



Safeguarding Children and Young People in Education

County Lines & Criminal Exploitation of Children

*Deborah Whelan - Rotherham local authority education & safeguarding officer
JMAT strategic attendance & safeguarding lead*

Aims of the session

Raise awareness of:

- **County Lines**
- **Signs and indicators of County Lines**
- **Criminal Exploitation of Children (CCE)**



County Lines

- County Lines is where **illegal drugs** are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries.
- County Lines works on a **business model** with a customer base.
- The cocaine market alone is estimated to be worth between **nine and twelve billion pounds** annually.
- The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs.
- Usually **Class A drugs** - heroin, crack cocaine and cocaine but can also include amphetamines and cannabis.

County Lines Tactics

- Child Criminal Exploitation involves a power imbalance in favour of the perpetrator.
- It usually involves some sort of exchange e.g. carrying drugs in exchange for something either tangible (money, drugs, clothes) or intangible (status, protection).
- It involves the use of coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons, and can involve threats to family.



Criminal Exploitation of Children

- Children as **young as 12** have been exploited into **carrying drugs** for gangs.
- Children from **stable backgrounds** are **often targeted** as they aren't known to the police.
- It can involve children being **trafficked away** from their home area, staying in accommodation and selling/manufacturing drugs.
- This can be in airbnbs, budget hotels, short term rental or the home of a vulnerable person (**cuckooing**).



Cuckooing

Cuckooing is when a criminal gang takes over the home of a vulnerable person through violence and intimidation, using it as their base for selling/manufacturing drugs.

They often create a **drugs debt** to exploit.

Signs of Cuckooing

- An increase in people coming and going.
- An increase in cars or bikes outside.
- Litter outside.
- Signs of drugs use.
- You haven't seen the person who lives there recently or when you have, they have been anxious or distracted.



Grooming

The grooming process involves the gang;

- targeting a child to exploit.
- finding out the child's vulnerabilities/needs and wants.
- manipulating the child into believing that being in the gang can fulfil these needs.
- some children are groomed through family members, for instance if they have a sibling/relative already involved with a gang.

Once they have identified a child, the gang will make contact either in person or via mobile phone, and the grooming process will begin.

Social media profiles may also be used to **glamourise gang life** and **entice young people**.

Key Places Targeted by Gangs

County lines gangs have been known to target/approach vulnerable young people from:

- schools and further educational institutions.
- special educational needs schools.
- places for alternative provision outside of mainstream education.



Signs of criminal exploitation and county lines in young people

- Unexplained money, phone(s), clothes or jewellery.
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour.
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know.
- Coming home with injuries or looking particularly dishevelled.
- Having hotel cards or keys to unknown places.

- Returning home late, staying out all night or going missing.
- Being found in areas away from home.
- Increasing drug use, or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them.
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going.
- Unexplained absences from school, college, training or work.

What do we notice about these signs and behaviours?

They are similar to those observed in children who have been **groomed** and **sexually exploited**.

These gangs use **similar tactics** to **CSE perpetrators** in order to exploit, coerce, threaten and control vulnerable children.

The young people involved **may not recognise** themselves as victims of any abuse, and can be used to **recruit other young people**.

County Lines is not a Single-issue **problem**

It involves:

- drugs
- violence
- gang affiliation
- child criminal and sexual exploitation
- modern slavery
- missing/trafficked persons

It can have a **devastating impact** on young people, vulnerable adults and communities and can cause **serious physical** and **emotional** harm to its victims.



Sharing your concerns

Child criminal exploitation is a form of child abuse, even if the young person appears to have **readily** become **involved**.

School staff should report their concerns to the **DSL** immediately and **log it** on the **school's safeguarding** recording system.

If there are any concerns about the criminal exploitation of a child, the **DSL** should contact their local child **protection services** to report it.

However if there are concerns that the child is at risk of serious and/or immediate harm then the **DSL** should contact the **police** and report it immediately.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

- Children **exploited by county lines** can be sent to different towns/county within the UK to carry out tasks for the gangs. When children are forced into travelling somewhere for the purpose of exploitation, this is classified as trafficking under the **Modern Slavery Act 2015**.
- When a referral has been received for county lines concerns, **MASH** will instigate an assessment with the police through a section 47 joint investigation.
- Police and other frontline practitioners will then refer the child to the National Referral Mechanism (**NRM**) when they believe the victim of county lines may also be a victim of modern slavery trafficking.
- The **NRM** is an online referral system used to identify and refer potential victims of modern slavery.

Contacts and websites

- NSPCC child protection helpline - **0808 800 5000**
- Police – **999** for urgent calls
- Police – call **101** for non urgent police enquiries
- Childline - **0800 1111**
- StopItNow! (for child sexual abuse) - **0808 1000 900**
- Crimestoppers – **0800 555 111**

- **www.safe4me.co.uk**
- **www.nspcc.org.uk**
- **www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk**