

One minute guide

Child Exploitation - County Lines

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The Government's Serious Violent Crime Strategy 2018 describes county lines as:

“a term used by police and partner agencies to refer to drug networks (both gangs and organised crime groups) who use children and young people and vulnerable adults to carry out illegal activity on their behalf”.

Whilst gangs dealing drugs is not a new activity the use of children and young people to transport drugs, activity which often involves violence and carrying weapons, is a modern development. Data shows that children as young as 12 work as couriers and unsurprisingly, these are often the most vulnerable children – those in care, or with parents who are absent, offenders themselves and/or drug users.

Vulnerable adults can also be used as part of the network, and risks to them involve 'cuckooing', which is a group of offenders taking over their home and using it as a base to run operations from.

The county line itself refers to a telephone line – a particular number or numbers which will be used to order and convey drugs over several counties, sometimes nationwide.

The gangs operating county lines do so very efficiently, using tactics such as coercion, violence, (including sexual violence) intimidation and weapons.

Is this a problem in Coventry?

The National Crime Agency say that there is no county in England unaffected by this activity. The National County Lines Coordination Centre say that there are at least 8 county lines originating from Coventry. These gangs are known to deal to local areas such as Leamington and Stratford, but also further afield to Oxford and Lincoln. There is no doubt that this activity is happening in our city, and that our vulnerable children, young people and adults are at risk from it.

We all see violent crime in Coventry on the news - this has recently included street robberies, house burglaries targeting car keys and serious assaults involving knives. The Police tell us that a large number of these are likely linked to gang and county lines activity and so the impact upon the city is clear to see. Police are working hard to disrupt criminal activity as much as they can, but we all have a duty to look for the signs of county lines and to report what we see. Only by working together can we protect the most vulnerable in our city.

What should I be looking for?

Some common warning signs:

- Returning home late, staying out all night or going missing
- Being found in areas away from home
- Increasing drug use, or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Unexplained absences from school, college, training or work
- Unexplained money, phone(s), clothes or jewellery
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Coming home with injuries or looking particularly dishevelled
- Having hotel cards or keys to unknown places.

What should I do if I spot the signs?

If you think the individual is in immediate danger, call the Police.

Whether or not you have immediately called the Police you must then follow your usual safeguarding procedures and make a referral into social care to ensure the individual is known and supported.

Coventry partners are in the process of drawing up their own, local strategy to manage risks posed by wider exploitation. This will set out a joined up approach to identifying and managing risk, and how the safeguarding partnership in Coventry as a whole will work to tackle this dangerous issue.

For more information check out:

You Tube clip (15 mins) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kmr-BJrL9R4>

The Government Serious Violent Crime Strategy 2018-

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf