

# Safeguarding Newsletter

## September 2022



County Lines is a term used to describe criminal networks from large urban areas, who travel to smaller locations such as a county or coastal town to sell class A drugs. Gangs typically recruit and exploit children and vulnerable people for various roles within the drug supply chain.

- 118 branded lines were reported as having links to firearms.
- an individual line can make profits in excess of £800,000 per year.
- children aged between 15-17 years make up the bulk of the vulnerable people involved in county lines.
- the highest number of lines continue to originate from London (approx. 15%), followed by the West Midlands (9%) and Merseyside (7%).
- 91% of individuals associated to county lines offending are male. However, the report acknowledges that females are underrepresented as both offenders and victims.
- heroin and crack cocaine (69%) remain the drugs most commonly supplied through county lines.
- offenders continue to use mass marketing text messages to advertise the supply and availability of drugs. This includes offers and promotions such as two for one deals and free samples.
- criminal networks use social media for several reasons: recruitment, promoting their brand, intimidating rival offenders, to avoid identification and disruption by law enforcement.
- analysis identified potential victims aged between 11 and 56.
- high vulnerability factors for children include poverty, family breakdown, social care intervention, looked after children, frequent missing episodes, behavioural and developmental disorders and exclusion from mainstream schooling.
- children without a criminal footprint are also targeted in an attempt to reduce attention from law enforcement.
- high vulnerability factors for adults include drug addiction and mental health conditions.
- key locations for recruitment include schools, higher educational institutions, Pupil Referral Units, special educational needs schools, foster homes, pharmacies and homeless shelters.
- there has been an increase in the use of short-term lets and guest houses to store drugs and cash, rather than cuckooed properties.
- rail network hubs are key points of access to and exit from the rail network (40%). Between May and August 2018, 35% of suspects in county lines activity encountered on the rail network had links to possession of weapons within the previous six months, and 3% were linked to possession of firearms.
- the national road network also remains key to the transportation of offenders, victims of exploitation, drugs, cash and weapons.

You can read the full NCA assessment [here](#)

## **What is being done to combat county lines?**

Whilst there has clearly been a growth in the number of criminal networks and branded lines, there has also been increased activity to tackle the issue, both in enforcement and safeguarding those who have been exploited. Just some of the actions already taken are:

- in September 2018, the new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre (NCLCC) began operating. Jointly led by the NCA and the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), the centre's objectives are to significantly increase law enforcement's ability to get a more accurate intelligence picture of the problem.
- the Home Office recently updated its [County Lines guidance booklet](#), which is aimed at frontline safeguarding staff, particularly those who work with children.
- the publication of the NCA assessment followed a week of coordinated law enforcement activity across the UK which resulted in over 600 arrests. Approximately 400 vulnerable adults and 600 children were offered safeguarding advice and support. Around 40 referrals were made under the NRM process.
- many areas around the UK have carried out multi-agency prevent and protect work.
- the Home Office has been engaged in talks with groups such as Uber and the Licenced Private Hire Car Association, around what they can offer as a response and how they can spot the warning signs of county lines.
- the Home Office funded a [year-long pilot project](#) run jointly by the St Giles Trust and Missing People, offering support and interventions to those young people and their families affected by county lines.

For further information on County Lines, please read our articles below:

[County lines, the children exploited to deal drugs by criminal networks](#)

[County Lines – how gangs recruit children](#)

[County Lines – Get a step ahead by improving your knowledge](#)

**If you would like more information, please contact Derek and any other member of the safeguarding team.**