

## **Working Together to tackle Vulnerability, Violence & Exploitation (VVE) in Haringey.**

This briefing has been prepared by Children's Social Care Exploitation Prevention Panel. The Panel work in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including the Police, Probation, Health and the third sector. The Panel aims to coordinate and support practitioners to protect and promote the welfare of all children and young people and some adults with care and support needs.

In recent months the Panel, along with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Board, have been reviewing the delivery of services for a particularly vulnerable group of people involved and exposed to the risk from the context in which they live. The Panel in consultation with the AD for Safeguarding consider the levels of vulnerability, violence and exploitation young people face.

### **What do we mean by Vulnerability, Violence and Exploitation (VVE)?**

Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation (**VVE**) describes what happens when **County lines** drug dealers, who are **gangs** involved in **organised crime**, use children and other vulnerable people through **Criminal Exploitation, Sexual Exploitation** and **Cuckooing**. The children or vulnerable adults may be from the same area as the gang, or could be local, and may be exploited to carry out criminal acts to reduce the gang members risk of getting caught (especially '**clean skins**' and '**tinys**'). They are often moved around locally or nationally for this purpose – a form of **Modern Slavery & Trafficking**. The risks to them are significant. **Serious violent crime** is a significant feature of county lines activity. People caught up in county lines may not see the risks of their involvement, or may feel trapped in the situation – scared of being seen as '**Going Ops**' or threatened with being '**Banged**' or experiencing '**DIY Injuries**' if they try and back out, and they can go from uninvolved (and not seen as an at risk child) to being exploited very quickly and without apparent warning.

### **County Lines, 'going country' and criminal exploitation**

County Lines takes the form of urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines". It involves criminal exploitation as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs (primarily heroin and crack cocaine, although cannabis is also supplied by 'runners'<sup>1</sup> as a secondary drug as an independent side-line to generate extra income) and money. It almost exclusively involves violence, intimidation and the offer of money or drugs. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.

Areas/towns also have local groups, to whom young people or vulnerable adults both respect and at times fear. These groups will also use vulnerable adults and young people to both run drugs across their area and sell.

Children and young people are also expected to support the recruitment of other young people into the gang/group. These individuals are at serious risk of criminalisation, sexual exploitation and exposure to violence. Criminal exploitation, like other forms of abuse and exploitation, is a safeguarding concern and constitutes abuse even if the person appears to have readily become involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Someone that illegally transports drugs around

## Gangs / Groups

Groups of children often gather together in public places to socialise, and peer association is an essential feature of most children's transition to adulthood. Groups of children can be disorderly and/or anti-social without engaging in criminal activity.

Professionals are advised to avoid applying definitions of a gang too rigorously; if a child or others think s/he is involved with or affected by 'a gang', then professionals should act accordingly.

Children rarely use the term 'gang', instead they used terms such as 'family', 'breddrin', 'crews', 'cuz' (cousins), 'my boys' or 'the people I grew up with'.

The **statutory definition** of a gang is:

"A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:

- See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, and
- Engage in a range of criminal activity and violence

They may also have any or all of the following factors:

- Identify with or lay claim over territory
- Have some form of identifying structural feature
- Are in conflict with other similar gangs"

*HM Government: Ending Gang & Youth Violence Report 2012*

## Organised Crime

An organised criminal group is a group of individuals normally led by adults for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise). This involves serious and organised criminality by a core of violent gang members who exploit vulnerable young people and adults.

## Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. People in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

People may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed and exploited online.

People can be sexually exploited in many ways. Examples include:

- Rape (which can include rape by a partner)
- Sexual assault
- Being tricked or manipulated into having sex or performing a sexual act
- Being trafficked into, out of, or around the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation (i.e. prostitution)
- Being forced to take part in or watch pornography
- Being victim to revenge porn (when a previously taken video or photograph, which was taken with or without consent, is shared online)

Girls and women who are exploited along County Lines are particularly at increased risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

## Cuckooing

This is the process whereby criminal gangs target the homes of vulnerable people to deal drugs from their premises. Many of the victims are particularly vulnerable and may be drug users themselves. They are often approached by dealers offering them free drugs in exchange for use of their home from which to deal drugs, or are sometimes forced by threats and intimidation to deal on their behalf.

