

Annex P - County Lines Policy & Procedure

Policy and Procedure on

1.2 Safeguarding Children from Criminal Exploitation (County Lines)

Central and Southern Homes

Contents:

1. Availability
 - 1.2 Monitoring and Reviewing
2. Legislative framework and guidance
3. Outcome
4. What is county lines exploitation?
5. The effects on children and vulnerable adults
6. Who is vulnerable to county lines exploitation?
7. Signs of involvement in county lines activity
8. Procedure

1.1 Availability

This policy is made available to staff, Placement Providers, Children and external support networks in the following ways: via the School website and paper copy in the home.

1.2 Monitoring and Review:

The Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, Operations Manager and House Manager will undertake a formal annual review of this policy for the purpose of monitoring and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged, by no later than one year from the date shown below, or earlier if significant changes to the systems and arrangements take place, or if legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidelines so require. If changes are required, the home will implement them. Information provided by job applicants and employees for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with *The Data Protection Act 2018*.

Date reviewed: 24th August 2020

Date of next review: 24th August 2021

Mr Chris Riordan Responsible Individual	Miss Rachel Loosemore Registered Manager Designated Safeguarding Lead	Mr Peter Paduch House Manager	Miss Alice Jenner Operations Manager

2. Legislative framework and guidance

- Regulation 12: The protection of children standard

- Guide to the protection of children standard
- Regulation 42: Notification of Offences
- Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, 2014
- Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance 2017
- Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance 2016

3. Outcome

- This policy is intended to explain the nature of county lines exploitation of children and vulnerable adults and to recognise its signs and respond appropriately so that potential victims get the support and help they need.
- To ensure that staff and professionals are aware that the criminal exploitation of children is a widespread form of harm to children and vulnerable adults that is a typical feature of county lines activity which falls under the protection of children standard.

4. What is county lines exploitation?

County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines". It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. 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'.

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government

departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations. County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

5. The effects on children and vulnerable adults

Like other forms of abuse and exploitation, county lines exploitation:

- Can affect any child (male or female) under the age of 18 years.
- Can affect any vulnerable adult over the age of 18 years.
- Can still be exploitation even if the activity appears consensual.
- Can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence.
- Can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults.
- Is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

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).

It is important to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a child or vulnerable adult does not make them any less of a victim.

It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange. For example a young person who engages in county lines activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

6. Who is vulnerable to county lines exploitation?

The national picture on county lines continues to develop and currently county lines exploitation is widespread, with gangs from big cities including London, Manchester and Liverpool operating throughout England, Wales and Scotland. The national picture indicates that,

- Children as young as 12 years old being exploited by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area; 15-16 years is the most common age range.
- Both males and females being exploited.
- White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection.
- The use of social media to make initial contact with children and young people.
- Class A drug users being targeted so that gangs can take over their homes (known as 'cuckooing').

Gangs are known to target vulnerable children and adults; some of the factors that heighten a person's vulnerability include:

- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted case histories.
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example);
- Social isolation or social difficulties;
- Economic vulnerability;

- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- Connections with other people involved in gangs;
- Having a physical or learning disability;
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted case histories).

7. Signs of involvement in county lines activity

Signs of involvement in county lines activity may include the following indicators. A child or vulnerable adult might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Risk assessments should take the possibility of involvement into consideration (along with other safeguarding risks) when there is significant cause for concern. Some indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and/or being found out of area
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls
- Relationships with controlling/older individuals or groups
- Leaving home/care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault/unexplained injuries
- Parental concerns
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results/performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

8. Procedure

- If any member of staff suspects or identifies that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of county lines exploitation they must follow the safeguarding/protecting children and vulnerable adults reporting procedure.
- Contact the designated safeguarding person immediately.
- If you believe a person is at immediate risk of harm and you cannot wait for a response you should contact the police immediately.