'. The criminals tend to use a local property, generally belonging to a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities. This is often taken over by force or coercion, and in some instances victims have left their homes in fear of violence. The criminals employ various tactics to evade detection, including rotating members between locations so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors, and using women, children and young people to transport drugs in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched.

In 2015 the National Crime Agency produced a report based on 2014 data *County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding*. Key points from the report were:

- County Lines' is a national issue involving the use of mobile phone 'lines' by groups to extend their drug dealing business into new locations outside of their home areas. This issue affects the majority of forces.
- A 'county lines' enterprise almost always involves **exploitation of vulnerable persons**; this can involve **both children and adults** who require safeguarding.
- Secure operating bases are an essential feature of these enterprises which can be successfully disrupted through law enforcement tactics.
- Mobile phone 'lines' are an essential feature of these enterprises; understanding what numbers are being used is important in assessing which groups are working where.
- There is a need for a multi-agency approach at a national, regional and local level.

In November 2016 the National Crime Agency produced a second report *County Lines: Gang Exploitation and Drug Supply*.

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file>

Emerging new trends noted included:

- The emergence of a 24/7 market; whereas in 2014 activity was almost exclusively day time
- Gang members establishing roots in areas that have had county lines activity over a long period and creating spin off markets around those established bases
- The use of tasers and acid as weapons for enforcing local dominance
- The targeting of adults with mental health issues
- 71% of Police Force areas reported established county lines activity, with a further 12% reporting an emerging picture over the previous six months.
- 80% of police forces reported the exploitation of children, typically to deliver the drugs to customers, using a combination of intimidation, violence, debt bondage,

and grooming to control them. Adult drug users, often addicts, and vulnerable females are also exploited.

- Other 2016 findings include the dominance of London gangs, which were reported in 85% of areas. 35% of areas highlighted the presence of Somali gangs from London.
- A positive aspect of the reports from Police Forces is that 90% are actively working with local partners to safeguard vulnerable adults and children. The most successful safeguarding outcomes have involved multiple agencies, including police, housing authorities, town councils, public health bodies, charities and the media.

Serious Youth Violence became an emerging concern for Norfolk Youth Offending Team in the summer of 2014 following the murder in Hemsby of Connor Barrett by two Norfolk based teenagers in May of that year. A 'Problem Profile' commissioned from the County Community Safety Partnership and Police Data Analyst produced in August 2015 informed a paper presented to the Norfolk Youth Justice (Management) Board in September 2015. This resulted in a recommendation to bring the matter to the attention of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board and a presentation *Serious Youth Violence: A Public Protection and Safeguarding Issue* was made in December 2015. It was agreed to commission the Home Office Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Team to conduct a *Local Assessment Process* and this took place in March 2016. In July 2016 a report was agreed with the recommendations:

1. **Commission a Multi-Agency Cross County Problem Profile:** an updated 'Problem Profile' on the issue of County Lines in Norfolk was commissioned and is being fully scoped in December 2016.
2. **Develop a County Lines Strategy:** the Norfolk Public Protection Forum received a presentation at its meeting on 15 December and agreed to facilitate bringing relevantly agencies together for an initial meeting prior to handing 'governance' over to the County Community Safety Partnership.
3. **Develop a county wide policy concerning missing from home return interviews for vulnerable children:** this work has been completed
4. **Explore opportunities for greater Partnership Working:** this work will be included within the emerging County Lines Strategy
5. **Develop Community Engagement Strategies with Emerging Communities:** this work will be considered within the emerging County Lines Strategy
6. **Awareness Training for Staff:** a multi-agency working group has been established to drive forward this recommendation and former staff of the Home Office Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Team will deliver three initial presentations for 60 -120 practitioners in Norfolk in February/March 2017. This training is funded by the Norfolk Youth Offending Team and the Police and the majority of delegates for these initial presentations will come from those agencies.



Operation Gravity

Disruption activity led by Norfolk Constabulary to target the most serious offenders involved in the dealing and the transportation of Class A drugs around the county commenced in November 2016 as part of a multi-agency operation in connection with drug related crime in the county. Operation Gravity, is not only about targeting criminals who have been travelling into Norfolk from places such as London but equally importantly is about supporting those vulnerable members of Norfolk communities who have been taken advantage of. Drug dealers use a range of tactics such as violence or exploiting vulnerable individuals by taking over their homes - known as “cuckooing”. They also use children and young people to conceal the drugs either directly or through their family. By understanding these tactics it allows the Police to target those who have become victims of drug dealers and are being forced to assist them, whilst signposting them to any support they may need. A multi-agency approach will be key to solving the issue long-term. All partner agencies from Children’s Services, Adult Services and Norfolk Youth Offending Team, to the NHS in Norfolk and Waveney, local housing authorities, local councils, landlords and drug rehabilitation organisations will have a role to play to reduce and prevent further drug offences taking place.

What to look out for and how can I help

- Increased awareness of houses being attended by people who would not normally be associated with the occupant
- Does the occupant seem in fear or controlled by the ‘visitors’?
- Is the occupant not staying at the address when the ‘visitors’ are present?
- Is there evidence of drugs being plugged (concealed in body cavities) within the address, for example dirty wet wipes, Vaseline, cling film on the floor or in bins?
- Are there weapons in the address or kitchen knives with cling film wrapped around the handle?
- Are neighbours saying there is dealing or ‘druggies’ at the address?
- Are there children at the address who may be at risk?
- Are you sharing information with partners to safeguard the occupants?
- Are you sharing information to prevent criminal activity?

Should your staff or contacts have any information that may be relevant or concerns about the vulnerability of residents they can either make contact with their local Operational Partnership Team quoting Operation Gravity or e-mail the Police at CIB@norfolk.pnn.police.uk with Operation Gravity in the subject bar. If the information or concern for safety is more pressing then staff should ‘phone 101 or if an emergency, 999 citing the believed links to Op Gravity.

How can partner agencies and stakeholders help?

- Contribute to the development of a County Lines strategy that all agencies can support and deliver against.
- Commit to joint working to identify those young people at risk.
- Contribute to the development of an operational strategy for those young people who want to get out of the situation they are in.
- Fully commit to intelligence and information sharing as a two way process.
- Provide appropriate support to vulnerable young people from a safeguarding perspective.

Recommendation

That County Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Panel notes and confirms the recommendations that 'governance' of multi-agency partnership activity in response to County Lines and its impact on vulnerable people is provided by the County Community Safety Partnership.

Other relevant documents:

Dr Simon Harding's (University of Middlesex) review of the Home Office EGYV Programme November 2016.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/570476/egyv-assessment-programme-2012-15-full-report.pdf

Home Office report on EGYV (now Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation) report

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/491699/Ending_gang_violence_and_Exploitation_FINAL.pdf