Cuckooing means the criminals can operate from a property rather than on the street, making them less easy to identify, and often they move between different properties to cover their activities. The person being cuckooed may be reluctant to raise concerns for fear of repercussions or violence, making the practice even harder to bring to light.

County Lines groups also make use of serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks. County Lines groups prefer to pay cash where possible and often use network associates to arrange these facilities, as a means of distancing themselves from the criminality.

### **Clean skins'/ 'tinys'**

These are young people, usually from middle class backgrounds, who do not have an existing criminal record or have not attracted the attention of police or security forces, but are vulnerable due to bereavement, domestic discord, etc. These young people are groomed with free drugs, then threatened for money and recruited to gangs to repay this 'debt'.

- To transport and sell drugs (children as young as 7 years old who have pedal-bikes)
- To launder money through personal bank accounts
- To be trafficked for sexual exploitation

Children may often be at the periphery of involvement for some time before they become active gang members. Children may also follow older siblings into gang involvement. This may provide opportunities for preventative work to be undertaken with children. 15-16 years is the most common age range.

### **Modern Slavery & Trafficking**

As well as sexual exploitation county lines cuts across a range of threats, including modern slavery and human trafficking. People are being exploited using the county lines model to transport and sell more than drugs. Weapons, sex and money are also being traded in this way. They are victims of trafficking and professional should report concerns to the [National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\)](#) to ensure victims receive the appropriate support.

### **Serious Violence**

Violence is a way for gang/group members to gain recognition and respect by asserting their power and authority. Violence, serious or otherwise, may be a function of gang/group activity.

Police Forces across England and Wales have reported a significant increase in violent crime connected to county lines. The violence includes; murder, rape, stabbings and kidnapping. It is likely that violence is underreported.

Knives, baseball bats, ammonia/corrosives and other weapons are used to enforce threats. There is also notable evidence of firearms being seen or used to threaten in connection to county lines activity.

### **'Going Ops', 'Banged' & 'DIY injuries'**

Due to the fact drug runners are exploited to be both consumer and runner, young people and vulnerable adults may begin to consume the drugs they are asked to run, which they must either pay back by 'working' or else accumulate debt. The more debt the more control the gang/group has. If the young person/ vulnerable adult appears to be 'going ops' (going oppositional to the gang/group) then they are made to evidence that they will correct their behaviour quickly e.g. spend more time with the

gang or not attend school. If the gang/group become concerned that young person / vulnerable adult appears to be 'going ops', then there is an explicit threat of being 'banged'. This can vary from threats to be beaten or in more extreme cases stabbed. There can also be indirect threats to harm family members too.

Knife wounds to the buttocks and 'accidental' puncture wounds with screw-drivers 'DIY Injuries' are becoming recognisable signs of drug debt enforcer retribution. These incidents are more likely to be reported to A&E but not to police due to intimidation and fear.

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## Scope and Scale

The true scale of County Lines activity is difficult to determine with accuracy as its nature is fluid and the intelligence surrounding the threat is not always clear, nor is it recorded consistently. It is estimated that:

- Over 90 individuals from Haringey have been involved in county lines activity across 20 police force areas.
- Over half (54%) of individuals from Haringey identified as involved in County Lines activity are aged 15-18 and three-quarters (75%) are males

The county police force areas which feature the most number of individuals frequenting are:

- Sussex (15)
- Hampshire (11)
- Norfolk (9)
- Essex (8)
- Kent (8)
- Somerset (8)
- Devon and Cornwall (8)

Of the young people known to the Exploitation Panel, 20 are known to have been involved in County Lines activity

Young people in some schools and living in our community are being slowly introduced to the gang lifestyle by being offered access to **presents/ gifts/ status/ alcohol/ drugs** and **excitement**. There are examples of young girls, over a period of months, becoming transitioned into this lifestyle and slowly becoming isolated from old friends, family and professionals.

## What are the risks?

People affected by County Lines activity are at risk of criminal and or sexual exploitation, serious violence as well as risk of significant harm through physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

The specific risks for males and females may be quite different. In some areas and settings, there is a higher risk of sexual abuse for females and they are more likely to have been coerced into involvement with a gang through peer pressure than their male counterparts.

There is national evidence of a high incidence of rape of girls who are involved with gangs. Some senior gang members pass their girlfriends around to lower ranking members and sometimes to the whole group at the same time. Very few rapes by gang members are reported.

Gangs are highly organised and professional; they send members to university to study marketing (as well as to establish new supply lines for drug-trafficking). They also recruit professional producers to make marketing videos for YouTube to attract young recruits.

Practitioners in Haringey have considered the perceived positives of engaging in criminal activity. They suggest that being part of a gang can bring money, status and a sense of safety.

- Some forms of criminal activity can offer a way out of poverty and exclusion by providing opportunities to quickly earn **money**
- It can offer a **collective identity**, expressed through group, gang or brand identity (within the context of exploitation, and alongside belonging, the construction of identity may be a mechanism that can be manipulated as part of a grooming process)
- It may offer a **sense of security** for those young people who feel let down by adults in their life.

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## Who is vulnerable to exploitation?

Exploitation can:

- Affect any child or young person under the age of 18 years
- Involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence
- Affect any vulnerable adult over the age of 18 years
- Be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults and is
- Still be exploitation even if the activity typified by some form of power imbalance appears a consensual favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something). Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection). The fact that the victim is in receipt of something does not make them any less of a victim.

Certain vulnerabilities may increase the chance that a person will be exploited by others. Whilst these factors do not mean that a person will be exploited it is important to recognise the increased vulnerability that some people face.

**An individual's vulnerability may be exacerbated by the following factors:**

- Violence in the family
- Involvement of family members or friends in gang related activity
- Poor educational attainment
- Mental health problems
- Dependent drug users
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation
- Social isolation or social difficulties
- The cuckooing of vulnerable adults brings increased risk of exploitation to young people. Young people becoming involved in county lines may be related to adults who had been cuckooed.

**The factors which influence a propensity to initiate violence include:**

- Parenting, which is uncaring, non-nurturing and neglectful
- Parenting which includes harsh disciplining
- Maltreatment, such as physical or sexual abuse in childhood (abuse by adults and peers within and outside of the family); and/or
- Trauma such as domestic violence or involvement in or witnessing conflict violence

**Additional vulnerabilities to exploitation include:**



**Looked after children** Looked after children are particularly vulnerable to being affected by gangs and serious youth violence as they may have low self-esteem, low resilience, attachment issues as well as the fact they are often isolated from family and friends. Young people who have been placed in local authority care out of area are particularly vulnerable.



**Girls and young women** Girls may be groomed at school using drugs and alcohol, which act as disinhibitors and create dependency, and encourage / coerce them to recruit other girls through school / social networks.



**Locations – schools, pupil referral units and residential children's care homes**  
There is national evidence that residential children's care homes and pupil referral units are targeted. There also known cases where gang members have been waiting outside schools to meet children. The gang members take the child away to participate in criminal activities and return them in time to avoid them being reported missing or raising suspicion.



## What signs / indicators should I be looking out for?

- ☐ Person seems to **withdraw** from family life;
- ☐ Sudden **loss of interest in school** or change in behaviour. Decline in attendance or academic achievement (although it should be noted that some young people will maintain a good attendance record to avoid coming to notice);
- ☐ Being **emotionally 'switched off'**, but also containing frustration / rage;
- ☐ Starting to use **new or unknown slang** words;
- ☐ Holding **unexplained money or possessions**;
- ☐ **Staying out unusually late** without reason, or breaking parental rules consistently;
- ☐ Sudden **change in appearance** – dressing in a particular style or 'uniform' similar to that of other young people they hang around with, including a particular colour;
- ☐ **Dropping out** of positive activities;
- ☐ **New nickname**;
- ☐ **Unexplained physical injuries**, and/or refusal to seek / receive medical treatment for injuries;
- ☐ Graffiti style **'tags'** on possessions, school books, walls;
- ☐ Constantly talking about another person who seems to have a lot of **influence over them**;
- ☐ Breaking off with old friends and hanging around with **one group** of people;
- ☐ Associating with known or suspected **gang members**, closeness to siblings or adults in the family who are gang members;
- ☐ Starting to adopt certain **codes of group behaviour** e.g. ways of talking and hand signs;
- ☐ **Going missing** and being found many **miles from home** with no explanation;
- ☐ Expressing **aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups** of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past;
- ☐ Being **scared** when entering certain areas;
- ☐ Concerned by the presence of **unknown youths** in their neighbourhoods
- ☐ Repeat **sexually-transmitted infections**, pregnancy and terminations
- ☐ **Disclosures made then withdrawn**

□ **Self-harm** or thoughts of/or attempts at suicide

## Cuckooing Signs

- It usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or social housing property
- There may be an increase in the number of comings and goings, including people you haven't seen before, throughout the day and night, often visiting for only short periods of time
- There might be new vehicles outside the property, including taxis or hire cars
- There may be bags of clothing or bedding around the property
- There may be a possible increase in crime and anti-social behaviour in and around the property reported to services, including the accumulation and storage of stolen pedal cycles
- There may be evidence of drug use such as deal bags, discarded syringes, weighing scales, foil and cling film, in and around the property.

Victims of cuckooing may disengage with support services and be unwilling to discuss what is happening at their property when the subject is raised with them.

## Advice from Children's Exploitation Prevention Panel

Young people wish to have a respectful professional who can listen to them and understand their perspective - it is not about bad choices. The key to building a relationship may therefore be about supporting the young person by listening and going through options together, rather than be another adult who is perceived to reflect similar power dynamics of the gang or their own parents whom tell them what to do.

## Some practice tips:

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| Focus upon supporting families of children and young people to provide a sense of belonging | Practitioners may prioritise signposting young people who are NEET towards education, training and employment opportunities  |
| Target families with no father or male present  | Recognise that not all employment opportunities offer young people sufficient money, status or sense of belonging – some young people in employment may therefore benefit from signposting to alternative opportunities to gain these benefits |
| Target families of children and young people who go missing                                 | Acknowledge that young people possess agency – the capacity to make choices and act according to self interest   |
| Provide interventions to families where   |  |



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| there is domestic violence   | Acknowledge that young people who become involved in exploitation may be seeking friendships, belonging, approval, excitement, money and status, but find legitimate opportunities to achieve these things more limited than others            |
| Provide support to parents of adolescents to prevent family breakdown  | Practitioners may prioritise signposting young people who are NEET towards education, training and employment opportunities  |
| Provide opportunities for young people involved / at risk of exploitation to participate in group activities   | Recognise that not all employment opportunities offer young people sufficient money, status or sense of belonging – some young people in employment may therefore benefit from signposting to alternative opportunities to gain these benefits |
| Prioritise and make use of existing youth and community development organisations and initiatives alongside individual and family focussed interventions | Acknowledge that young people possess agency – the capacity to make choices and act according to self interest   |

## 1. What you should do if you are concerned?

If you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of harm contact 999.

If you are worried about a **child** contact MASH

Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm  
and  
Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm - Tel: **020 8489 4470**

Out of office hours, including weekends –  
**the Emergency Duty Team**  
Tel: **020 8489 0000**

If you are worried about an **adult** contact:

The First Response Team (**adult social services**):  
Telephone: 020 8489 1400  
Email:  
[firstresponseteam@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:firstresponseteam@haringey.gov.uk)

You should also refer any young person you suspect of being a potential victim of **trafficking** to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). In the case of children their consent is not required. Adults must sign the permission form (capacity allowing). To download an adult or child referral form go to the gov.uk website.

If you believe a crime is being committed, or planned, or are aware of any **terrorist activity**, you should contact the Police Prevent team without delay on 101 or email the police Prevent officer. Referrals to **Channel** can be made using this form. If you want advice from the Prevent team

regarding concerns about an individual please email [Karina.Kaur@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:Karina.Kaur@haringey.gov.uk).

## 2. What we will do over the next 12 months

The Exploitation Prevention Panel and senior leaders within Social Care have engaged 2 Missing and Exploitation Co-ordinators. Supported by the multi- agency these officers will work with the Community Safety Partnership to co-ordinate:

- Greater involvement with a range of professionals working with children and young people with Special Needs and to identify those young people who are most vulnerable to exploitation.
- Workshops for parents across schools in Haringey to build the resilience and capability of the community to recognise the levels of vulnerability, violence and exploitation that children and young people may face in the environments that they live and create further opportunities to co design community solutions.
- Develop better working relationships with Adults Social Care
- Structured work with the Police, Community Safety Partnership and the Adults and Children's Safeguarding Board to deliver whole borough learning to:
  - ✓ Semi-independent units and other care homes
  - ✓ Hotels and B&B
  - ✓ Chicken Shops and other food and restaurant venues
  - ✓ Taxi services

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