

Independent Custody Visiting Association

Briefing for Independent Custody Visitors and Scheme Managers

County Lines

July 2019

What are County Lines?

County lines is a term used for drug distribution networks. It represents a move for organised gangs from highly competitive, violent drug markets in cities, to areas of high demand for drugs with less violence, outside of cities.

The higher-ranking gang members who organise the sales and supply of the drugs remain in the cities, and groom children to go and sell the drugs outside of the cities – in the ‘County’ in smaller cities and towns.

This is achieved by having a ‘line’ - the telephone number by which drugs are sold by the children in the out of city areas. Orders tend to come into the higher-ranking members, and then they send the order to the child to distribute via telephone communication. In a recent report from The Children’s Society, they estimate that around 46, 000 children in the UK are involved in gangs to some extent, although not all of those will be County Lines children. You can read more on this, and find the full report on children who are criminally exploited [here](#).

What is cuckooing?

Cuckooing is the practice of a gang taking over the (usually) residential premises of someone vulnerable to use as a base for the sales of drugs. Those who are victims of cuckooing are often, but not always, drug users. All are vulnerable. The children who are running the ‘line’ may stay with the vulnerable person in the cuckooed property which presents multiple risks of varying kinds for all in the dwelling. The ‘County Line’ may also operate in a communal space in social housing for example or a local park.

Who are the children who are involved?

The operations are often run on a local level by a more experienced dealer, often still only in their late teens. The drugs themselves are delivered by younger children and are often concealed internally. The younger children undertake most of the delivery function and often take the most risks by not only carrying the drugs and risking arrest, but also health risks that could arise from internally concealing drugs.

Typically, the children who are groomed into County Lines are between 10 and 25, although reports indicate that 15 is the most common age. Children from the local area can become embroiled in the sale of drugs in this way, as well as children that are sent out from the cities

and these children come from a range of backgrounds. The affected children vary rarely take the drugs they sell, but often smoke cannabis and drink alcohol. There have been links made to school exclusions, previous exposure to violence and often demonstrate issues with belonging and identity.

What does this mean for the young person in custody?

Young people are likely to have been arrested for the possession or supply of drugs and brought into custody. Drugs and money that they have in their possession will be confiscated. Typically, a young person might then be released, either under investigation, or on bail, or with no further action being taken.

If they have lost drugs and/or money, this could have consequences with the gang on their return to the community and pose a safeguarding issue for them. The young person is significantly more likely to have been arrested and therefore released in an area far from their home.

Things for ICVs to consider:

- ➔ If there is a child in custody, ensure that they have an AA and have been offered a solicitor as you normally would.
- ➔ Let the child know that if they initially declined a solicitor, they could change their mind at any time.
- ➔ Is the child from the local area? If not, check with the custody staff whether they have an address and have considered that the child might be part of a 'County Lines' network.
- ➔ Check in your local suite, do they have a specific service or pre-release risk assessment for children who are thought to be involved in 'County Lines', some suites do.
- ➔ If the staff have identified the child as a 'County Lines' child, have the staff made specific arrangements to safeguard the child on their release.
- ➔ Record areas of good practice.
- ➔ Ensure that if you have a cause for concern in this area, record, and report that to your scheme manager too.

Briefing for ICVA purposes only. With thanks to St Giles Trust for information.