

# **PART G – County Lines and Cuckooing**

Safeguarding Policy and Procedures  
2023-2024

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## Version Control

Version	Changes/Comments	Officer	Approved by	Date adopted
1.0	Part G introduced with updated policy.	Grant White	CP&R Committee	09/02/2023

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 'County Lines' and 'Cuckooing' are forms of criminal exploitation involving children and vulnerable adults. They are geographically widespread forms of harm about which currently relatively little is known or recognised by those best placed to spot its potential victims. This chapter is intended to explain the nature of this harm to enable staff to recognise the signs and respond appropriately so that potential victims get the support and help that they need.

## 2. County Lines

- 2.1 County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations.

- 2.2 The UK Government defines county lines as follows:

"County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons."

- 2.3 Those who become involved in county lines will almost undoubtedly be caught up in other safeguarding issues, potentially drugs, criminality, trafficking, modern slavery, sexual exploitation, and gangs. It is extremely important that those involved in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults have an understanding of county lines. A typical county lines scenario is defined by the following components:

- A group (not necessarily affiliated as a gang) establishes a network between an urban hub and county location, into which drugs (primarily heroin and crack cocaine) are supplied;
- A branded mobile phone line is established in the market, to which orders are placed by introduced customers. The line will commonly (but not exclusively) be controlled by a third party, remote from the market;
- The group exploits young or vulnerable persons, to achieve the storage and/or supply of drugs, movement of cash proceeds and to secure the use of dwellings (commonly referred to as cuckooing);
- The group or individuals exploited by them regularly travel between the urban hub and the county market, to replenish stock and deliver cash;

- The group is inclined to use intimidation, violence, and weapons, including knives, corrosives, and firearms.

2.4 Some potential indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- 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 and/or having multiple handsets;
- relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups;
- leaving home / care without explanation;
- suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries;
- parental concerns;
- carrying weapons;
- significant decline in school results / performance;
- gang association or isolation from peers or social networks;
- self-harm or significant changes in emotional wellbeing.

2.5 One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something). Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection). It is important to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a young person or vulnerable adult does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a young person who engages in county lines activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

2.6 The **National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC)** was established in September 2018 with the aim of developing the national intelligence picture of the complexity and scale of the threat, prioritising action against the most serious offenders, and engaging with partners across government, including in the health, welfare and education spheres, in tackling the wider issues.

### 3. Cuckooing

3.1 Cuckooing is a practice where people take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate exploitation. The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take over a person's home and use it to store or distribute drugs.

3.2 Drug dealers will often target the most vulnerable in society. They are seeking to establish relationships to access the vulnerable person's home. Once they gain control over the victim, whether through drug dependency, debt or as part of their relationship, larger groups will sometimes move in. The threat of violence is often used to control the victim.

- 3.3 It is common for the drug dealers to have access to several cuckooed addresses at once, and to move quickly between them to evade detection. The victims of cuckooing are most commonly class 'A' drug users, but there are cases of victims with learning difficulties, mental health issues and, to a lesser extent, physical disabilities.
- 3.4 Signs that cuckooing may be going on at a property include:
- An increase in people entering and leaving;
  - An increase in cars or bikes outside;
  - An increase in anti-social behaviour;
  - Increasing litter outside;
  - People coming and going at strange times;
  - Damage to the door/the door propped open;
  - Unknown people pressing buzzers to gain access to the building;
  - You haven't seen the person who lives there recently or, when you have, they have been anxious or distracted;
- 3.5 If just one of these is taking place in a property, it may not mean anything. But if three or more of them are taking place, it could indicate that the property is being cuckooed.

## **4. Reporting Concerns about County Lines or Cuckooing**

- 4.1 Anybody subject to this policy may witness, be informed of, or see during the course of their duties, a county lines or cuckooing concern. The duty to refer applies to everybody to whom this policy applies.
- 4.2 Please report a concern internally through the Safeguarding Report a Concern form on the Intranet and discuss with the Designated Safeguarding Officer or Deputy Safeguarding Officer to agree next steps. This may need a referral into Children's Services, Adult Services or Lincolnshire Police – or for action to be taken through multi-agency case management in MACE or VAP.