

County Lines Scoping Report

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Scoping County Lines – A snapshot of challenges and emerging practice

Introduction

In September 2017, as part of a wider County Lines Demonstration Project led by St Giles Trust with Missing People, the Home Office commissioned national scoping research and analysis intended to:

- gain a greater understanding of how the issue of vulnerable children’s involvement in county lines activity was being tackled in different parts of the country, examples of effective or emerging practice, critical gaps or challenges in services and how best to address them, and
- draw on the results of the research to identify key local factors for effective approaches/services for supporting vulnerable children involved in county lines activity that can help to inform a national response.

This paper summarises the key themes arising from the scoping research, in relation to these objectives. The timescale, scope and evolving backdrop for the work means that it is by nature a snapshot rather than an in depth mapping or analysis of all services and approaches being delivered or developed. It is focused primarily on what might support involved and exploited children, rather than detection or enforcement, although the important links between them are considered where appropriate. The range and complexity of county lines means that this report is offered as a starting point to help identify key factors that can be further investigated and tested as part of developing effective local and national responses.

The scoping work is linked to an evaluation of pilot activity delivered by St Giles Trust and Missing People. The linked evaluation report explores in more detail and at a local level some of the issues and effective practice highlighted through the scoping research. Where key points are common to the scoping and evaluation work, they appear in both reports for ease of reading.

The scoping report is presented in the following sections:

Page	
2	Executive summary
7	Methodology and scope
8	Background and context for the scoping research
8	Differences between London, other cities and ‘county’ areas
9	A highly responsive and proactive business model
10	Who are the children involved in county lines?
12	Key challenges in supporting children involved in county lines
22	Emerging practice to address the issues
28	A scarcity and urgent need for voluntary sector services
35	Moving forward: national consistency and local flexibility
37	Terry: a case study in how children become involved and what might help them

Executive summary

Scoping research was commissioned by the Home Office to gain a greater understanding of how the issue of vulnerable children's involvement in county lines is being tackled in different parts of the country, identifying critical gaps or challenges in services and what would help to address them. The work is intended to help to inform a national response by understanding these factors across different areas. It is linked to a more detailed evaluation of county lines pilot activity delivered by St Giles Trust (SGT) and Missing People, presented in an associated report, and is informed by their wider work.

Scoping discussions took place with statutory and voluntary sector organisations, children at risk of and involved in county lines activity and their parents/carers in 20 different areas (cities, towns, rural areas) and 9 London boroughs. It is a snapshot rather than an in depth mapping of issues, services and developments. Many of the approaches and services are in development and it will take time for their impact to be felt, and measured. However, it is possible to identify some indications of what is emerging and what might work based on early insights.

A need for consistent awareness and understanding

The 2017 National Crime Agency (NCA) report highlighted that 88% of police force returns identified county lines activity, with a conservative estimate of 720 lines operating across England and Wales, the majority originating in London. 42% of forces specifically report evidence of children from the age of 12 running drugs and money on behalf of county lines.

Whilst awareness of county lines is growing, full understanding and identification of the phenomenon and the aspect of exploitation of vulnerable children seems very variable across and within different geographical areas and organisations (police, youth offending, children's/social services, voluntary sector). London probably has greatest awareness of and options to respond to the issue, but still experiences difficulty in identifying children involved in the activity and in providing sufficient services to meet need.

There is acknowledgement amongst some staff in statutory agencies that children involved in county lines can be exploited and vulnerable whilst being involved in criminal activity. However, this understanding appears inconsistent and some children may still be inappropriately criminalised. The Modern Slavery Act (MSA) and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are beginning to be used in some areas to safeguard children and protect against prosecution. The legislation is relatively new and was not written with county lines in mind. Currently, impact appears to be limited. The lack of specialist support available (and necessary) for children placed under the protection of the NRM also means that they may be at risk and/or not receive the help that they need to exit the activity.

