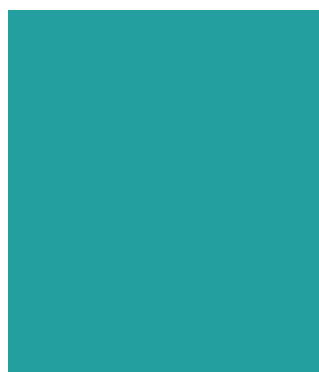
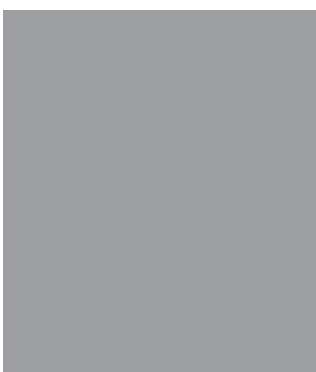
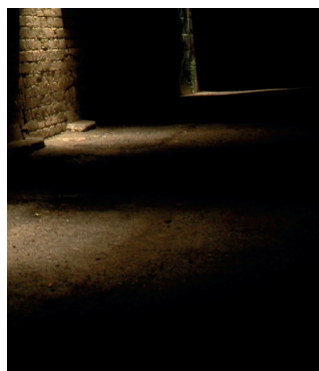
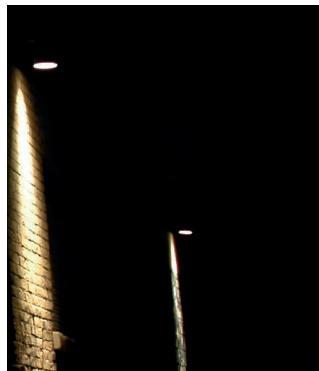


National County Lines Coordination Centre





GSC Marking:	Official
Title:	NCLCC County Lines Strategic Assessment 2020/2022
Summary:	Strategic Overview of County Lines and Law Enforcement Activity 2020/2022, and NCLCC Business Review
Branch:	National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC)
Owner & Authorising Officer:	NPCC County Lines Lead (Gold) Commander Paul Brogden
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Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. County Line Business Model, Supply and Demand	6
2.1. County Lines - Definition and Business Model	6
2.2. Lines	6
2.3. Drugs Supply, Demand and Commodity	7
3. Operational Response	9
3.1. Merseyside Police	9
3.2. Metropolitan Police	11
3.3. West Midlands Police	12
3.4. Greater Manchester Police	12
3.5. British Transport Police	13
3.6. Importer / Non-Taskforce Forces	15
3.7. NCA / Upstream and NCLCC Review	15
3.8. Intensification Weeks	15
4. Telecoms	16
4.1. Telecoms and Social Media	16
5. Exploitation	17
5.1. Debt Bondage	17
5.2. Cuckooing	18
5.3. Modern Day Slavery, Sec 45 Defence and NRM	18
5.4. Juveniles and Females Involved In County Lines	19
6. Violence	20
6.1. Themes in Violence	20
6.2. Organised Crime Groups	20
6.3. County Lines and Homicide	21
7. National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC)	22
7.1. Training and Relationships	23
7.2. Peer Reviews	24
7.3. Orders Team	24
7.4. Collaboration with PACE	24
8. Glossary	26



1. Executive Summary

Tackling County Lines features prominently in the Government’s 2021 Drugs Plan to Cut Crime and Save Lives – ‘From Harm to Hope’. There is clear direction in this 10 Year Drugs Strategy that ‘rolling up’ county lines remains a priority for the whole of government and the police, bringing perpetrators to justice, safeguarding and supporting victims, and reducing associated violence and homicide.

The objective was set by this strategy that, by the end of financial year 2024/25, over 2,000 more county lines are to be closed through relentless and robust action to break the model and bring down the gangs running these illegal lines, hence moving county lines to a ‘County Lines is a high-risk, high-consequence criminal activity’ The County Lines Model has undoubtedly shifted to one of higher risk for offenders and exploiters due to increased and enhanced Pursue activity. However, we cannot ‘arrest our way out of the County Lines threat’ and a holistic ‘4P approach’ pursue, prevent, protect, prepare in a County Lines context will be most effective at achieving longevity of impact:

- **Pursue** offenders through prosecution and disruption, bringing all of our collective powers and tools to bear
- **Prevent** people from engaging in serious and organised crime
- **Protect** victims, organisations and systems from its harms
- **Prepare** for when it occurs, mitigating the impact¹

This is also necessary due to a partial shift to online distribution which requires changing tactics.

The County Lines Programme funded by the Home Office supports a nationwide law enforcement response, focusing on 4 key exporting forces Metropolitan (MPS), Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester Police (GMP) which have dedicated funded ‘Taskforces’.

The 3 original Taskforces (MPS, Merseyside and West Midlands) have matured and become increasingly effective over the period of this strategic assessment, and now deliver highly impressive and innovative work across all 4Ps. The more recent taskforce of GMP has quickly established itself, learning effectively from the existing taskforces and interacting strongly with the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) to establish and embed best practice.

The transport network is gripped through a dedicated British Transport Police (BTP) County Lines Taskforce to make the rail network a high risk option for county lines distribution.

The programme also strongly supports all other Forces which are exporting County Lines, importing County Lines or which have an ‘internal’ County Lines threat. This is achieved financially with the provision of ‘Surge Funding’ from the Home Office and by the wider National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) provision of support and training for forces and partners. The Surge Fund has been seen to have a massive impact to these ‘non-taskforce’s impacted by County Lines by enabling extra capacity to target County Lines and to support people who are exploited. The surge funding also enables the taskforces to work effectively with the other forces, as these other non-taskforces have the surge funding for effective joint working.

¹ 4P-approach - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (justiceinspectrates.gov.uk)

The NCLCC functions to provide strategic oversight for all county lines activity and disruption, promoting UK wide collaboration and best practice among police forces across all 4P's , including supporting the use of civil and criminal orders, and overseeing the allocation of surge funding to operational activity.

Strong support has been received from the Home Office, maximising the capability of the county lines programme, providing funding for operational and safeguarding activity

However, enduring demand means that the County Lines Business Model is likely to continue to evolve to attempt to avoid detection, and there remains challenges ahead which need to be addressed to mitigate the ongoing county lines threat to communities and the vulnerable.

The understanding of the commodities involved has also developed. It was reported in the last strategic assessment that 'The county lines market is predominantly crack cocaine and heroin'. However, our understanding of the business model has increased over the duration of the County Lines Programme, and it is clear that we are increasingly seeing diversification in the drugs being supplied via county lines.

The County Lines Programme and network including collaborative working between Taskforces, Forces, NCLCC and all internal and external partners has never been stronger, more effective or more impactful than it is at the time of this assessment, and it is strongly believed that the County Lines Programme has the structure and ability to evolve to respond to the challenges that continue ahead.

The last County Lines Strategic Assessment covered a reporting period of 1st November 2019 to 31st October 2020, and was created on 1st April 2021. No County Lines Strategic Assessment was created for period November 2020 to October 2021.

This Strategic Assessment refers to 2 Annual periods to allow for year on year comparisons within this 2 year period, and also with the previously completed Strategic Assessment :-

- Year 1 - November 2020 to October 2021
- Year 2 - November 2021 to October 2022

2. County Line Business Model, Supply and Demand

2.1. County Lines - Definition and Business Model

County Lines is a criminal business model that involves vulnerability and exploitation. Ultimately all key stakeholders in the County Lines programme are working to remove the vulnerability and exploitation from this business model, leaving the Organised Crime Groups (OCG's) and gangs conducting their own criminality.

The current Home Office 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'.

In the 2 years since the last Strategic Assessment, the County Lines model and our understanding and perception of it have evolved, and the NCLCC have focussed hard on achieving consistency of the understanding of what County Lines looks like nationally.

It is now accepted that county lines do not necessarily need to cross arbitrary geographical County 'borders' to be defined as such, and indeed County Lines can run within the confines of a single county. This is something the NCLCC have advocated, and this wider acceptance has enabled a more effective targeting of County Lines by Forces.

The NCLCC and taskforces agree that the County Lines definition has evolved, and this joint thinking is also reflected in the recent 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 report definition of County Lines', which states :-

'County Lines activity can happen locally as well as across the UK - no specified distance of travel is required'.

Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults remains at the heart of the County Lines model, and is the 'USP' of County Lines.

County Lines remains a highly organised yet chaotic business model supplying the front end of the drug dealing market. The groups behind the lines are usually organised in their approach to their business and will often supply or move commodity across a number of different levels of the market. The County Lines part remains the lowest tier servicing the most challenged chronic users, children and vulnerable people. The vulnerability of both the user base and the workforce at the point of sale adds increasing chaos at that end of the supply and demand chain.

2.2. Lines

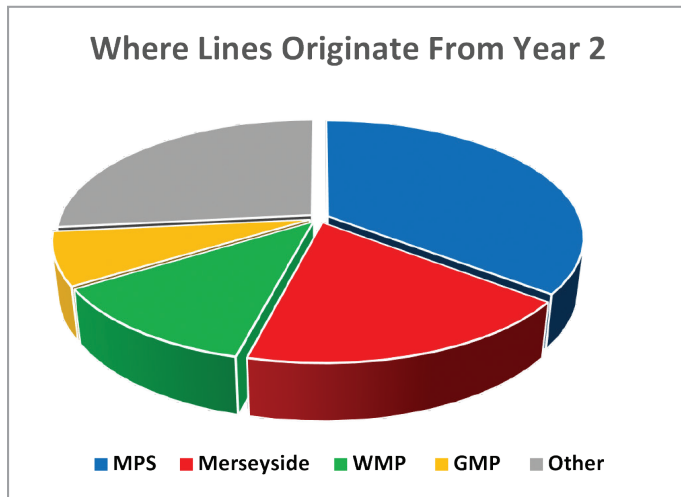
The four county lines taskforces have become efficient at identification of lines and working with the impacted importing forces to close lines and disrupt the network behind the business.

Lines are considered to be under-reported and as the county lines programme moves forward the recording of the crime theme will improve. NCLCC expect the numbers of lines to go up as we develop better techniques to identify the lines and map the threat from shorter more localised lines.

Like any business, county lines networks use brand names to advertise their products. This assists in building a customer base and boosting confidence that the product is of a certain quality. Additionally, it enables the networks to offer deals and draw in new users through social media and word of mouth.

2.3. Drugs Supply, Demand and Commodity

The networks continue to diversify, and drugs supply occurs locally (across estates and streets) not just along the longer rail and road networks. However with minimal investigation the originating supply of commodity and organisation of most lines can be traced back to the four principal exporting areas.



It was reported in the last strategic assessment that 'The county lines market is predominantly crack cocaine and heroin'. However, our understanding of the business model and the commodities involved has increased over the duration of the County Lines Programme.

Around 90% of all identified and reported lines supply Crack Cocaine or Heroin. The majority both together. For the user the immediate hit of crack is supported by the slower "come down" of heroin. This combination is the most widely reported drug type.

Cannabis and Powder Cocaine are the next most seen drugs but there is a huge distinction between the categories. As stated above 90% of all lines see the Crack and Heroin combination, whereas the next most recorded drug is powder cocaine at around 10% of all lines. This is not reflected in the larger range of commodity found during County Lines Intensification Weeks (CLIW). NCLCC would stress that any type of drug can fit the County Lines model.

Most policing operations over longer term will focus on Class A drugs, as usually they present most risk. However, during CLIW when we focus on the wider County Lines model, as stated previously we see increasing numbers of other types of drugs.

Prescription Drugs - Benzodiazepines are causing concern as the use of them without prescription and medical supervision becomes more reported in this space. They come to note alongside many other types of anti-depressant or sleeping medication. We regularly see Xanax, Diazepam, Valium, Tamazepam, Zopiclone, Pregabalin, bottles of Methodone, Mirtazapine, Gabapentin and Ropinirole, Citalopram, and Viagra.

Drugs linked more to the chemsex scene such as GBL/ GHB and crystal meth are seen on lines with other drugs linked to different markets such as MDMA, Amphetamine, Ketamine and LSD.

Cannabis is found regularly within County Lines investigations', in all forms, from plants, buds and seeds, to resin, oil, shatter, butter and edibles. Cannabis finds range from huge empty buildings that have been converted to allow the crop to grow and be harvested to smaller grows in home addresses. Bags of the drug in herbal format or resin are often found alongside users and suppliers, in both personal use and supplier quantities.

Shatter is made by soaking cannabis in butane gas and then purifying the results. It can be made into a product to smoke with a pipe, or similar, and is believed more addictive in this format.

Edibles can take the form of Cakes, Biscuits, Oils and Syrups or Sweets.

Cannabis edibles have increasingly come to note in the last year or so, and whilst a Class B drug and County Lines policing resource tends to focus on the high harm Class A, cannabis edibles present a real threat to the most vulnerable. The drugs are marketed to attract children and young adults. Cannabis is often a gateway drug into County Lines' methodology.

Cannabis is often sold to young people and vulnerable people with the aim of achieving a debt with the dealer. The supplying of drugs “on tick” and then calling in the debt offers the dealer new workforce recruitment opportunities.

Cannabis Grows are increasingly found during the course of county lines investigations. There is nothing to suggest a reduction in the demand or supply of Class A drugs, but the amount of Cannabis recovered evidences how strong the Cannabis market is. Most lines are running a range of drugs, due to the needs of the market they are invested in.

Spice - Spice remains a drug of interest. HMPPS report consistently that Spice remains a consistent threat within the footprint of prisons yet we do not find significant amounts outside of the HMPPS context.



3. Operational Response

The four designated 'Taskforces' MPS, Merseyside, GMP and West Midlands have been assessed as being the four biggest 'exporting' Forces, and hence receive separate dedicated Home Office funding for their 'Taskforces', to maximise operational response in these key Forces. BTP also receive dedicated funding due to their critical role with transport networks.

The investment into dedicated teams in these forces has transformed the response to county lines. The County Lines Model has shifted to one of higher risk due to the increased and enhanced Pursue activity.

3.1. Merseyside Police

Merseyside Police have continued their successful approach to tackling county lines through Project Medusa which coordinates activities from safeguarding to enforcement, and is built around a 4P plan:

■ **PURSUE** – Targeting offenders linked to county lines drugs supply.

■ **PREVENT** – Ensuring suitable safeguarding is implemented for victims of county lines. Working with partner agencies and the 3rd sector to implement effective prevention, intervention and diversionary pathways out of county lines.

■ **PROTECT** – Raising awareness of county lines exploitation in High Harm Force areas and Merseyside, through partnership working with the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership and the Eyes-Open campaign etc.

■ **PREPARE** – Making best use of technology to develop intelligence and awareness of county lines within the community and partner agencies.

The five supporting pillars :-

- **Operation Toxic** – Investigating and targeting the Merseyside based controllers of county lines
- **Operation Overlord** – Targeting individuals using the transport networks to engage in county lines drugs supply
- **Operation Octane** – Targeting individuals who use the road networks to engage in county lines supply
- **Operation Denarii** – Targeting the illicit finances linked to county lines
- **Operation Stonehaven** – Safeguarding and Prevention response to intervene and divert young people and vulnerable adults away from county lines.

Operation Stonehaven breaks its prevention interventions into 3 levels:


1. Primary interventions - aimed at young people who aren't necessarily involved in Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) but assessed as vulnerable. Interventions are intended to discourage young people from committing serious offences e.g., mass participation interventions and awareness raising at school.
2. Secondary Interventions - aimed at, at risk young people with emerging indicators of being drawn into SOC.
3. Tertiary Interventions - aimed at the hardest to reach and most challenging young people. Interventions are intended to facilitate desistance from SOC activity.

Between Nov 2020 and Oct 2022, Operation Stonehaven has engaged with over 10,000 children and young people through a mixture of mass participation, group work and one to one intervention.



The Op Stonehaven SOC Community Coordinator has also overseen multi-agency processes to enhance community initiatives and activities for improving community resilience to SOC especially when county lines have been closed within an area and voids are created. Activities are undertaken to reduce the attraction and acceptability of SOC as a lifestyle to individuals within communities.

Between November 2020 and October 2022 Project Medusa has successfully:

Op Toxic 661 County Lines Closed	Op Toxic 550 Line Holders Charged	Op Toxic 100% Conviction rate
462 children & vulnerable adults Safeguarded	£1,495,272 Cash Seized	Over 400 kilos of controlled drugs Seized
11 Firearms & over 200 Knives and other weapons Seized		Over 60 Op Stonehaven partnerships delivering intervention and diversion pathways to prevent young & vulnerable people being drawn into county lines
4,793 Stop Searches	Op Stonehaven engagement with over 10,000 children and young people	2,573 intelligence submissions
9 Evidence Led modern slavery prosecutions for County Lines offences	1605 Project Medusa Arrests	19 Civil Orders

Safeguarded for Merseyside is any child or adult that is suspected of being involved in county lines/associated activity will be referred by the reporting officer. This can be directly through a Project Medusa deployment or via other staff within the Merseyside police family.

The VPRU (Vulnerable Person Referral Unit) then create the most suitable referral to partners / safeguarding services. The numbers quoted within the assessment are as a direct result of these submissions in that 2 year period.

3.2. Metropolitan Police

The MPS established the County Lines Taskforce, Operation Orochi, in November 2019; with a clear mission of tackling the national threat of County Lines emanating from London. Since then the unit has grown in size and now comprises a multi-disciplined team of Police Officers and Staff.

Orochi has worked collaboratively with constabularies across the UK, with significant benefits.

Precision Policing Tackling County Lines

Orochi dismantle and disrupt criminal networks involved in violent crime and exploitation in London & across the UK, playing a key part in tackling the national threat of County Lines. The data-driven precise methodology used by Orochi resulted in the following:

- 88% of Orochi arrests result in charges;
- 81% of accused persons in Orochi cases pleading guilty early;
- 94% of Orochi prosecutions result in convictions

Child Exploitation – Rescuing Missing Children

Orochi have taken a new approach to tackling child criminal exploitation in the context of County Lines Drug Supply, by working proactively to find exploited missing children. Since April 2022, 34 children have been rescued. In total, 66 Charges have been brought against 44 defendants using the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

MPS Performance Overview

Orochi	Yamata
Disruption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1,257 County Lines closed ■ 1,484 Individuals arrested ■ 1,308 Individuals charged (88%) ■ £815,390 cash seized ■ 74 weapons seized ■ 4 Firearms seized 	Disruption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 202 London-Lines closed ■ 144 Individuals arrested ■ 138 Individuals charged (96%) ■ £283,127 cash seized ■ 63 weapons seized
Diversion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 909 individuals engaged with statutory safeguarding partners ■ 157 individuals referred to any specialist support provider 	Diversion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 56 vulnerable persons referred for drugs treatment & diversion

Inception to Dec 2022*

**Orochi incepted Nov 19; Yamata incepted April 22)*

MPS Building on Success – The 2022/23 Operation Yamata Pilot

Operation Yamata, commenced as a pilot project in April 2022. It sought to pilot use of Orochi methodology to tackle London-Based drug supply lines ('London/City Lines'). Initially trialled in Hackney and Tower Hamlets (MPS Central East BCU), it was expanded in October 2022.

The cross-border challenge of criminal networks operating across law enforcement boundaries exists equally in London with 12 different Borough Command Units, spanning 32 London Boroughs as it does across the UK, with 43 different police forces. The London criminal model does bear some differences with a broader range of local channels being used to supply drugs. Notwithstanding these differences, Orochi methodology employed by Operation Yamata within London has still proved to be highly successful at disrupting criminal networks. Furthermore, the profile of those being arrested/charged has again confirmed the link between drug supply and serious crime: over 80% of offenders have previously been arrested for violence.



3.3. West Midlands

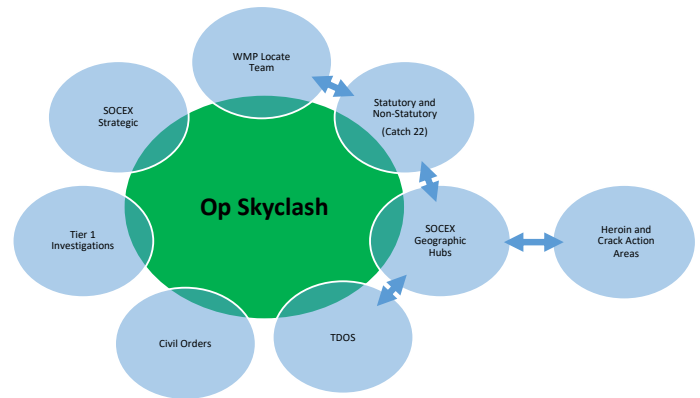
From 1st April 2022 the West Midlands County Lines Taskforce was moved from West Midlands ROCU and aligned to the West Midlands Police Force CID investigative model. A Hub and Spoke approach was developed with the Hub itself sitting within West Midlands Police.

Key objectives of the West Midlands County Lines Taskforce include the closure of County lines bringing County Lines perpetrators to justice by increasing the consequences and decreasing the reward associated with county lines offending, reducing the exploitation of young people and vulnerable adults and ensuring appropriate safeguarding and support for victims, reducing and mitigating violence and homicide linked to County Lines and tackling the enablers of county lines.

The identification of county lines and assessing the threat they pose to individuals and communities is essential to inform effective operational activity within the West Midlands region.

In addition to a focused criminal investigation, the denial of service through restriction orders and direct engagement with safeguarding professionals are considered as appropriate pathways.

Operation Skyclash describes the West Midlands County Lines Taskforce approach to deliver against the vision of working in collaboration to protect the most vulnerable at risk of exploitation by County Lines' drug networks. Based on the "One Day One Conversation" principles key stakeholders discuss specific cases of concern and ensure that safeguarding opportunities are maximised and those involved in such criminal exploitation are proactively pursued.



3.4. Greater Manchester Police

Tackling County Lines in Greater Manchester is led by Programme Challenger, the partnership response to SOC. The partnership is significant in size and includes law enforcement agencies and emergency services combined, local Authorities, health, education, the Non-Governmental Organisation and business sectors. In GMP, Challenger is made up of a central team, which incorporates a new dedicated Home Office funded County Lines Taskforce and twelve district Challenger Teams who tackle local SOC threats with co-located partners such as Complex Safeguarding and Community Safety Teams.

The County Lines Taskforce launched in May 2021 and comprises an intelligence and investigative function. The new team worked with Operations Orochi and Medusa to identify best practices when launching the programme and developed efficient operating procedures to tackle those running the lines and exploiting the young and vulnerable.

Despite a standing start the Taskforce are now consistently closing a significant number of County Lines along with achieving convictions against the exploiters and directing specialist safeguarding to those impacted by this crime type.

Programme Challenger deliver under a 4P strategy to tackle SOC threats. Although significant investment has been made in the Pursue function with the new County Lines taskforce there has also been considerable work undertaken within the Protect, Prevent and Prepare (3P) strands.

The County Lines Taskforce includes a dedicated Campaign and Engagement Officer. In addition a dedicated Partnership Officer within the team coordinates the 3P response alongside partners such as the Violence Reduction Unit, Youth Justice and Catch 22. Administering and Coordinating the We Move diversionary scheme. Launched in May 2022 in its first year has worked with over 50 children, focussed on developing the young person's strengths and interests, offering them related opportunities through a range of delivery partners

In the prevent space Challenger deliver impactful, tailored campaigns around County Lines. This year Breaking Barriers was commissioned, a creative media company to deliver a hard-hitting play and workshop to over 1500 year 6 children across the city.

Challenger has a dedicated Training Coordinator who delivers bespoke trauma informed exploitation awareness sessions to both the public and partners. These include large scale inputs to college students, medical staff, schools, and front-line responders amongst others across the city.

3.5. British Transport Police

The rail network is a key element of the County Lines distribution model. As a consequence, British Transport Police receive Home Office County Lines funding, particularly as it is the agency most likely to intercept vulnerable children, who are engaged in drug supply activity; demonstrated by BTP being the largest reporter of intelligence related to children, linked to county lines.

Since the formation of the Op Defiant teams in Dec 2019, BTP has conducted hundreds of joint deployments at train stations and on rail routes throughout the country, with a wide variety of law enforcement and safeguarding partners.

As of April 2022, BTP has now formed an in-house investigation team for the taskforce; this unit also includes BTP's specialist safeguarding team, working alongside the proactive teams, focussing on supporting the successful investigation of Modern

Slavery offences. One of the advantages of this model is that investigation and safeguarding begins immediately at the point of contact, when a child is identified as being involved in County Lines.

Missing Children on the Railway Network

British Transport Police continues to encounter children on the rail network, who are involved in or impacted by County Lines. A significant number of children who come to attention are missing, or repeat missing children. Embedded within County Lines Task Force are safeguarding leads with skills and experience in social work and the voluntary sector, who support officers in identifying vulnerability, this initiates safeguarding at the critical point that children and vulnerable persons come to the attention of officers.

Safeguarding

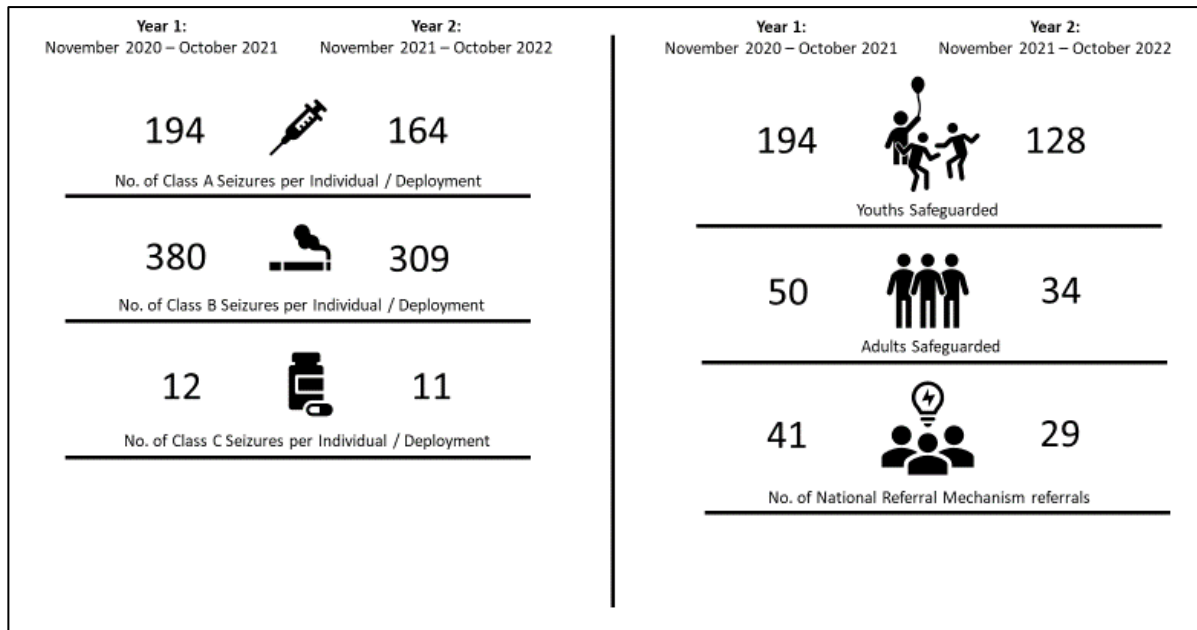
Using the Look Closer Campaign with The Children's Society and longstanding relationship with The Railway Children, safeguarding action groups are being developed across England, Scotland, and Wales, to focus partners on how they can increase safety through better recognition and response to risk, harm and abuse. An example includes BTP work at Waterloo Station where BTP worked across the footprint of the station to gather information and provide training to businesses and security services. Leading to the identification of eight vulnerable children travelling from a coastal Local Authority

As a year-on-year comparison across both years, the BTP County Lines Task Force has observed a general downward trend of arrests and other metrics, barring cash seizures, which have increased by almost double. BTP consider the taskforce's dedicated approach to County Lines on the railway network over three years to have successfully target-hardened the environment to some extent, and this reduction in arrest numbers from the team's inception (which has stabilised to approximately 500 – 550 per annum), was anticipated.

National County Lines Coordination Centre

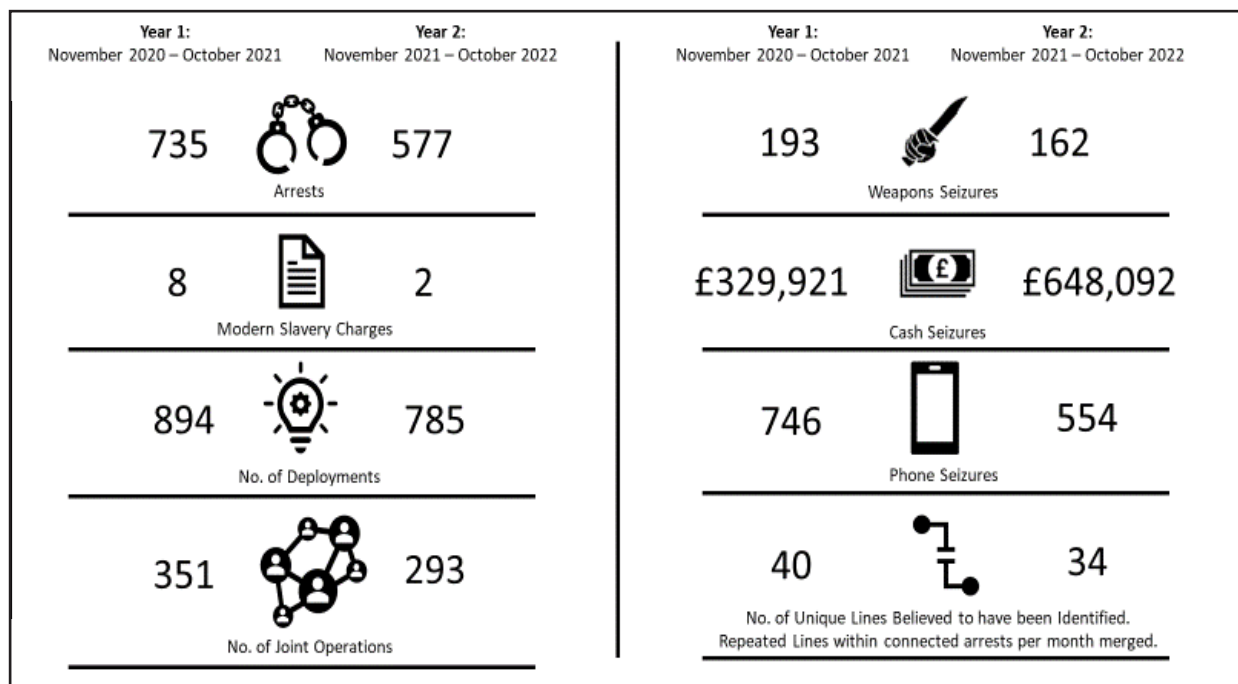


Totals from the County Lines Task Force Deployments and Arrests comparing November 2020 – October 2021 to November 2021 – October 2022



'Safeguarded' for BTP means that there has been a referral made and discussions held with the appropriate agencies, to ensure the necessary information is exchanged and a collective understanding of potential risks which will lead to actions to improve the safety of the individual and their families.

Totals from the County Lines Task Force Deployments and Arrests comparing November 2020 – October 2021 to November 2021 – October 2022



3.6. Importer / Non-Taskforce Forces

The remaining eligible Forces have generally previously been referred to as 'importing' Forces. However, as discussed in Section 2.1, the view of the County Lines model has evolved from a binary 'Exporter Force to Importer Force' model to a more mature understanding of how County Lines can also operate within Force boundaries or indeed from a non-designated 'exporting Force' to another Force.

The entire success of the County Lines program relies on:-

- Exporter taskforces and Non-Taskforce forces to be able to work effectively with each other
- Non-Taskforce forces to be able to effectively work with each other on lines between their Forces
- Non-Taskforce forces to be able to effectively deal with their 'internal lines'

Home Office 'Surge Funding', administered and authorised via the NCLCC, has been critical in enabling the above.

For the first time, in FY 2022/23, every single eligible force bid for and received an allocation of surge funding to tackle County Lines within, to or from their Force areas.

The operational outcomes of this surge funding have been exceptional, and have complemented the equally excellent Taskforce results and activity.

3.7. NCA / Upstream and NCLCC Review

At the time of the last strategic assessment there was joint Gold command of NCLCC from National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the National Crime Agency (NCA).

However, at the end of financial year 2021/22, the NCA withdrew from the County Lines space to focus on upstream drugs activity, resulting in a NCLCC governance structure with one Gold.

The NCA continue to work closely with NCLCC to assist with analysis of the National County Lines Intelligence picture, and the NCA's investigations into upstream drug importations remain key in choking the supply chain that feeds county lines.

NCLCC have since evolved and expanded to enhance NCLCC structure and processes to meet requirements of the new '10 Year Drug Strategy' and provide sustainability and an enhanced NCLCC service to UK Forces, Regions and partners.

3.8. Intensification Weeks

CLIW's are coordinated by NCLCC and are partially funded by Surge Funding. The CLIWs serve to provide intense weeks of operational and partnership activity, across all 4P strands

Key purposes of CLIWs are to provide public reassurance and preventative messaging that 'County Lines is a high-risk, high-consequence criminal activity', and this is partially achieved via a joined up national media strategy subsequent to the week's activity.

Cumulative Headline Totals CLIW Year 1 & Year 2

INTENSIFICATION WEEKS	YEAR 1	YEAR 2
ARRESTS	2,568	2,804
CUCKOOED ADDRESS VISITS	1798	1503
NRM REFERRALS	91	158
CASH SEIZED	£2,086,423	£2,403,319
DEAL LINES CLOSED	204	268
WEAPONS RECOVERED	583	626
Inc Firearms	15 - Section 1 firearms 67 - Section 5 firearms	9 - Section 1 firearms 33 - Section 5 firearms 44 - Imitation firearms
Inc Bladed	405	442
DRUG VALUE SEIZED CLASS A - Wholesale Value	£2,842,944	£4,192,244
Cannabis - Wholesale Value	Over £3 Million Cannabis	Over £2.8 Million Cannabis

Every Force in the Country has played a part in securing these results. Forces work with partners, notably The Children Society who promote their #Look Closer campaign during this time to help engage with a range of people within the whole community to promote professional curiosity.

Of the arrests in Year 1. 11% were juveniles, and in Year 2. 10% were juveniles

4. Telecoms

4.1. Telecoms and Social Media

Communication is key to the supply model and the favoured mode of communication remains mobile phones. Whilst the suppliers of drugs become ever more innovative in marketing and diversifying the model, the user base of most challenged Class A users with addiction are still in this space, therefore the dealers have to account for the demand.

The use of telecoms changes as the market changes. In policing we are aware of the changing tactics and continue to develop how we tackle the groups behind the drugs lines.

5. Exploitation

The majority of the harm and risk caused within the county lines business model continues to be created through the exploitation of children and vulnerable individuals. This causes significant harm to our communities when OCG's use this as a way to maintain control, increase profit and evade law enforcement, largely through a methodology of grooming, creating debt bondage and trafficking of children and adults.

The NCLCC continue to build strong collaborative working relationships with police and key strategic partners to tackle exploitation. This collaborative approach is vital, with the aim being to make the use of children and vulnerable individual's high risk and low reward within the business model.

The NCLCC drive both police and partners to be in the 'proactive safeguarding space' enabling early identification of those at risk and vulnerable to exploitation, working in partnership to increase the safeguarding of victims and importantly targeting the perpetrators, bringing them justice.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 report:-

Children can be targeted and recruited into county lines in a number of locations including any type of schools (including special schools), further and higher educational institutions, pupil referral units, children's homes and care homes. Children are also increasingly being targeted and recruited online using social media. Children can easily become trapped

by this type of exploitation as county lines gangs can manufacture drug debts which need to be worked off or threaten serious violence and kidnap towards victims (and their families) if they attempt to leave the county lines network."

