



## PCC Briefing Document

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## **1. Background**

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing to the Police and Crime Commissioner on:

- Child Criminal Exploitation
- County Lines methodology for dealing drugs
- Strategic Context
- Partnership actions
- Public messages
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## **2. Child Criminal Exploitation**

2.1. Child Sexual Exploitation is widely understood by the public and is an acknowledged high priority for all law enforcement and partner agencies and each force has a strategy to work in partnership to tackle the issue. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), the exploitation of children for other criminal purposes, does not have the same level of priority as sexual exploitation. CCE has been a part of criminal behaviour for centuries, adult offenders using them to commit crimes and to use their innocence to distance the adults from the evidence of their offending, thereby reducing the risk of being caught and prosecuted.

2.2. There is no legal definition of CCE but an academic definition is as follows:

*[Criminal exploitation] is the exchange of the services of a child for commodities. These may be tangible, such as cigarettes or money, or intangible, such as affection. Child [criminal] exploitation involves asymmetrical power relationships whereby the victim's emotional, mental or physical immaturity or socioeconomic disadvantage is exploited. (Cockbain and Brayley, 2012).*

2.3. This definition shows that the common interpretation of exploitation applies to CCE and it simply involves using children for criminal purposes in exchange for something. This something can be as simple as perceived affection.

2.4. In Surrey the main example of CCE is the use of children to hold, carry and deliver drugs on behalf of adult dealers. The exploiter and exploited can come from either local communities or travel into the county.

## **3. County Lines**

3.1. The NCA Definition of County Lines is:

*"A typical County Lines activity involves a group (usually made up of young males) from a large urban area travelling to smaller locations, such as a county or coastal town, to sell class A drugs, specifically crack cocaine and heroin. They may challenge an existing group from the local area or another County Lines enterprise which often causes an increase of violent incidents. Groups will communicate with drugs users via a mobile phone number given a brand name which we refer to as the 'line'. This line is usually kept away from the area where drugs are being sold and the group will use a relay system to contact the members acting as the dealers in the county location. Group members travel between the urban and county locations on a regular basis to collect drugs and deliver cash. Groups will use a local property as a base for their activities and this is often acquired by forced or coercion referred to as cuckooing. Groups generally utilise children (under 18 year olds) to deliver drugs from the urban to county location and this often involves exploitation, threats/violence, debt bondage and/or grooming. Adult drug users and vulnerable females are also exploited for their properties or to assist with dealing within the county market."*

3.2. As a Region, the South East Regional Serious Organised Crime Unit (SEROCU) collate all of our activity in relation to County Lines. Surrey currently has 97 County Lines active in the county. A high proportion of these operate in the east of the county.

3.3. The County Lines methodology is diverse but children are often exploited in some part of their operation. The criminal group exploits young or vulnerable people, to store and/or supply drugs to their client base, move and launder the cash proceeds through their bank accounts. The group, or individuals exploited by them, regularly travel between the urban hub and the county market, to replenish stock and deliver cash.

3.4. It is impossible to say what level of exploitation is associated with these lines in Surrey but whenever we have intelligence suggesting any exploitation our first consideration is to safeguard

the vulnerable victims, whether children or adults, before considering enforcement options. This approach was exemplified in a recent case on North Surrey where a boy supplying controlled drugs as part of a County Line was safeguarded and diverted, rather than criminalised.

- 3.5. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 covers the act of moving people around for the purposes of exploitation. In relation to Human Trafficking, "A person commits this offence if they arrange or facilitate the travel of another person with a view to that person being exploited. It is irrelevant whether the person, adult or child, consents to the travel." This legislation is already being used to tackle County Lines. There is a statutory defence provided by the Modern Slavery Act for people who are forced to commit offences against their will. This further helps us to treat those exploited as victims and help protect them from further harm.
- 3.6. In addition to the exploitation of children, the group will also exploit adults vulnerable through drug use or due mental or physical disability and use their houses or flats to deal drugs. This is commonly referred to as 'cuckooing'. The advantage for the dealer is that they are less exposed to law enforcement than they would be if they were having to operate on the street.

#### **4. Strategic Context**

- 4.1. Surrey's Substance Misuse Strategy mirrors the national Drug Strategy and seeks to reduce the demand for illegal drugs, restrict the supply and work with communities to build recovery from drug use.
- 4.2. Tackling the harm caused by illegal drugs is a Control Strategy priority and combatting County Lines is a specific focus for Surrey and the other forces in the South East Region.
- 4.3. In Surrey drug-related harm is currently the focus of a third of all proactive police operations and both the force and every division has proactive assets that target this criminality.

#### **5. The Partnership Actions**

- 5.1. In Surrey the oversight for the development and scrutiny of the Substance Misuse Strategy is the responsibility of the Community Safety Board and the Director of Public Health is responsible for commissioning treatment services. Reporting to this is a quarterly Substance Misuse Partnership chaired by Surrey County Council, Public Health.
- 5.2. The partnership delivery of the strategy is through the Community Safety Partnerships and Surrey Police is raising the awareness of the issue with all partners by delivering training and holding workshops for key stakeholders and practitioners from our statutory and third sector partners.
- 5.3. The initial focus of the Partnership is to develop a better understanding of the demand for illegal drugs and to identify those vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups involved in drug supply. We have created a partnership anti-cuckooing plan to work together to identify and protect vulnerable people whose properties are being used to deal from.

#### **6. Public Messages**

- 6.1. We are actively seeking information from all sections of the communities in Surrey, and impacting upon Surrey, to assist us in better understanding how County Lines operate and impact upon the county, identify those responsible for this criminality and, critically, identify individual, both children and vulnerable adults, being exploited in order to facilitate this criminality. Anyone with concerns regarding any individual being potentially exploited can report these concerns to the police or any of our partners (schools, social services etc).
- 6.2. The responsibility for public health messages in relation to drugs remains with Public Health and Surrey County Council.

#### **7. Decision[s] Required**

- 7.1. This paper is for information only