

# Child Criminal Exploitation - County Lines



## County Lines – Home Office Definition;

County lines is a term used to describe gangs, groups or drug networks that supply drugs from urban to suburban areas across the country, including market and coastal towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”. They exploit children and vulnerable adults to move the drugs and money to and from the urban area, and to store the drugs in local markets. They will often use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives and firearms.

# Key features of county lines



The victims are often children, most commonly males aged 15 to 17 years, who are groomed with money, gifts or through sexual and violent relationships, and forced to move, store and deal, Class A drugs. Children as young as 11 years of age have been reported as being exploited.

Methods of control include:

- Debt bondage, including staged robberies;
- Sexual abuse, particularly against females, including for blackmail and humiliation purposes;
- Violence (real and threatened) is used to coerce victims to become dealers, enforce debts, and use victim's accommodation as an operating base;
- Kidnap against victims and their families.

Heroin remains the most frequently supplied drug, the use of crack cocaine is increasing.

**There are significant intelligence gaps because of data limitations.**

# Potential Signs of county lines



- **Persistently going missing from school or home and/or being found out-of-area**
- **Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones**
- **Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls**
- **Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups**
- **Leaving home / care without explanation**
- **Suspicion of physical assault /unexplained injuries**
- **Parental concerns**
- **Weapons – carrying, talking or obsessing**
- **Significant decline in school results / performance**
- **Isolation from peers or social networks**
- **Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being**
- **Vulnerable; socially and emotionally**

Unfortunately this is evolving beyond the norm