5.1. Debt Bondage

It is widely recognised that Debt bondage is a mechanism to control, coerce and intimidate children and adults at risk. It is a form of entrapment which can lead to people feeling as though they are caught in a situation from which they cannot escape.

The NCLCC set up and led a working group after recognising that there was an increasing number of children becoming subject to debt bondage after arrest whereby there is a loss of drugs through police seizure, or being victim of an assault and or intimidation where drugs or a service were demanded by the perpetrator. This type of debt bondage also involves vulnerable adults whose premises are taken over by the suspect(s) to 'pay off' a drug debt and is not exclusive to children.

The debts are extremely harmful and come with considerable risk to the victim as well as their family. The 'debt' is often never really paid off and in some extreme circumstances, parents/carers of victims have attempted to pay off the line holders to break the cycle.

The working group consisted of statutory partners, Policing colleagues and commissioned services which has resulted in a number of tangible products being produced which include:



- A professional’s resource pack created in collaboration with The Children’s Society ‘Debt Bondage in a Criminal Exploitation and County Lines context’
- A collaboration with Parents against Child Exploitation (PACE) to produce :- *‘Debt Bondage: A guide for parents and carers on how debts are created and used to control and exploit children in acts of criminality’*
- Funding for Sketch Up awareness campaigns including a digital video similar to the NRM and Sec45 defence projects also created by NCLCC.

5.2. Cuckooing

Cuckooing continues to be part of the methodology of the county lines criminal networks.

It remains the case that there is no predominant vulnerability type for victims of cuckooing, however, those individuals who suffer from addiction to drugs and other substances are largely affected. Many forces prioritise the vulnerable people caught up within cuckooing. The NCLCC continue to support forces nationally with initiatives to enhance the police response to cuckooing, which continues to be a key part of the county lines business model. Within the last 2 years the NCLCC 3P team have shared a significant amount of good practice for both police and partners. There are currently at least 21 cuckooing initiatives nationally, ranging from individual initiatives in particular areas, through to force wide initiatives or best practice guidance.

Following the March 2020 NCLCC conference attended by 10,000 police and partner colleagues, the 3P team have used the feedback to developed training tools to enhance knowledge, provide guidance and inform of the ‘signs’ to spot in cases of cuckooing. With videos created to enable access to the information as and when required. As of November 2022 there have been 44,000 views of the video content provided by NCLCC.

5.3. Modern Slavery, Sec 45 Defence, and NRM

Modern Slavery legislation is a significant tool in tackling county lines criminality, which strongly supports the NCLCC aim to disincentivize the use of children and vulnerable individuals within the county lines business model.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is used by First Responder organisations to identify and refer potential victims of modern slavery to the relevant Competent Authority within the Home Office to ensure they receive appropriate support.

It is critical that the safeguarding / 3P aspect of the response to county lines is effective and energetic. We cannot ‘arrest our way out of the county lines problem’.

The NCLCC have provided numerous training workshops and presentations around the use of Modern Slavery Legislation to tackle county lines criminality, and have driven the message that the legislation must be considered alongside traditional drugs offences. The benefits of enhanced sentencing opportunities and better management of offenders post-conviction through the use of Slavery and Trafficking Orders have been highlighted.

To enhance the support available to officers, the NCLCC led and jointly produced an interactive training session to increase officer and partner awareness of the legislation and to improve knowledge and understanding of Section 45 defence, NRM, evidence led prosecutions and managing parallel investigations as a result of the recent ruling from VCL&AN.

To support policing colleagues further, the NCLCC have produced a Modern Slavery Investigation checklist. Additionally, the NCLCC provide tactical advice to investigators to improve the quality of investigations and support officers in overcoming barriers and challenges to successful prosecution of perpetrators. Such tactical advice has led to

numerous cases resulting in successful charging decisions.

Partners within law enforcement work together to ensure that frontline practitioners are provided with adequate knowledge and skills to tackle this type of criminality and exploitation.

5.4. Juveniles and Females Involved In County Lines

There has sadly been no change to the fact that around 20% of all nominals reported as being involved in county lines are juveniles. This has remained the same proportion since we started recording the data.

In the Year 1. Reporting period for this report it was 18% of nominals, in Year 2. 21.5% of nominals - an average of 20.2% over the two years.

8% of the reported juveniles are female. Females make up 14.3% of reported people as an average over the reporting period. 14.5% in Year 1 and 13.9% in Year 2.

Age when added	Y1	Y2
10	0.1%	0.2%
11	0.1%	0.4%
12	1.0%	1.6%
13	2.5%	4.9%
14	9.5%	11.0%
15	20.0%	20.2%
16	29.3%	29.6%
17	40.3%	34.1%

This table shows the proportion of each age group when a juvenile was first identified within the reporting period. So for example 20% of all reported juveniles were 15yrs old when they were first reported.

Age when added	Y1	Y2
10	-	-
11	-	-
12	-	3.0%
13	3.0%	10.0%
14	5.5%	17.0%
15	21.0%	23.5%
16	32.0%	24.0%
17	38.5%	25.0%

This table is an extract of only the female juveniles.

Forces maximise support for vulnerable young people involved in county lines, and refer victims and families to specialist support services where appropriate.

The following support services are utilised :-

Home Office Funded :-

- Catch22 County Lines Support and Rescue – a specialist support and rescue service in London, West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester for young people up to the age of 25 and their families who are criminally exploited through county lines.
- Missing People’s SafeCall– a confidential and anonymous helpline and support service for young people and family members in England and Wales that are affected by missing, county lines and criminal exploitation. The service also provides confidential support and advice for professionals in relation to their work with an exploited young person or family.

Other organisations that offer support and are a further source of information and advice include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- St Giles Trust
- The Children’s Society
- NSPCC
- Barnardo’s
- PACE
- Railway Children

The Rescue and Response service (MOPAC Commissioned) may also be considered.



6. Violence

6.1. Themes in Violence

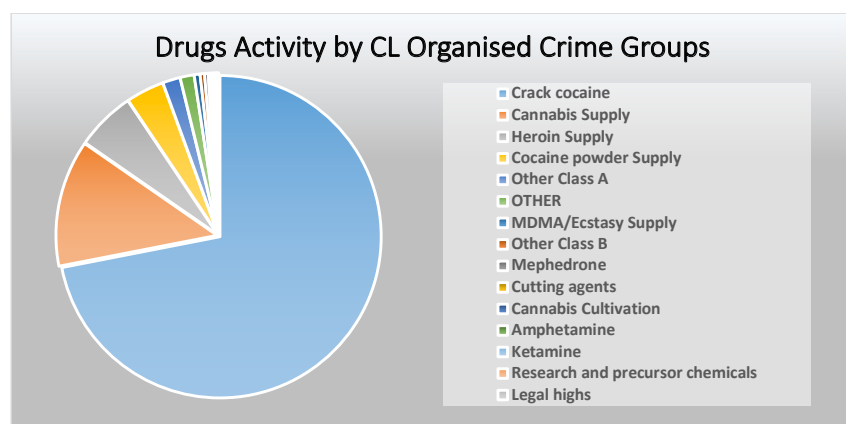
County lines involve face to face contact between users and dealers. Further up the drugs tier model those organisers benefitting from the “deal” do not have to meet. At street level, young children or vulnerable adults are left holding quantities of cash and or drugs, either in a known premises, such as a trap or crack house or out in the street. This makes them prime targets for robbery or disputes which lead to more chaotic acts of violence.

6.2. Organised Crime Groups

The groups behind the lines may be called OCG’s Urban Street Gangs, Peer Groups or many other phrases. They are the teams behind the business model. The OCG’s are a small section of that business model. The OCGs identified as active with County Lines during the reporting period are recorded against a principal criminal activity. This does not exclude them from any other criminal behaviour, just indicates the main activity for which the organised crime group came to note.

The Table below shows the proportion of identified OCGs involved in each crime type, unsurprisingly 80% are involved in Drugs Activity.

Criminality Type	Y1	Y2
Drug activity	80%	84%
Commodity importation, counterfeiting, Illegal Supply	14%	9%
Organised theft	3%	2%
Violent criminal activity	2%	3%
Organised immigration crime	<1	1%
Specialist money laundering	<1	<1
Sexual offences	<1	<1
Economic crime	<1	<1
Cyber crime	<1	0%



The criteria for inclusion in the pie chart to the left may detail that the group supplies or imports the mentioned drug. The list is the data from the two years merged as there was no change in ranking year on year. The top four are crack cocaine, by far the most seen commodity, followed by cannabis, heroin, and then powder cocaine. The other drugs are seen in far smaller numbers but the range supports the diversity of drugs we see in the County Lines chains, during CLIW and at point of arrest.

6.3. County Lines and Homicide

NCLCC has started to collect data on serious violence linked to County Lines Offending. This has involved identifying when an offence has been committed in a county lines context in the view of the investigating team

The below extracts relate to a small group of 120 offences, with the earliest confirmed County Lines Offence being from 2016.

The headlines from this group include:-

- 70% of all victims sustained a Knife or bladed weapon injury
- 18% sustained fatal firearms injuries
- 10% of all victims were 18 years old, it is the largest single age group on the data set.
- 21.6% of the victims were 17 or under, the youngest just was just 14 years old.

This issue is a nationwide problem with offences likely to be in every region. The data held by NCLCC and represented above currently only reflects 26 Forces.

Recurrent Themes in Homicide :-

Cuckooing, violence is an inherent factor in the process of cuckooing, with violence being suffered by juveniles, vulnerable adults and adult drug dealers.

Within the group of identified offences, juveniles are most often victims of homicide when they are in the role of suspect who has cuckooed the premises. They have been stabbed as part of a dispute whereby the Cuckooed victim has sought assistance from others in removing them from the property. Adult Dealers become victims of most serious violence when becoming involved in arguments in the premises with other dealers or customers, potentially within the theme of robbery. The further victims are clearly vulnerable people who have been assaulted within their own cuckooed property.

These offences have in common the extreme nature of the injuries. These victims have sustained multiple injuries often involving different types of weapons in some occasions over a prolonged period of time.

The vulnerability of this group, those who have their property taken over by criminal groups is clear and evident. It is hoped future changes to modern slavery legislation will give police and partners more opportunity to support them.

Robbery as a theme is consistent through the data in relation to murder, although the context varies. Broadly, there are a large proportion of robbery offences at the point of sale, where user has stabbed dealer or vice versa (almost all are blade offences), with one party attempting to rob the other of the cash or commodity they hold. Within County Lines this risk will always be high.

County Lines can be considered as the point on the supply chain where user meets dealer. The mid tiers forming elements of the supply chain present a different form of risk. Challenged, vulnerable, chaotic users meeting scared, volatile or chaotic dealers will always have a high threat of harm. The other offences represent County Lines groups robbing other County Lines groups, often featuring aggravated burglary of trap houses or Line Holders robbing other lines holders of drugs or money. Also runners robbing other runners to pay their own debts or incur debts for others.



7. National County Lines Coordination Centre

The NCLCC is an NPCC function funded through the Home Office in recognition that the threat and harm from County Lines is a national priority that requires a coordinated approach from forces, regions and partners to tackle. Announced in the 2018 Home Office Serious Violence Strategy, it was launched by the Home Secretary on 20th September 2018.

The aim of the NCLCC is to work across all 4 strands of Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Pursue, to coordinate a national, joined up, strategic and tactical response to county lines.

The funding received from the Home Office supports the continuation of the NCLCC, which includes coordinating national law enforcement activity across England, Scotland and Wales, increasing intelligence on the county lines threat, and informing national policy development and best practice.

The NCLCC has developed since inception and has expanded functionality to include orchestrating intensification weeks, training, peer reviews, Continued Profession Development (CPD) days for the county lines officers and staff. The sharing of best practice, dissemination of intelligence and analysis, reporting re progress of the County Lines programme to the Home Office, managing core grants and authorising surge funding. Increased 'surge funding' to local forces has been critical in increasing the operational engagement of all UK Regional Forces in tackling County Lines.

Prevent, Protect, Prepare

NCLCC includes a 3P team focussing on Safeguarding and Disruption of the County Lines Model.

The 3P team work with forces and relevant partners to deliver effective join up for data retrieval and tactical work, as well as developing best guidance, practice, policy and influencing operational response in a safeguarding context related to County Lines.

Additionally the NCLCC National Orders team provides support and guidance for obtaining key judicial restrictions such as Slavery Trafficking orders against County Lines offenders'. This regional support is available to all forces and contributes to the delivery of the national operational and strategic objectives.

Pursue

NCLCC includes a Regional Pursue element which consists of Regional coordinators and analysts across the country, including Scotland (Scotland Coordinators are funded by Merseyside). Every region across the country, and BTP, has at least one Detective Inspector or staff equivalent and an analyst. The NCLCC also houses a tactical and strategic intelligence development team.

The regional coordination teams support their forces to better understand the threat of county lines and to develop their operational response.

7.1. Training and Relationships

National CPD events

The NCLCC recognise the importance of professional development and strive to ensure that the whole team nationally have the skillset required to support the forces with their strategic and operational response to county lines and the associated exploitation and criminality. Since November 2020 6 CPD events have been held.

NCLCC Hydra Training

The NCLCC Hydra training is a two day immersive learning and training package that takes participants through a county lines investigation from beginning to conclusion. This training is delivered to both police and partners, the course explores the complex nature of these investigations from both a policing and partner perspective. It focuses on the exploitation element and the victim vs offender status. It explores the use of legislation in relation to the Modern Day Slavery act and the importance of the use of the NRM and S45 as well as tactical options such as the use of ancillary orders. A wide range of partners have been on the course including CPS, Social Services, Housing, Health, HMPPS and non-statutory partners.

The NCLCC have developed the training to ensure accuracy and updated methodology to maximise effectiveness and Hydra 2 will be launched at the end of performance year 2022-2023.

Nov 2020 to Oct 2021 - 52 Hydras delivered to average of 832 delegates of which approximately 180 were partners

Nov 2021 to Oct 2022 - 63 Hydras delivered to average of 1008 delegates of which approximately 230 were partners

Moving forward with the new launch at the time of writing there are 75 courses booked nationally which will see in excess of 1200 delegates trained.



7.2. Peer Reviews

The NCLCC offer Peer Reviews to forces, the opportunity for subject matter experts to work with the forces to assess their current response to County Line Criminality across all 4 P's, identify gaps and offer guidance on where the most effective change might be realised. Since November 2020 8 forces have requested and received this service.

7.3. Orders Team

The NCLCC National Orders team is now well established and they continue to promote the use of civil orders through training and guidance; but importantly through taking an active role in identifying opportunities for both prevention and risk orders. Supporting frontline officers with drafting the applications and going through the legal process to obtain them. The team work closely with the NCLCC 3P team, providing tactical advice on the evidential requirements for a Modern Slavery investigation and charge. Where these charges are not possible they work with the officers to explore other opportunities to risk manage perpetrators of exploitation in the community and in prison.

The slavery and trafficking orders guidance for practitioners which was due to be released in 2021 was successfully launched via an online event in May 2022 with inputs from the Head of NCLCC, leading barristers with expert knowledge in the field, legal services and case studies of where orders have been used effectively to tackle county lines offending. NCLCC are sharing this guidance nationally for all frontline practitioners.

In November 2022 an event was hosted for legal services teams of all forces in England and Wales on the use of slavery and trafficking risk orders, barristers detailed evidential criteria required, applications and court process to aid those in attendance to be confident in obtaining them moving forward. Noting the potential conflict with cases that are awaiting trial and how to support and not undermine those cases. NCLCC have shared this learning and used it as part of their internal

team development which has resulted in the number of Slavery and trafficking risk orders (STRO's) increasing significantly in the 3 months post the training.

2021- 2022 has seen a steady increase in the use of STRO's from 1 to 19, which demonstrates the uplift detailed by the training provided. The use of interim risk orders pending the outcome of a modern slavery trial is also an approach now advocated for by the NCLCC. There have been over 255 people charged with modern slavery act offences in county lines cases since 2020, this data is now captured by NCLCC orders team, and it allows the team to review all cases of modern slavery for potential orders. The orders team plays a critical part in promoting the use of modern slavery legislation and has offered tactical advice guidance and support to officers investigating county lines, of those investigations supported 105 have resulted in MDS charges in a county lines context.

7.4. Collaboration with PACE

In 2021 following NCLCC recognising a gap in the current outreach programmes, the NCLCC approached Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE) and Barnardo's in order to deliver county lines awareness webinars for parents and carers. It was identified that parents and carers have had limited knowledge of the signs of exploitation however they will be the first people to recognise changes in behaviour. The ethos was to upskill and engage with parents as safeguarding partners to give them the skills to recognise, the knowledge as to where help and support can be sought, as well as the confidence to report.

The NCLCC funded the delivery of sessions in 4 pilot areas (Essex, Bedfordshire, Exeter, and Northamptonshire), this saw over 1000 attending with a focus on an introduction to criminal exploitation and county lines, followed by a lived experience approach from the lens of the child.

In 2022 -23 further funding was secured and sessions were delivered in West Yorkshire, West Midlands, North Wales, Gloucestershire, and North and South Yorkshire. This led to partners initiating further deliveries within their own areas.

On average PACE received 5 referrals from parent/carers out of each webinar series, where active engagement and ongoing work has taken place and in some cases access support the very same day. These sessions demonstrate great examples of how effective partnership working is and the importance of early intervention for both children who are victims as well as their families who hold so much information but do not always know where to go to get help or are fearful of repercussions.

The NCLCC are looking at further collaborative work with key partners to increase the reach and impact to children, parents/carers and professionals in 2023-2024.

8. Glossary

County Line Deal Line - The phone line used by county line drug networks to manage their distribution and supply and deal drugs to the end drug user.

Crack or Trap House - A place where illegal drugs are sold.

Cuckooing - A term used to describe the use of someone's property as a base to deal drugs from, typically seen in the county lines methodology. As a simile to the behaviour of the cuckoo bird, drug dealers use violence and coercion to occupy the property of someone who is often vulnerable through mental health, domestic circumstances, substance misuse or manipulation. Their property is used as a "base" for that drug dealing gang who want to deal in that particular area. The property is used to cut and store drugs, and despatch drug runners from to perform a deal. As the address can be used for long periods at a time, it is not uncommon to find missing children within these premises.

Notably, the occupier of the cuckooed address can be a victim of violence, coercion and even Modern Slavery, however there can be instances where the drug user is also being paid in drugs for the use of their property. Victim hood of cuckooed property occupants is variable and full investigation of the circumstances of that occupier should be carried out.

DDTRO Drug Dealing Telecommunications Restriction Order - This order is created for disruption on mobile phones used by individuals involved in criminal activity.

Home Office definition of a County Line: ...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.

Imitation Firearm (summarised) - anything which has the appearance of being a firearm whether or not it is capable of discharging any shot, bullet or other missile.

Line Holder - The person in charge of the county line.

Runner - A person selling and delivering the drugs to the user. The lowest role in the business model and the entry point that many vulnerable or young people are groomed or coerced into joining.

Section 1 Firearm (summarised) - is a firearm that is declared to be 'specially dangerous' and requires a firearm certificate. It is an offence to have, purchase, or acquire a section 1 firearm without holding a valid firearm certificate or as authorised by such a certificate

Section 5 Firearm (summarised) - prohibits certain categories of firearms. These include (not an exhaustive list):

- (i) Any firearm which is designed or adapted so that two or more missiles can be successively discharged without repeated pressure on the trigger
- (ii) Any self-loading or pump-action rifled gun other than one which is chambered for .22 rim-fire cartridges
- (iii) Any firearm which either has a barrel less than 30 centimetres in length or is less than 60 centimetres in length overall, other than an air weapon, muzzle-loading gun or a firearm designed as signalling apparatus.

STPO Slavery & Trafficking Prevention Orders - The purpose of the STPO is to prevent slavery and human trafficking offences being committed by someone who has already committed such offences. They can be applied for on conviction of such an offence (section 14) or a separate application made to the courts at any time in respect of an individual who has been convicted or cautioned (or subject to a similar finding) for a slavery or trafficking offence in the UK or been convicted or cautioned for an equivalent offence abroad.

STRO Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders - An STRO can be made by a Court in respect of an individual who has NOT been convicted of a slavery or trafficking offence. The Court must be satisfied that there is a risk that the defendant may commit a slavery or human trafficking offence and that the STRO is necessary to protect against the risk of harm from the defendant committing the offence. STROs enable action to be taken where this is necessary to prevent serious harm to the public notwithstanding the absence of a conviction.

Surge Funding - A funding stream, provided by the Home Office, managed by the NCLCC and financially administered by Merseyside Police. This Surge Funding is only available to Forces that do not already receive dedicated County Lines Funding, and is hence not available to the 4 Taskforces or BTP. The funding is to enable Forces to work effectively with Taskforces to tackle county lines between them, or is also for tackling internal Force County Lines or County Lines between non-taskforce Forces. It is primarily for Pursue activity but is most effectively also used for activity across all 4Ps of Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare.

VCL&AN - V.C.L and A.N is a significant stated case from the European Court of Human Rights, which resulted in the UK having to implement numerous changes to comply with the ruling. Of significance, it places a duty on law enforcement to investigate whether a subject is a victim of Modern Slavery and requires the outcome of the NRM referral before a decision can be made to prosecute.

Workforce - general term for a person at the lowest end of the county lines model, engaged in the work. They may be a runner or wrapping the drugs into deal packages. This group are very vulnerable to exploitation and at high risk of threat and harm.

National County Lines Coordination Centre

