



**National
County
Lines
Coordination
Centre**

Disrupting County Lines

Policing Strategy 2024–2027



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Foreword

Commander Paul Brogden



As the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) lead for County Lines, I am pleased to announce the release of the County Lines Strategy for 2024–27.

Significant progress has been made in addressing the issue of County Lines and the organised criminals involved. Through the work of the National County Lines Coordination Centre, Exporter & Importer Forces and British Transport Police, we have implemented successful collaborative practices that have facilitated the sharing of best practices, experiences, and knowledge across England and Wales. This has resulted in substantial arrests, seizures and the closure of criminal lines.

County Lines drug dealing has devastating effects on lives, and our commitment is to seriously disrupt the County Lines business model, as well as those involved in exploitation and violence often associated with it. Our message is clear;

We will continue to rescue and protect children and vulnerable adults who are exploited into County Lines activities, and we will prosecute those responsible for their exploitation using the full force of the law.

We will relentlessly pursue individuals involved in running County Lines operations nationwide. We will dismantle their criminal networks and remove drugs from our streets.

We will confront the violent criminals and the harm and misery they inflict on our communities.

While there are still challenges ahead, the past five years have demonstrated that by working together with law enforcement and external partners, we can achieve significant success in eradicating this heinous crime. It is crucial that we maintain the momentum we have built to safeguard the vulnerable and our communities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for your ongoing hard work, dedication, and the exceptional results you consistently achieve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Brogden'.

Commander Paul Brogden
NPCC lead for County Lines
and Gangs

Executive Summary

This new 3-year strategy sets out the national plan for police forces to continue disrupting and dismantling County Lines from 2024 to 2027.

It builds on the successes of the Home Office County Lines programme, which since 2019, has invested in the policing response leading to significant improvements in how forces identify, respond and disrupt County Lines-related criminality and exploitation.

Despite this work, criminals are continuing to operate County Lines, exploiting children and vulnerable adults, requiring forces to continue working together to effectively tackle this cross-border crime. This plan provides the framework for forces to use as they disrupt the threat.

The approach ensures we are doing much more than arresting offenders. It takes us back to our Peelian roots of Policing by consent, developed by Sir Robert Peel. The primary aim is to prevent crime, recognising the test for police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder.

Since the inception of the Home Office County Lines programme in 2019, officers and staff have worked tirelessly to tackle this threat, resulting in over 5,000 drug lines closed. Weapons, including guns and knives, are often recovered during enforcement activity, showing the link to violence. Large quantities of drugs have been seized, helping to disrupt supply networks.

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Since the inception of the programme in 2019, officers and staff have worked tirelessly to tackle this threat, resulting in over 5,000 drug lines closed.

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Drug-related crime and homicides are reducing. Serious violence in Exporter Forces is trending downwards. This means, since November 2019: fewer people stabbed (under 25) and less firearms discharged. Fewer young adults (18–24 years old) have been hospitalised due to drug misuse.

We have arrested and charged thousands of drug dealers for running County Lines since 2019, contributing to a shift in the business model that has reduced some of the harms associated. There are now fewer County Lines coming from Exporter Forces and fewer children involved in County Lines from those areas.

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We know there is much more still to do. Drugs demand is enduring and we must see fewer drugs lines and far fewer people, particularly children and vulnerable adults, involved in County Lines.

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We know there is much more still to do. Drugs demand is enduring and we must see fewer drugs lines and far fewer people, particularly children and vulnerable adults, involved in County Lines. This plan sets out what we will do next, and how we will continue working to seriously disrupt County Lines and in doing so reduce the associated harm, including violence and exploitation.

The mission

Our mission is to prevent County Lines, and the associated violence and exploitation.

The UK Government definition of 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.”

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The rise in the County Lines business model seems to be a major factor in increased drug-related violence in the UK, alongside the related factors of the growth in the crack cocaine market and the increasing role of young people in drug supply.

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County Lines have a devastating impact on communities and brings serious harm to people, through the supply of drugs and associated violence and exploitation of vulnerable people.

County Lines features as a key theme in the Serious Violence Strategy 2018¹, which saw the creation of the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) and recognition of crack cocaine markets and their strong links to violence. Dame Carol Black highlighted in her 2020 review of drugs how ‘the rise in the County Lines business model seems to be a major factor in increased drug-related violence in the UK, alongside the related factors of the growth in the crack cocaine market and the increasing role of young people in drug supply.’²

The Review of Drugs by Dame Carol Black also found (in 2020) more children and young people were becoming involved in the supply of drugs and county lines groups are associated with the widespread exploitation of young people as drugs runners, and of vulnerable drug users through cuckooing.

We are continuing to see crack and heroin as the predominant drug supplied in county lines. In addition there is an emerging trend and threat of synthetic opioid’s which pose significant harm and risk.



¹ Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018.

² Dame Carol Black Review of Drugs 2020.

Through the Home Office County Lines (HO CL) programme (2022 to 2025) £145 million of additional funding provided for dedicated Taskforces in the four exporter Forces of Metropolitan, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester Police, who worked collaboratively with importer Forces, British Transport Police (BTP) and the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) to surpass the ambition to roll up 2,000 more County Lines set out in the HM Government's Harm to Hope 10-year drugs plan³.

This new 3-year County Lines strategy brings together the County Lines theme of the Serious Violence Strategy 2018, Dame Carol Black's independent review of Drugs 2020 and the UK Governments 10-year Harm to Hope strategy to set out how Policing will work to tackle this threat.

The strategy aims to:

- Prevent people engaging in County Lines, and the associated violence and exploitation
- Proactively safeguard children and vulnerable adults from harm
- Better prepare communities by building resilience against the harms of County Lines
- Relentlessly pursue offenders, including Organised Criminal Groups, Urban Street Gangs and individuals running County Lines

Key steps to tackling County Lines

By Forces adopting the prevention-first approach set out in this strategy we will reduce the harms of this devastating model of drugs supply.

Community-led Neighbourhood policing that targets resources to the areas of most need will prevent crime and provide early-intervention opportunities that can reduce the risk for children vulnerable to grooming and exploitation.

Disrupting drugs supply and county lines must remain a national strategic policing priority, thus providing the national policing capability to tackle the cross-border threat.

Policing must consistently identify and respond to exploitation so we recognise and help vulnerable victims caught up in drugs supply, who may otherwise be seen as criminals, alongside a strong multi-agency safeguarding response. This is especially important when vulnerable people are arrested away from their Force area, as the support services they need are further away. Services such as Catch22 and London's Rescue and Response provide rescue services and are key partners.

Forces sharing relevant information via the national PND system is essential to developing our understanding of the nature and scale of the threat and makes better use of intelligence.

This cross-border crime requires continued collaboration across Force boundaries and with Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU).

Continued investment, such as the Home Office County Lines programme is key, to further build capability and provide capacity for Policing and Partners to respond effectively to the threat.

³ From Harm to Hope: UK Government 10-year drugs plan, December 2021.

Measuring success

A new ambitious target to close a further 1,000 County Lines by August 2024 has been set, bringing the total number of County Lines dismantled to over 3,000 since the drug strategy launched in April 2022⁴.

Our headline metrics⁵ are focussed on enforcement against drug lines and safeguarding but we will ultimately judge this strategy on our ability to prevent county lines and the associated harm and exploitation.

The key metrics for measuring progress are:

- Line Closures
- Arrests
- Individuals charged
- Line Holders charged
- Individuals referred to statutory safeguarding partners
- Individuals referred to specialist support provision

We will also know our approach is working by continued monitoring of the intelligence picture. The National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) strategic assessments will update on the nature and scale of the threat.

The National Referral Mechanism provides information on the number of potential victims of modern slavery linked to county lines.

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⁴ Plan proven to slash anti-social behaviour rolled out nationwide – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

⁵ County Lines programme data.

	Prevent	Protect	Prepare	Pursue
Goal	Preventing people engaging in County Lines, and the associated violence and exploitation	Being proactive in our approach to safeguarding that better protects children and vulnerable adults from harm	Better prepare communities to build more resilience against the harms of County Lines	Relentlessly pursue offenders, including Organised Criminal Groups, Urban Street Gangs and individuals running County Lines
Ambition	<p>Target the areas in which County Lines are concentrated with visible Neighbourhood policing & community-engagement to reduce crime</p> <p>Undertake training within Policing that promotes a contextual safeguarding approach & educates how to recognise vulnerability and respond effectively</p> <p>Utilise all judicial powers available such as criminal and civil orders to prevent / disrupt offenders from being involved in County Lines</p> <p>Maximise our offender management capabilities in partnership (e.g. HM Prison & Probation Service)</p>	<p>Consistently take a trauma informed approach that better recognises vulnerability & enables appropriate safeguarding interventions</p> <p>Build strong working relationships with key partners, so we better understand our service and 'what works' when referring to support provision</p> <p>Enhance our response to missing episodes linked to County Lines, recognising the serious risk of harm that occurs</p> <p>Develop our understanding of cuckooing & grooming, e.g. a victim of grooming is unlikely to recognise they're exploited; Sharing best practice nationally</p>	<p>Raise awareness through County Lines-themed public information campaigns e.g. via Crimestoppers</p> <p>Engage communities through Neighbourhood Policing to improve the feelings of safety & reduce perceived ASB</p> <p>Delivery of coherent and consistent County Lines training product, to internal / external partners & the public</p> <p>Gather information and intelligence to better inform our understanding of the threat, harm & risk arising from the County Lines drugs supply business model, including how that shifts in response to law enforcement activity</p>	<p>Identify & close drugs lines, prioritising those causing the most threat, harm & risk</p> <p>Disrupt / dismantle organised crime groups, urban street gangs & individuals by targeting the Line Holders – those controlling the lines – to reduce violence & exploitation</p> <p>Utilise data-led and precise Policing operations for maximum efficiency & effectiveness</p> <p>Go after criminals using all available legislation, especially Modern Slavery laws</p> <p>Work in partnership across Law Enforcement to tackle this cross-border threat</p>
Success factors	<p>Fewer County Lines</p> <p>Greater awareness of vulnerability & wider use of contextual safeguarding responses</p> <p>Increased referrals to specialist support providers</p> <p>Greater use of orders for offender management</p>	<p>Increased referrals to statutory safeguarding partners and the NRM</p> <p>Greater use of the NCLCC power application across a broader range of Forces – our County Lines knowledge hub for practitioners</p> <p>Cuckooing – Increased awareness, recording and safeguarding</p>	<p>Delivery of information campaigns</p> <p>Annual strategic threat assessment</p> <p>More County Lines intelligence provided by communities</p> <p>More frontline police officers & staff receiving County Lines training</p>	<p>Numbers of drugs lines closed</p> <p>Numbers of Line Holders arrested & prosecuted for Drugs Supply / Modern Slavery</p> <p>Major and Moderate disruptions achieved</p> <p>Weapons and criminal proceeds (e.g. cash) seized / forfeited</p>

1. Preventing people engaging in County Lines, and the associated violence and exploitation



Crime prevention sits at the heart of our approach. We are targeting our resources into the areas worst-affected by County Lines, with high-visibility hot-spot patrols and community-led policing by local Neighbourhood Teams to stop people engaging in County Lines.

Breaking the cycle: Most children involved in County lines are aged 15–17 years old⁶, but we know that criminal gangs, and individuals running County Lines, have also exploited much younger children. We know it can be hard to escape, with some children trapped via mechanisms such as debt bondage⁷ and made to work on drugs lines until the debt is paid off. We have formed strong partnerships with organisations such as Catch22, Missing Persons SafeCall and Barnardo's, so people at risk of harm and exploitation can receive specialist support.

Young women and girls affected by County Lines are often over-looked and we must do more to better recognise vulnerability, if we are to effectively prevent young women and girls from involvement in county lines.

What we've achieved so far:

- Over **8,000 individuals** referred by Police to safeguarding.
- **Merseyside Police** Taskforce's **Operation Stonehaven** has worked in partnership with over 60 internal and external partners, charities and third sector bodies to identify, commission, coordinate and deliver appropriate intervention and diversion pathways to prevent young / vulnerable people being drawn into serious organised crime and county lines activity.
- **Greater Manchester Police** Taskforce's **Programme Challenger** delivers impactful, tailored campaigns around County Lines including: **Breaking Barriers** roadshow **'Crossing the Line'** was delivered to 98 primary schools across Manchester reaching in excess of **4,500** nine to eleven year olds (from Sept 2022 to Oct 23).

- **Iverson Trust** in partnership with the **NCLCC** have run over 5,792 early awareness webinars for parents and carers in 2022–2023. This approach has engaged parents and carers as safeguarding partners, linking with the wider community. This partnership is helping us to embed the contextual safeguarding approach.

We have worked hard to safeguard children and vulnerable adults involved in County Lines. The British Transport Police utilise a contextual safeguarding approach that provides a good example of how Policing can work across a number of contexts (e.g. child, home, peer group, school and neighbourhood) to respond. In addition to safeguarding the victim and pursuing the offender, they consider the location in which exploitation takes place, and targets action at these places, such as rail hubs or interchanges accordingly.

To prevent reoffending, NCLCC promote the use of civil orders⁸ through training and guidance. With previous expertise in identifying and obtaining orders, they now provide tactical advice/support to practitioners in Forces.

⁶ From analysis of County Lines data held on PND.

⁷ Debt Bondage is when a young person is controlled by the exploiters due to a 'debt'.

⁸ There are two civil orders available under Part 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 that can be applied to those who pose a risk of harm from committing modern slavery offences in future. The criminal behaviour order (CBO) is available on conviction for any criminal offence in any criminal court. The order is aimed at tackling the most serious and persistent offenders where their behaviour has brought them before a criminal court.

Preventing County Lines

By 2027

- Target the areas in which County Lines are concentrated with visible Neighbourhood patrols & community-engagement
- Promote a contextual safeguarding approach that considers the extra-familial risk and harm and helps keep young people safe
- Targeted visible Policing presence in Neighbourhoods affected by anti-social behaviour, drugs supply and County Lines can reduce crime and build trust with communities.
- Two-way community engagement through Neighbourhood teams will improve the understanding of threat, harm and risk and provide intelligence.
- This intelligence will enable a contextual safeguarding approach. Hotspot locations can be prioritised for problem-solving initiatives to address the root cause. NCLCC will promote the contextual safeguarding work BTP are doing at rail hubs and interchanges as an example of best practice.
- NCLCC will improve geographical analysis within regional intelligence products so Forces' can better target interventions using hot spot mapping to tackle problem locations.
- We will produce intelligence products which set out the threat, harm and risk County Lines presents. This can help inform regional tasking and co-ordination enabling focussed activity in priority areas.
- We are working with partners such as the NCA to stem the supply of synthetic opioid's to prevent deaths and serious harm.
- We will support the 'Clear, Hold, Build' approach by local policing to tackle neighbourhoods blighted by crime.⁹



⁹ 'Clear' means targeted arrests and crime disruption, working with partners in the prison and probation service; 'Hold' means stabilising the area to stop criminals moving in to fill the void; and 'Build' means community-driven action to address the causes of criminality and prevent it from happening again.

- NCLCC will work with key partners including Catch-22 and Barnardo's, and academics to enhance our understanding of the risk factors that may lead to involvement in drugs supply.
- We recognise the importance of early intervention in child safeguarding. **Greater Manchester Police** Taskforce's **Programme Challenger** Task successful 'Breaking Barriers' roadshow in Manchester targeted prevent work at 10–11 year olds and we are sharing the learning from this approach.
- We will work to improve our engagement with parents and carers, who can help children on the cusp of criminality through a protective family environment that has awareness and understanding of risk factors. This includes the partnership with the Ivison Trust that is delivering early awareness sessions.
- We will continue to seek Slavery & Trafficking orders. NCLCC will support Forces through guidance on the use of these and other criminal or civil orders. This will help manage offender behaviour and reduce the risk of harm to victims.
- We will seek to maximise our offender management capabilities across Forces, developing our response to ensure that we effectively and robustly police breaches of orders, working effectively with key partners including HM Prisons & Probation Service.

Using civil and criminal orders to prevent reoffending

By 2027

- Utilise all judicial powers available such as criminal and civil orders to prevent & disrupt offenders from involvement in County Lines

2. Being proactive in our approach to safeguarding that better protects children and vulnerable adults from harm



When Police Officers encounter young people involved in County Lines it is essential they recognise the signs of exploitation, and respond appropriately by adopting the principle of professional curiosity and use an investigative mind-set.

This will enable the potential indicators of vulnerability to be identified at an early stage, and provide the opportunity for early intervention. This can involve responding in a caring manner, or it could mean a referral to statutory and/or specialist support provision. The College of Policing's THRIVE definition of vulnerability¹⁰ assists here and NCLCC will promote the use of THRIVE, alongside training to support recognition and response, particularly for those police officers and staff on the frontline who are most likely to encounter vulnerable people.

Since 2018, there has been a reduction in the numbers of children prosecuted in County Forces, for possession with intent to supply, production and supply of class A drugs offences. During the same time period, 785 young people have been referred to the specialist support provider Rescue and Response (the pan-London County Lines service). This is likely to be because Policing has improved how it recognises and responds to child criminal exploitation on County Lines.

Missing episodes are a key indicator of vulnerability to child criminal exploitation on County Lines. It is estimated 1,900 children went missing in 2021/22 specifically due to County Lines.

Using specialist resources, such as our County Lines Programme Taskforce's, we proactively rescue children who are reported missing and at high-risk of serious harm. Working in partnership with specialist support providers, we can better protect those children from serious harm, prevent future missing episodes and gather evidence to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of child exploitation.

Drug dealers take over the homes of vulnerable adults, using the premises as a base to supply drugs, in a tactic known as cuckooing. By working together with Local Authorities and housing associations, we are able to evict the offenders and support the victim to regain control of their property.

What we've achieved so far:

Since April 2022:

- **Operation Orochi, Met County Lines** Taskforce, have proactively rescued **76** children from County Lines and charged **62** individuals with Modern Slavery.
- **BTP County Lines** Taskforce have achieved **24** charges under the Modern Slavery Act. All were commenced through a child being encountered by Police on the Rail Network, away from their homes.

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By working together with Local Authorities and housing associations, we are able to evict the offenders and support the victim to regain control of their property.

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¹⁰ Introduction to vulnerability-related risk.

Training that improves the Policing response to vulnerability

March 2025

- Achieve greater consistency in identifying and responding to vulnerability

We are delivering immersive training, such as our innovative Hydra County Lines training programme, to upskill Police Officers, Police Staff and professionals, enabling them to see and understand the signs of vulnerability, then respond appropriately.

- NCLCC will promote trauma-informed training that seeks to improve understanding of the complexity of county lines policing, how to achieve best evidence, and how victims of criminal exploitation can be both victims and perpetrators.

- We will adopt a child-centred approach that recognises their vulnerability, listens to the voice of children and sees custody as a last resort. As part of this NCLCC will explore new partnerships and consider how they can work with agencies such as the Alliance for Youth Justice, as we strive to reduce the numbers of children involved in County Lines.
- We have partnered with The Children's Society, to improve our understanding of financial exploitation, including debt bondage. We will use this partnership to strengthen our Policing response, better recognising and managing the threat this poses.
- The NCLCC will raise awareness of guidance and best practice materials available via our County Lines Power application, which acts as a knowledge hub for officers and staff, by promoting the app across Forces and improving our internal and external communications.



Multi-agency partnerships

March 2025

- Build strong working relationships with key partners, so we better understand our service and 'what works'
 - Work with key stakeholders, such as Catch22, to help young people at risk of County Lines involvement
- We will strengthen working relationships with key partners such as Catch22, who provide specialist support provision including a rescue service and help young people at risk of exploitation from County Lines.
 - We will increase awareness within Policing of the specialist support provision available and how this supplements the support provided by Social Care, encouraging more referrals for targeted interventions.
 - We will work with our partners to effectively share data and support programme evaluations that help us better understand the impact and effectiveness of diversion programmes.
 - We are using the NCLCC 28-day safeguarding cycle¹¹ to identify cases and ensure appropriate safeguarding responses are in place at an earlier stage. We will examine how that can be complemented by diversion projects in custody suites.

Enhanced response to children missing on County Lines

Dec 2024

- NCLCC will work to better understand the links between missing episodes and County Lines through strategic analysis
- We will enhance the response to children missing and at risk of serious harm from County Lines

The Metropolitan Police Taskforce (Op Orochi) has developed capability so they are rescuing children at high risk of serious harm, when they go missing on County Lines. Building on the broader Policing response to Missing, this specialist response proactively safeguards the young person and often provides evidential opportunities for the perpetrator-focussed investigation into the exploiter, running the County Line. This is aligned with the College of Policing guidance on missing persons.

- We will increase the numbers of missing rescues by actively promoting this as best practice amongst the County Lines Taskforces, and working with key partners such as Catch22 and London's Rescue and Response service.
- We will build our relationships with key stakeholders so we are better able to share information inter-agency, to improve our understanding of risk and 'what works' for effective interventions to prevent/deter County Lines involvement.

¹¹ The threat, harm and risk relating to children and vulnerable adults that come to notice via reporting on PND, is shared with all impacted Forces (e.g. a child is missing from a host Force and comes to notice in a different Force location & reported onto PND – this information is then shared via the 28-day safeguarding cycle). This approach ensures there are no gaps and appropriate information has been shared effectively.

A more consistent policing response to cuckooing

March 2025

- We will develop our understanding of cuckooing and grooming, identifying and sharing best practice
 - NCLCC will identify and share best practice to achieve a more consistent response to cuckooing across Forces
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- NCLCC will work with Forces to develop an effective consistent approach to cuckooing. Currently there are a range of initiatives and we will identify and share the best practice.
 - Make use of the child-centred policing principles to improve how we engage with children and young people, being more open and transparent and building trust. This will help us to better identify grooming, understanding that the child is unlikely to recognise they have been groomed.
 - We will make better use of tools such as the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) and vulnerability PNC and / or PND markers, to highlight safeguarding concerns for proactive action. This will assist in managing the identification of exploitation.

3. Better prepare communities to strengthen resilience



Early intervention is an essential approach to countering the threat of County Lines. Public information campaigns help to raise awareness of what to look out for, and we have worked in partnership with Crimestoppers, The Children's Society and other external partners, to deliver key messages, reaching a wide diverse audience. We will build on this work to keep local communities informed, including the risk factors to look out for.

Our bi-annual National County Lines Intensification Weeks serve to surge collective effort against the threat for a period of 7 days of action. This intensified period of activity is promoted via internal and external media campaigns, supported by Force Communications and Engagement teams and has garnered National interest from mainstream media outlets. This helps to raise awareness and build understanding within local communities.

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We will build on this work to keep local communities informed, including the risk factors to look out for.

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Work with key partners, to raise awareness and improve communities understanding of County Lines, via communication campaigns

March 2024

- We are working with The Children's Society to promote the #LookCloser campaign

What we've achieved so far:

- We have launched our NCLCC Power App, a central resource for County Lines knowledge and practitioner guidance.
- We partner with The Children's Society on their hugely successful #LookCloser campaign – in 2022/23 **4,231 professionals, parents, and carers attended sessions** and the campaign site had 16,000 visits. **93%** of learning session participants said their knowledge and understanding had improved.
- Public Health campaign – **6,000 people** contacted by **West Midlands** Task Force following a series of drug-related deaths to warn them of the increased risk of harm linked to the localised supply of a synthetic opioid.

By 2027

- Engage communities through Neighbourhood Policing to improve the feelings of safety & reduce perceived Anti-Social Behaviour

- We will work in collaboration with The Children's Society and Crimestoppers on public campaigns and use social media platforms to deliver key messages. This will continue the successful and long-running #LookCloser campaign, run in collaboration with The Children's Society, BTP and the NCLCC.
 - By engaging directly with young people through Neighbourhood and Schools officers and working with The Children's Society's Youth voice initiative, hearing their experiences, fears and concerns and use this to help inform our response.
 - We will listen to the voices of those with lived experience of County Lines and ensure this is incorporated into our training.
 - NCLCC will support and promote the work of SafeCall, as a free confidential service for young people, family members, and professionals.
 - We will promote our activity via local and National media outlets, particularly during County Lines Intensification Week.
 - We will raise awareness of the NCLCC PowerApp, which provides support materials for frontline offices, including NCLCC training videos, to better equip them with the information they need to talk to communities about County Lines.
 - We are innovating, adopting the use of new technologies (e.g. geo-targeted advertising), to reach a wide diverse audience.
- We will help train key partners from the hospitality and transport network to enable them to identify the use of their areas of business, as enablers of the County Lines business model.
 - We are working in partnership with The Children's Society and their prevention coordinators to promote their Prevention Programme training to professionals and the public to help keep children safe. This is focussed on public spaces and helps people understand how to identify children being exploited.
 - NCLCC will work with Abianda to improve the focus on young women and girls involved in county lines, to better understand and respond to their experiences.

End of each financial year

- Produce Annual Strategic Assessments

- We will develop our understanding of the nature and scale of the threat, and produce publicised annual strategic assessment at the conclusion of each financial year.

March 2025

- Delivery of county lines training products to partners and the public

4. Relentlessly pursue offenders, including Organised Criminal Groups, Urban Street Gangs and individuals running County Lines



We take an intelligence-led precision approach to Policing the Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs)¹², Urban Street Gangs (USGs)¹³ and individuals controlling the deal lines. Our focus is on arresting and charging those persons controlling drugs lines (known as Line Holders) with offences such as Drugs Trafficking. These Line Holders are the controlling minds of the County Lines, as opposed to ‘street-level’ dealers or ‘drugs runners’.

They are often based in the Force area the line originates from and therefore much less likely to come to Police notice. By directly targeting this level of the drugs network, we are able to close County Lines, reducing or preventing the harm caused in local communities and significantly disrupting the drugs supply business model.

Targeting Line Holders will help to reduce the violence and exploitation caused by County Lines.

An example of how this works well is when Local Policing Teams prioritise locations with the greatest need, targeting activity in the right areas and gathering intelligence on active lines. These are referred to specialist County Lines – teams in Exporter Forces funded by the Home Office programme, working jointly with the Importer Force, focussed on identifying and arresting the Line Holder(s), to disrupt the drugs supply network.

We are tackling exploitation by seeking evidence-led prosecutions for Modern Slavery offences, where we can. This disincentives criminals from using children as drugs runners.

We are targeting illicit finances and using the full range of legislative powers available to us, including civil and criminal orders, to bring county lines perpetrators to justice. This increases the consequences, and decreases the reward from County Lines drugs supply.

What we’ve achieved so far:

Since the programme was launched in 2019 to December 2023.

- **5,627 County Lines** have been **closed**
- **16,536** people have been **arrested**
- **8,011** people have been **charged**
- **8,817 individuals** have been referred by police to safeguarding

¹² Organised Crime Groups (OCGs).

OCGs are made up of members who plan, coordinate and carry out serious crime on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain. OCG structure varies but often consists of a core of key individuals, surrounded by subordinates and other more transient members, as well as an extended network of associates. OCGs will often use violence and intimidation in communities in order to operate.

¹³ Urban street gangs (USGs).

Urban street gangs tend to be less organised than OCGs and more concerned with perpetuating a threat of violence or harm across a geographical area related to the gang’s main activities. These types of gangs can be involved in varied forms of serious criminality that can have a significant impact on local communities.

CPS guidance: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/gang-related-offences-decision-making>.

Closing County Lines & disrupting offenders

August 2024

- We will continue closing County Lines, raising our ambition to deliver 1,000 more
- We closed over **2,500** drug lines since April 2022. We will continue to close lines and pursue offenders making county lines drugs supply riskier for criminals. This year, we aim to close 1,000 drugs lines by August 2024, taking the total to **3,000** since the UK Government drug strategy launched in April 2022.

By 2027

- We will maximise the disruption of County Lines gangs through focussed operational activity
- We will target high harm offenders controlling drugs lines, reducing associated violence such as County Lines-related homicides
- We will continue to target controllers of County Lines, known as Line Holders, using a data-led precision approach. Through joint working between Importer and Exporter Forces, targeting of the individuals, OCGs and USGs controlling these lines, will ensure the line is closed and supply disrupted. It will reduce harm, such as county lines related homicides, along with violence and exploitation. When allied with Neighbourhood Policing, this approach could improve confidence in Policing.
- We will strengthen our working relationships between NCLCC and Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU), National Crime Agency (NCA) and other Law Enforcement partners, so the NCLCC can better coordinate activity to support enforcement, disruption and safeguarding work. This includes developing and sharing intelligence on the upstream suppliers of County Lines to help disrupt entire networks of supply.
- We will identify and share best practice, helping Forces to conduct high quality investigations that secure best evidence and use all available legislation, particularly in Modern Slavery cases.
- We will seek to maximise the recording of lines and individuals involved in County Lines, on PND. This will enhance our understanding of the threat and enable Forces to target resources more effectively, e.g. via NCLCC strategic and tactical assessment products that highlight threat, harm and risk in County Lines-related individuals, lines and locations.
- We are using ANPR technology to better target offenders using the road network, supporting the work of Roads Policing teams.
- We will continue to conduct targeted operations at transport hubs to detect and disrupt those offenders that use the transport network, including rail and coach.
- We are working closely with HM Prison and Probation Service to disrupt or prevent offenders from continuing County Lines drugs supply operations within the prison estate.

Online threats

March 2025

- Develop our capabilities to tackle an evolving threat

- We will continue to develop our online capability, learning as technology and drugs markets evolve, ensuring we share best practice such as how we investigate drugs supply networks facilitated by social media.
- We have invested in technology to build local and regional capability and capacity to extract and analyse data from digital devices more quickly. This is being accelerated through the NPCC Digital Forensics strand and better supports serious and complex investigations such as Modern Slavery cases where digital devices could contain evidence of control or exploitation.

- We are using innovations such as PESTER¹⁴ tactics to directly engage with drug users connected to identified County Lines, directing them to locally available specialist drug treatment services.

¹⁴ PESTER technology provides the ability to send bulk messages to multiple telephone numbers at the same time. This can be used to share public health messages and gain valuable intelligence to disrupt existing supply lines.



Appendix A

Dependencies

Funding

The Government funded County Lines programme has run since November 2019 providing significant investment, creating an expanded National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC), Taskforces in the 4 major exporting areas (Metropolitan, Merseyside, West Midlands and Manchester) and the rail networks British Transport Police (BTP), new technologies such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition and increased victim support. This has provided real impact against this most violent and exploitative drugs supply business model, in combatting illegal drugs.

