



Safeguarding Briefing - 18th November 2024

County Lines: Strategic Threat Report (NPCC and NCLCC, November 2024)

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) has published its strategic threat report about county lines based on data from April 2023 to March 2024.

Organised Crime Groups

There are 1,447 Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) linked to County Lines, with the numbers of new OCGs and individuals linked remaining steady. OCGs drug activity is predominantly crack cocaine and heroin supply, with 87% of drug lines supplying these drugs. The main lines are run out of London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester. Demand for heroin and crack cocaine remains strong.

Key Findings

Key findings from the report indicate that county lines have become more localised, seeing a tripling of the number of lines that start and finish within the same police area. This means that drug runners, often teenagers, are travelling shorter distances and when found are usually in a different area of their city. It is likely that recruitment of children, often via social media, will also become more localised.

Missing Children

Criminally exploited young people are often identified after episodes of going missing, particularly over several days. Where drug delivery journeys are shorter, exploited children may be running lines without necessarily being 'missing' for long periods of time, making identification harder. Most exploited children were missing from home (61%), but 16% of the total were missing from a care home. Seventy per cent of children were recorded as missing on multiple occasions; on average 18 times.

Dangers of Drug Running

Drug running is the most dangerous part of the county line operation as they are carrying valuable cash and drugs. They also find themselves involved at the frontline of violent conflict with other lines, typically over territory. Children are frequently used to launder the proceeds of organised crime through their bank accounts which will be controlled by the gang. The threat of mental, physical and sexual abuse is constant.

Fewer Children Involved

Although the police have recorded 10% fewer children being involved in county lines, they are still an important part of the drug distribution business model. Exploited children are mostly boys (93%) aged 15 - 17 (80%); although under-14s (20%) can be involved too. The true number of children involved in county lines will be much higher than police data. A 2019 study by the Children's Commissioner, Keeping Kids Safe (<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/keeping-kids-safe/>), reported that 27,000 children were involved, but that only a quarter were known to agencies.

Grooming Process

Children are groomed with promise of money and gifts before being trapped into the day to day delivery of drugs. The most prevalent tactic to maintain control is debt bondage. Typically, this means the child being robbed (usually by someone in the criminal gang unknown to the victim) and then being held responsible for the loss of drugs or cash (or both). In 2024, police found evidence for the first time of these debts being sold on to another criminal gang.

Key Indicators

A key indicator of child exploitation is being missing from home. Other factors which increase vulnerability include:

- living in an area of deprivation or poverty
- experiencing parental substance misuse
- having poor mental health
- being known to children's services or having looked-after status
- being excluded from school

Partners

To better protect children from serious harm, the police work in partnership with specialist support providers such as Catch22 (<https://www.catch-22.org.uk/>), Missing Persons SafeCall

(<https://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk/safecall-service/>) and Barnardo's (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/criminal-exploitation-children>).

Cuckooing

About half of county lines use cuckooed properties where the gang takes over and controls the householder's property, typically a vulnerable adult, to facilitate crime, manufacture or cultivate drugs, store weapons or sell drugs. There has been an increase in the sharing on social media of videos taken of the vulnerable adult being bullied, abused, demeaned or assaulted.

Advertising

The majority of county lines advertise and respond to customers purchasing crack cocaine and heroin using 'simple' 'burner or graft' mobiles (which can only make calls or texts). Online drug markets using social media is more often used for cocaine, cannabis, MDMA and ketamine, with delivery to the end-user through the postal network.

Links

Download the County Lines: Strategic Threat Report here:

<https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/county-lines-are-changing-to-become-more-localised-reveals-new-county-lines-strategic-threat-risk-assessment>

Have you ordered your copy of the Safeguarding Handbook yet?

You can order the latest copy of the Safeguarding Handbook by going to: <https://checkout.safeguardingschools.co.uk/sh2024>

Question of the Week

Question: What is meant by Disguised Compliance?

Answer: Disguised compliance refers to parents or carers who appear to be working with agencies, but are actually not actually cooperating to keep their children safe from harm. This can put children at a greater risk of harm because professionals may believe safeguarding has been put in place, parents are doing the minimum required so that the case is closed or perhaps parents/carers present differently to different professional (splitting). Disguised compliance can be a feature seen in many of the

most serious cases of harm, but can often be seen at a lower level of risk too.

Some indicators of disguised compliance may include: parents who put little effort into making changes, limited improvement despite significant input, parents aligning with certain professionals, parents only agreeing with part of the plan, child's view conflict's with that of the parents, professional observation of the reality.

Implementing the role of the Senior Mental Health Lead

Our SMHL course, Implementing the role of the Senior Mental Health Lead, has once again been assessed to meet the DfE's rigorous quality assurance standard. The course is self-paced and uses a wealth of resources to help you develop your whole school approach to mental health and well-being.

You can find out more about our Senior Mental Health Lead course here: www.smhl.pro

Prohibited teacher failed to disclose relationship with an offender

Teachers have a duty to inform their school of personal relationships that may give rise to a safeguarding risk to children at the school.

A woman from the north of England has been recently been prohibited from teaching after she failed to tell her school that her partner was being investigated by police. In October 2022, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) informed the school's head that the teacher concerned was in a relationship with a convicted sex offender.

In a written statement to Teacher Regulation Agency (TRA) professional conduct hearing, the teacher said, "I knew I had to come to terms with the reality of the situation sooner rather than later and this would mean informing school." Despite knowing that she should speak to the head, the teacher chose not. The panel said it was 'satisfied' that the teacher had failed to adhere to the standards of the profession, and had created a transferable risk.

The panel said, 'There are many ways in which an individual, should they wish to do so, could use a relationship with a teacher to gain access to

pupils; not only through being allowed to visit the school but also through finding out information about the pupils.'

Although the teacher had right to a private life, the panel was satisfied that this was overridden by her wider professional obligations and she had a duty to disclose her relationship and circumstances to the school, so that they could manage the risk.

The teacher is now prohibited from teaching indefinitely, although she can apply for the order to be removed in November 2026.

Available Courses

Advanced Safeguarding for DSLs

"I just wanted to say that I thought today's training was absolutely fantastic. By a mile it was the most engaging training I have done."

Next live online course - 15th January 2025

Wednesday, 15th January 2025 [Book here](#)

The on-demand course is always available and is updated after each live session [Book Online](#)

Other available online courses include:

Whole School Safeguarding Course for September 2024 (2 hours of content plus a break)

Online courses - Safeguarding.Pro

All our other courses are now available in [Safeguarding.Pro](#) These courses can be accessed for a full year.

Current courses include:

- Safeguarding Refresher
- An Introduction to Cybersecurity
- Safeguarding for Governance
- Safeguarding Induction for new staff

For further details, go to: <https://safeguarding.pro/>

Until next time, keep safe,

Andrew Hall

Specialist Safeguarding Consultant,
Director, Success In Schools Ltd.

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