For the next year, up to March 2025, we will deliver much of this plan through the County Lines programme, whilst also building sustainability into our approach, recognising the last three years has seen the recruitment of an additional 20,000 police officers. Future delivery in years 2 and 3 (2025 & 2026), at the scale and breadth of activity set out in the plan, is dependent upon future investment. The police uplift programme filled urgent capacity gaps in Forces, whilst the increasing complexity of policing demand, alongside lower levels of legitimacy and trust in policing, have impacted effectiveness. Neighbourhood policing, allied with precision proactive operations against Line Holders, achieving high arrest to charge ratios whilst safeguarding vulnerable people, will improve public confidence and legitimacy.

Criminal Justice System

We are striving to bring more prosecutions that see criminals brought to justice, especially for exploitation by using the Modern Slavery Act. However, increased demands on investigators, such as pre-charge case file builds to meet charging standards and disclosure requirements, require investigators to process much more material acting as a barrier. Subsequent Crown Court backlogs can then result in lengthy delays between charge and trial. Whilst we are working closely with the CPS, these challenges are impacting our work to improve the number of successful Modern Slavery prosecutions.

Glossary

Abianda	Abianda is a social enterprise that works with young women and girls affected by criminal exploitation and violence and provides training for the professionals who work with them.
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). ANPR technology is used to help detect, deter and disrupt criminality at a local, force, regional and national level. This includes tackling traveling criminals, Organised Crime Groups and terrorists.
Barnardo's	Barnardo's helps hundreds of thousands of children, young people, parents and carers across the UK with various issues and challenges.
Catch22	Catch22 is a social business. Since 1788, they have designed and delivered services that build resilience and aspiration in people and communities.
Child	Any persons under 18 years of age.
Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)	<p>Child criminal exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.</p> <p>Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes, for instance, children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft. However, many of the characteristics of county lines exploitation will be present in other forms of child criminal exploitation. Likewise, victims of county lines may also experience other overlapping forms of exploitation, such as sexual, in addition to criminal.</p>
Contextual Safeguarding	Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families.
County Lines	<p>Home Office Definition: '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".</p> <p>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.</p>
CPS	The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales. The CPS is independent, and they make their own decisions independently of the police and government.
Crimestoppers	An independent charity that allows people to report crime information anonymously and securely. It also runs campaigns, partnerships and services to tackle crime.

Exporter Forces	The police force areas from which the majority of county lines originate. These are Metropolitan Police, Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester.
His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service: HMPPS carry out sentences given by the courts, in custody and the community, and rehabilitate people in their care through education and employment.
Ivison Trust	Ivison Trust (formerly Pace) is a national charity working to keep children safe from exploitation by supporting their parents, disrupting the offenders and working in partnership with police and family services. They also train professionals to support affected children and their parents using a trauma-informed, family-centric approach.
Importer Forces	The police force areas into which County Lines are imported.
National Referral Mechanism (NRM)	The process by which an individual is identified as a victim of modern slavery or trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.
NCLCC	National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) is a team that aims to coordinate national law enforcement activity across England and Wales; increase intelligence on the county lines threat; inform national policy development and best practice.
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) brings UK police leaders together to set direction in policing and drive progress for the public.
OCG	Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs) are made up of members who plan, coordinate and carry out serious crime on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain. OCG structure varies but often consists of a core of key individuals, surrounded by subordinates and other more transient members, as well as an extended network of associates. OCGs will often use violence and intimidation in communities in order to operate.
PESTER	PESTER technology provides the ability to send bulk messages to multiple telephone numbers at the same time. This can be used to share public health messages and gain valuable intelligence to disrupt existing supply lines.
Police National Computer (PNC)	A computer Police and other UK law enforcement organisations use to carry out real-time checks, for example on a person's criminal record, missing and wanted people, and vehicle registration checks.
Police National Database (PND)	A national information management system that improves the ability of the Police Service to manage and share intelligence and other operational information, to prevent and detect crime and make communities safer. The PND offers a capability for the Police Service to share, access and search local information electronically, overcoming artificial geographical and jurisdictional boundaries.

SafeCall – Missing People	SafeCall is a free, confidential and anonymous helpline and support service for young people and family members that are affected by missing, county lines and criminal exploitation.
Safeguarding	Safeguarding is a term we use to describe how we protect adults and children from abuse or neglect. It is an important shared priority of many public services, and a key responsibility of local authorities.
TCS	The Children’s Society (TCS) are a national charity working to transform the hopes and happiness of young people facing abuse, exploitation and neglect.
USG	Urban street gangs tend to be less organised than OCGs and more concerned with perpetuating a threat of violence or harm across a geographical area related to the gang’s main activities. These types of gangs can be involved in varied forms of serious criminality that can have a significant impact on local communities.