Children involved in county lines experience particularly high levels of risk to safety and life that differ from other exploitation, for example, child sexual exploitation (CSE) and require different approaches. Lack of, or variable understanding of the severity of risk, particularly drug debt/bondage, seems not uncommon across statutory and non-specialist voluntary sector organisations. This may increase the danger to the child and makes it particularly difficult for them to exit county lines.

Structures and working practices

Statutory services are locally/sub-regionally funded and focused. County lines are extremely efficient national networks that disregard or exploit boundaries. This contrast presents a significant challenge for detection, enforcement and support. Intelligence is not, or not easily shared across police force boundaries. Local authorities may not know about vulnerable, involved children being placed in their areas, and may not communicate with a host authority when they are re-locating similarly involved or at risk children or families.

A number of police forces recognise that traditional team demarcations (serious and organised crime, missing persons, CSE/safeguarding, drugs) are not effective in tackling county lines because the activity cuts across these delineations and requires significant joining up of intelligence and co-ordinated action. A variety of different, integrated approaches are being developed. Addressing the demand for drugs is highlighted as a significant factor in tackling the proliferation of county lines.

British Transport Police (BTP) could play a much more significant role in identifying and supporting vulnerable children, given the frequent use of trains to traffic children, drugs and money. Resourcing is tight and BTP are reliant on operatives employed by the train companies to identify children (and others) travelling without tickets. BTP and regional police sharing protocols do not currently provide an effective means of helping to identify children being trafficked on county lines.

Statutory sector processes

Where police forces recognise criminal exploitation of children and do not bring charges, children avoid criminalisation but there is a further challenge of them being released without the specialist support they require to be safe and to be helped to exit activity. Referrals to multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) appear inconsistent and even when made, children may not be supported adequately.

The provisions of the Children Act focus on risks within the family. A child from a stable family may not meet the threshold for support because dangers from the external environment (the county line) are not factored in. A contextual safeguarding approach would address this issue but requires a change in statutory service approach and specialist staff development. In addition, social services experience high demand on limited budgets, raising the level of support thresholds and limiting the amount of support that can be delivered.

Where children are arrested and released away from their home area, there is the added issue of how they will be returned home and supported. Social services and police forces have limited resources and those in the area of arrest generally appear to take the approach that the child is the responsibility of the child's home area. This can lead to children being in a 'no-man's-land' with agencies in both areas unable or unwilling to facilitate the child's return. Return Home Interviews appear inconsistent in their application and effectiveness. Many children seem to go missing again as soon as they are returned to home/care.

Care, education and health are key factors

A high proportion of children involved in county lines appear to be outside of mainstream education, with many in pupil referral units (PRUs) where they may be required to attend for only a few hours each week, and, where they do attend, appear disengaged with the provision on offer. This leaves

children with significant free time to continue county lines involvement and no effective support to engage in the learning that could help them to develop alternative, legitimate career paths.

Challenges and/or failings in the care system are a recurring feature reported across all areas involved in the scoping and other research. Poor quality and/or badly located children's homes, for example, in high risk housing areas, provide "*ideal conditions for county lines exploitation*" (local authority). The currently unregulated 16+ children's accommodation sector where there is often little support and significant potential for exploitation is a particularly difficult issue cited by many areas, not least because local authorities have no means of ensuring improvements or shutting down poor quality homes.

Youth violence has for some time been regarded as a public health issue by a number of practitioners and experts. Children involved in county lines experience varying degrees of assault, including sexual assault and violent attacks, as well as a range of mental health issues. Some will present at hospital A&E/Major Trauma Centres (MTC), either as 'walk ins' or by ambulance. This provides an opportunity for engagement with the child. Specialist intervention services are only currently available in London and Nottingham MTCs, with a service due to start in Birmingham.

Who are the children?

Children who get involved in county lines come from a variety of backgrounds including those with multiple interventions from public services because of chaotic and risky home circumstances, looked after children and those from well-ordered and materially comfortable families. Involvement in county lines, whilst more common amongst children who are experiencing deprivation or being looked after, it is certainly not restricted to these groups. The majority of children in county lines are male, but girls are involved and can carry out the same drug running role.

Children will often fluctuate between being "*willing workers on a county line and, after a beating or when they have a drug debt, become aware of the risk and exploitation and want to leave*" (voluntary sector organisation). This seems to mirror the type of exploitation involved in other types of violent and coercive control such as domestic abuse.

There are some 'reachable moments' in this cycle where interventions from statutory and/or voluntary sector organisations could enable the child to avoid getting further entrenched and, ideally, to exit the activity. These include in the initial stages of grooming, exclusion from mainstream education, being returned from a missing episode, after violent assault (including admission to A&E), release after arrest, court appearance and serving community/custodial orders. Reachable moments and the services might be effective in supporting the child are included in a worked example at the end of the report.

Emerging statutory sector responses

As might be expected, London has the most established and comprehensive range of statutory sector arrangements and voluntary sector services that can support children involved in county lines. That said, these approaches and services need further development and expansion to respond to the particular risks and issues associated with county lines. Areas outside of the capital are at varying stages of developing statutory sector responses to the issue. Across the country (including London) there are some pockets of interesting and potentially effective development focused on:

- **internal and external partnership in the police force:** creating missing and child exploitation teams within police areas, working across force areas on safeguarding as well as enforcement
- **taking a vulnerability approach to safeguarding:** – addressing silo working by removing ‘county lines’, CSE and other labels and looking at a child’s vulnerability and risk in the round; implementing contextual safeguarding that looks outside the family and recognises risk from county lines involvement
- **effective cross agency working:** through proactive community safety teams, reconfiguring services for children using the ‘one trusted adult’ principle that helps them maintain beneficial relationships with professionals
- **working in partnership with voluntary sector specialists:** through specialist casework services that recognises the value of an independent role delivered by experts with lived experience, cultural competence and professional training
- **earlier intervention:** developing edge of care services using cross agency (including statutory sector) partnerships, effective use of youth intervention services, innovative services such as ‘crashpad’ temporary accommodation for children not wanting to return home
- **offering real alternatives through education and training:** specialist school provision that engages and inspires, vocational training programmes from Year 8 upwards
- **taking a trauma informed approach:** that recognises the deeply traumatic experiences of the children, the effects on their behaviour and the approach that needs to be taken to help them
- **sharing effective practice:** so that local areas are able to learn from those that have had significantly more experience of dealing with county lines issues.

Proactive and effective Community Safety Partnerships can provide good starting points for the type of cross agency approach that is effective in tackling county lines activity, both in terms of enforcement and safeguarding. However, they need strong leadership, the involvement of practitioners as well as managers and the engagement of the key partners, including voluntary sector specialists where possible.

The need for specialist voluntary sector services

The overwhelming view of contributors to the scoping research was that there is a gap in the specialist services needed to support children involved in county lines activity and that these services are best delivered by independent workers in the voluntary sector. Specialist one-to-one casework and/or mentoring was most commonly cited by statutory agencies as the intervention that they feel would be most effective in addressing the identified gap in expertise and *“the independent role that means they will engage and the time to do the intensive work that’s needed”* (social services). Awareness raising for children in schools, and training for professionals across statutory and voluntary sector organisations was also highlighted.

Very few organisations seem to deliver the specialist services that seem able to meet the needs of children involved in county lines. Where specialist pilot activity is being delivered by St Giles Trust in London, Kent and South Wales, there is early evidence of the effectiveness of the casework approach in enabling children to begin to exit county lines activity. This includes reducing or

stopping missing episodes, engaging in education, moving into jobs, having better family relationships and believing that it is possible for them to regain their lives.

There are a small number of medium sized, experienced organisations that provide specialist face-to-face services for those involved in serious youth violence and/or gang activities that include some children involved in county lines, for example, Safer London, Redthread, Catch 22 and Abianda. A significant number of these types of services are in London, with some provision in other larger cities. The MOPAC funded pan London county lines service due to start in summer 2018 will help provide greater capacity for London children arrested/found out of their home area. However, this will not address the urgent need in other parts of the country.

Missing People is trialling a phone based national support service, SafeCall, for children and family members affected by county lines. Whilst there are other children's helplines, notably Childline, these do not appear to offer the type of specialist knowledge and support required for children and families affected by county lines. SafeCall phone support is proving helpful for parents/carers in particular, with some children and young people also accessing the service. Whilst phone support is limited by its nature, a key advantage of the service is that it has national coverage, and therefore is available in the many areas that currently lack on the ground services.

Niche 'micro organisations' and individuals also deliver a range of often informal mentoring support that can be very helpful for some children and families. Whilst this mentoring may draw very effectively on the 'lived experience' of being affected by gangs, youth violence and county lines, the services may lack the structure necessary for consistent or widespread responses. There are also a number of organisations offering very effective support for children affected by CSE. As highlighted earlier, whilst CSE may be a factor for some children involved in county lines, there is an additional and different skills and knowledge base required to support them safely and effectively.

Recommendations for moving forward

In order to build on the various approaches and pilots that are currently being taken forward to try and tackle county lines and the involvement of vulnerable children in criminal exploitation, a number of recommendations are suggested.

- Continue to pilot and evaluate specialist casework services, developing additional services that draw on the best practice established through piloting, including using the key success factors in specifications for effective commissioning of services in new areas.
- Identify sustainable sources of funding such as from the Police & Crime Commissioners, Local Authority, Home Office etc. that can provide the length of intervention (12 months) required for effective casework. Cost benefit analyses could prove useful for putting forward the business case for this type of service.
- Continue to pilot and evaluate Missing People's SafeCall service, with a view to it being able to provide a national specialist service primarily for parents/carers, but including children and young people where they make contact with the service. Test out how the phone service can provide a supported referral to on the ground specialist services (once they are established).
- Explore how light touch peer to peer organisational exchange/mentoring could be established to give opportunities to learn in more detail about each other's approaches and developments (statutory and voluntary sector)

- Introduce training for professionals (statutory and voluntary sector), supported by specialists with lived experience and/or cultural competence.
- Review the current arrangements and lack of regulation for accommodation for those aged 16 and over, including introducing some form of regulation and inspection.
- Introduce specialist support for children referred to the NRM to enable them to be helped to exit safely and effectively the criminal exploitation in which they have been involved.
- Review the current position regarding making out of area placements of children, including the arrangements for ensuring that all relevant agencies are made aware of these placements, especially where there are significant risk factors including county lines, CSE etc.
- Identify how academies and PRUs can address the issue of exclusions, very long term/permanent exclusion, and lack of engagement of children in the education provided, including through the Ofsted inspection framework.

Methodology and scope

The scoping research was carried out between September 2017 and March 2018 and involved over 20 areas across 6 English regions and 3 Welsh counties, as well as 9 London boroughs. A range of different areas were included to provide a balance in terms of location across the country and type (coastal town, inland large city, smaller rural town, counties with large rural areas and smaller county towns). London boroughs included those in central and outer locations across the capital.

Across these areas, one-to-one discussions took place with over 130 contributors including:

- Statutory services staff – police force teams (missing persons, gangs and youth violence, drugs, serious and organised crime, child sexual exploitation and various regional teams including analysts and organised crime), British Transport Police, youth offending teams, community safety teams, social/children/adolescent services, integrated gangs teams
- A range of local, regional and national voluntary sector organisations
- Children involved in, or at risk of involvement in county lines activity, and their mothers

In addition, discussions took place at a range of fora including launches of county lines police operations, senior level roundtables, cross agency operational and strategic meetings and consultation events. The research also draws on the evaluation of the county lines pilot activities delivered by St Giles Trust and Missing People, and the experience of their wider service delivery.

Apart from the National Crime Agency's reports there is very little published research specifically on county lines. Publicly available documents that have been drawn on and that cover some aspects of the activity are listed on page 38 of the report. Other unpublished internal documents have also provided information, including county lines analyses and action plans.

In the report, direct quotes are shown in italics and speech marks but are not attributed to individuals in order to protect confidentiality. Where quotes are used, these illustrate points that have been made by a significant number of contributors to the research and the source agency type or individual is given for clarity. Some organisations are named where appropriate and where examples are provided, with their permission.

Brief background and context for the scoping research

As stated in the Government's recently published Serious Violence Strategy '*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.*'

It should be noted that 'county lines' and the related terminology is used primarily by statutory and voluntary sector organisations working in this field, not by children involved in the activity who will use a range of ever changing terms to describe this.

County lines have been in existence for a number of years, but have recently multiplied significantly and rapidly, involving an increasing number of vulnerable children in criminal exploitation. The 2017 National Crime Agency (NCA) national briefing reports evidence of county lines activity in 88% of police force returns, with a conservative estimate of 720 lines operating across England and Wales. The majority of lines originate in London, followed by Liverpool. 42% of forces specifically report evidence of children from the age of 12 running drugs and money on behalf of county lines.

The scoping research has identified that whilst awareness of and response to county lines and children's involvement is growing, there remain some major challenges in the statutory sector and there is a significant need and demand for specialist voluntary sector services to support developing good practice in the statutory sector.

Differences between London, other cities and 'county' areas

London and other large cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester have histories of serious violence, gangs and county lines issues. Whilst statutory services in these cities vary in their awareness and response to the issue, there is probably a greater degree of experience amongst staff, and some have structures such as integrated gang units offering multi-agency approaches that can provide some response to county lines activity.

London's awareness, statutory response and range of voluntary sector services is the most developed in relation to this issue, but there remains a challenge in identifying and supporting children involved in county lines and, until recently, no service to support London children arrested or found in other parts of the country. The new MOPAC commissioned county lines service should help to address the latter issue, but, of course children are trafficked from a number of different areas, not just London, and those non-Londoners being arrested/found out of their home area will continue to face this issue.

The other larger cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham do not appear to have as many specialist voluntary sector services as are available in London, and statutory sector approaches to county lines do not appear to be as widespread. However, integrated gangs teams that were first established to address 'local' gang issues are now taking forward strategies to tackle county lines.

Outside of London, statutory and voluntary sector services for children involved in county lines tend not to be as well developed because the level and nature of gang and county lines related activity has traditionally been lower and less violent than in the capital. Consequently, specialist services

and approaches have previously not been needed – *“the problem is that we’ve got lots of county lines coming in here now, but nothing to tackle it.”* (police)

Some areas have not been fully aware of the activity, *“we’re a bit out of our depth. People think we have a magic wand and can sort it out, but it’s a really complex problem and we’re not like London, there hasn’t been the awareness of this.”* (YOT)

Even where there is an awareness in some quarters, persuading others of the presence of county lines and the need for swift action has been challenging – *“It’s an uphill battle – trying to get others to understand that this is a major problem that we need to work together on. Some would like to think that we don’t have the problem. That denial is a bit like CSE was a few years ago.”* (police)

There is a need for London in particular, as well as other key export areas such as Liverpool to share their expertise and approaches with import areas that are now beginning to experience the serious exploitation and violence of the big cities. Some London boroughs already do this with areas such as Kent and Essex. Open and mutually supportive partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors is a particular aspect of effective practice that should be shared. This could include input into specifications for commissioning services as well as developing integrated teams with well defined and complementary statutory and voluntary sector roles.

A highly responsive and proactive business model

Those who own and manage county lines seem extremely adept at changing the business model to maximise the income generated. Any risks to the business are dealt with swiftly – *“it’s relatively easy to disrupt a line, but they’ll just move it, find a new market, use different people or a different way of operating.”* (head of community safety)

An example of the apparent evolution of the model that is particularly relevant to children’s involvement was observed during the course of the scoping research and linked evaluation. Traditionally most of the children taking drugs to county areas have been recruited in the export area eg: London. More recently, local ‘hubs’ seem to be being established, recruiting more local children to distribute drugs that are supplied either by a runner from the export area, or, increasingly by an experienced child from the local area being sent on a day return trip for supply.

This appears to have advantages for the line owner – supply can be achieved in a day which avoids the potential trigger of children going missing overnight or longer, and local children are likely to be a cheaper workforce, more easily intimidated and coerced, and less likely to be noticed in a local area. This change in model appears to be emerging in a number of areas, particularly those within a day’s journey from London. That said, there remain vulnerable London children who are involved in county lines activity and who are being trafficked, and non-London local children who continue to be trafficked to various parts of the country.

The recruitment of more local children to county lines and the escalation in the number of county lines being established puts increasing pressure on local areas. These towns and cities appear least prepared to respond to this threat both in terms of statutory sector responses and a lack of specialist services.

Who are the children involved in county lines?

In order to identify what approaches and services will work in supporting vulnerable children involved in county lines activity, it's important to understand some of the key features of this group.

Children who get involved in county lines appear to come from a variety of backgrounds including those with multiple interventions from public services because of chaotic and risky home circumstances, looked after children and those from well-ordered and materially comfortable families. Involvement in county lines, whilst more frequent amongst children who are experiencing deprivation or being looked after, is certainly not restricted to these groups.

One reason for the diversity of backgrounds is that county line owners/managers will recruit children that blend in with the drug market that the line is intended to exploit. These markets can vary from relative affluence such as working professionals and universities to the poverty of addicts living on the street or in poor housing. Recruiting children who know, and can fit in with the relevant market environment helps lines to 'keep under the radar' of the police and communities.

Another feature of this business model is that county lines owners appear to have become more aware of the importance of trying to match recruits with the ethnic profile of a market area so that they don't draw attention, as observed by a local police force - *"we used to have Black lads coming over from London (to the East of England), but they recruit more locals now because they're not so noticeable."*

Whilst statistics on those involved in county lines are not readily available, caseloads for gang/drug involved children show that in London the majority appear to be from BAME backgrounds whilst in county areas children are predominantly white. This is reflected in the cohort of children receiving support through St Giles Trust casework in Kent and London. The ethnicity dimension is important to highlight since it appears to be a significant factor in county lines in a number of ways. A mother of a child living outside of London, who had become involved in county lines activity comment that the portrayal of county lines is *"as a black, violent thing. It's not just a black crime."* This reflects the view of other white British mothers who feel that this portrayal means that *"you don't think your child will get involved because they're not black, and then it makes you really angry when you see on the TV and in the papers the whole time about black kids being the ones involved. It gives out the wrong message."*

In addition, some mothers and workers (voluntary and statutory sector) highlight that white (and some mixed heritage) children *"take on what they think is a cool way of talking and behaving, like they hear from black 'elders' (on the county line) or on youtube. It means that they have a really negative image of black young people. It's why it's really important that they see positive black role models, including caseworkers."*

Once children are on the fringes of/or are involved in county lines activity, there are a number characteristics associated with their involvement, including:

- missing from home episodes
- not being in mainstream education (many are in PRUs)
- having experienced some form of (often serious) violent assault
- being under youth offending services
- being classed as either a 'child in need' or with a child protection plan in place
- cannabis and alcohol use (sometimes other drugs)

Some examples of the difficult and complex starting points for some children involved in the St Giles casework and Missing People SafeCall service include:

13 years old, ADHD diagnosis, excluded from school, not attending PRU, reputation of violence and carrying knives, injury from being hit by a car whilst fleeing the scene of an assault at which he was the perpetrator, active involvement in drug running/dealing network, mother has been asking for help for 7 years.

16 years old, dealing drugs from 13 years old, numerous missing from home episodes lasting for 2-3 weeks and involved in county lines activities in other parts of the country, under the YOT, seen as an 'experienced operator' by local children with resulting pressure to act the big player, not in any form of education, serious previous adverse childhood experiences, drug and alcohol abuse leading to chaotic and risky behaviours, arrested for being drunk and disorderly whilst on his tag, involved in extreme violence, carrying weapons.

15 years old, arrested during a high risk drugs deal, under the YOT and on tag, in debt to the county line, several missing episodes involving county lines, violent attacks on him and threats to the family, excluded and not attending PRU.

Testimony from a 14 year old child: *"I ran away from home when I was young, I was angry with everybody....I used to sleep on kitchen floors and older boys would come in and kick me in the head to wake me up. By the age of 13 I started a gang... I'm nearly 15 now, I hardly ever go to school (PRU) and my mum always shouts at me so it's best to stay out....she used to search through my room and find knives, weed, cocaine, condoms and she once found a gun, obvs (sic) she was mad"*

Money is reported by children, parents and professionals as a major factor driving involvement in county lines activity, even for those from families with working parents and a good income. Although exploited children see only a tiny fraction of the money that is being generated through a county line, for a young teenager, being able to earn the £100 per day offered to some is highly attractive. There are also examples of children from families living in poverty regarding the income that county lines can provide as a way of *"helping to provide for my family"*. The 'kudos' of being involved in something illegal is also attractive, and, for those who may have been isolated or bullied previously, the feeling of belonging.

An added challenge in supporting children to move away from county lines involvement, particularly in import areas is that *"this is a small town, everyone knows each other, either before they get involved, but definitely once they're doing it"*. In these groups, relationships between the children are frequently tense, even where they are involved in the same county line. Suspicion and fears about each other jostle with pressures to be loyal to the group, and there can also be competition to move up the pecking order of the line.

An issue or incident with one child almost inevitably has a ripple effect for the group, disrupting progress and creating a febrile and volatile environment where further problems can arise quickly. This, in combination with the negative effects of social media and the 'normal' highs and lows of adolescence creates a challenging environment for statutory and voluntary sector services alike.

In some areas, such as Dover and Brighton, mothers are coming together to provide mutual support, as well as to be able to advocate and ‘campaign’ on the issues affecting their children. The mutual support provided through this group is highly valued – *“other friends back off because what is going on is really horrible and they can’t relate to it. When you’re having a really bad time, the group really helps – you can talk to them and they’re not shocked and disgusted because they’re going through it too.”*

This highlights the support needed for parents as well as children. Good quality specialist casework should include this support as part of a coherent package. Where this is not available, Missing People’s SafeCall service can provide a helpful option.

To illustrate the way in which children are drawn into county lines involvement and how, at various ‘reachable’ moments they can potentially be helped to move away from that involvement, a composite case study is presented on pages 37-40. This case study is drawn together from a variety of different, real cases that have contributed to the scoping and evaluation work.

Key challenges

There are a number of challenges facing statutory sector organisations:

- Identifying county lines activity and the children involved in it
- Understanding and identifying child vulnerability and criminal exploitation
- Identifying the urgent and serious risks to the safety and life of the child, including identifying when a child meets thresholds for interventions
- Delivering effective support for children, with limited resources, a lack of specialist knowledge and services, and children who are very difficult to engage

These challenges are due to a variety of factors that are important to understand so that new approaches and services are able to address them and provide better support for vulnerable children involved in county lines. Emerging effective approaches and services are explored in the next section of the report.

As discussed earlier, some areas are only just becoming aware of county lines. Even when there is an understanding of the issue, there are difficulties – *“actually trying to identify the scale of the problem and who’s involved – there’s no flag on the system for county lines and it’s not the same as CSE. Something will come to the attention of organised crime but then it doesn’t get flagged as county lines.”* (police)

Some areas that have used gang matrices for a number of years to identify key ‘gang nominals’ are finding that this method isn’t effective in identifying the younger children now involved in county lines activity. In addition, the fast response of the county lines business owners/‘elders’ means that when children are identified by the authorities, they may be quickly moved elsewhere to avoid arrest or other enforcement activity.

Some police forces are taking the approach of *“looking at vulnerability across the board – not using labels like county lines, CSE etc., so that we are more able to identify those involved quickly”*, and a number are developing strategies around violence, vulnerability and exploitation that can cover a range of issues including youth violence, gangs, sexual exploitation and county lines. These

developments are very positive, however, to be effective they will need to be delivered through a 'whole organisation approach' where there is consistent and shared awareness, understanding and knowledge, combined with the professional curiosity needed to tackle such challenging issues.

Working together to develop strategies to tackle the issue is a welcome development taking place in various parts of the country, however, putting these into practice can be more of a challenge - *"We've got a draft county lines strategy but we don't know who should lead on it and how we should deliver it. People don't have the understanding across the partnership and there's a bit of a reluctance based on fear of the scale of the issue. It feels a bit like Prevent in the early days."* (police)

Added to this, statutory sector organisations generally find it difficult to work within and across county boundaries, creating further difficulties for detecting criminal activity and child trafficking that is designed to work across county boundaries with ease:

"In our county, we have 3 unitary authorities, 2 YOS, 2 clinical commissioning partnerships, 2 public health bodies, one police force, 3 adult safeguarding teams and 3 MASHs. Each authority has a different youth offer and its own CSE lead. And the county is so diverse. We've got a lot of gang activity in two towns and then rural middle England. Getting the right people around the table can be challenging." (head of children's services)

"it's enough of a challenge to make sure that we work together within a county that's so diverse and large. We know that working with neighbouring counties is essential to tackle this problem but it is very difficult to do in practice." (police)

The police force has some regional structures, for example, for serious and organised crime and for intelligence and analysis. However, because county lines activity cuts across a number of different police sections/teams – organised crime, drugs, CSE/safeguarding, missing persons etc., the challenge is to ensure effective partnership working at local, county, regional and national levels.

Cross agency working has for many years been promoted as the most effective way of tackling a range of serious issues, CSE being the most recent example. There are a number of structures in place to facilitate this, for example, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and community safety teams. However, the effectiveness of these and other multi-agency partnerships is variable and depends on strong leadership that promotes professional curiosity and personal responsibility, the involvement of pro-active individuals and *"having front line practitioners as well as managers involved so that it isn't just a talking shop."* (YOT)

Education and health partners seem to be more difficult to engage in these cross agency groupings. However, it is clear from the scoping and evaluation work that they are both pivotal to an effective response to helping children involved in county lines to exit the activity. Active inclusion of these partners, as well as housing, in community safety teams and other integrated approaches is likely to be of significant benefit.

The scoping research highlighted the important position that British Transport Police (BTP) occupies in being able to identify trafficked children using train services to carry drugs and money, confirmed by the view of a former county line child drug runner – *"I got stopped once without a ticket. I was praying that the officer would take me in, but he let me off with a fine."* Some children involved in county lines travel without tickets, and others may have tickets but clearly should be in school and not travelling alone on a train. BTP are dependent on train line operatives to report incidents of children travelling without tickets and other issues. However, the train operatives are managed by the private train companies and so this process relies on good relationships, willingness to engage in

the issue on the part of the train companies and their operatives, vigilance on the part of BTP and motivation for the BTP officer to share intelligence. Much greater use of this valuable resource could be made – *“They are a missing link, a huge gap in how we could respond better”* (head of children’s services)

Common to all effective partnerships is the appropriate sharing of information. This is a perennial challenge in many areas of work. There are some examples of very effective information sharing protocols that promote safeguarding and support for children as well as enabling detection and enforcement activity. The new General Data Regulation Protection (GDRP) should not affect appropriate information sharing, however, there are some early indications that misinterpretation of the regulations could potentially hamper this essential element of cross agency working.

An important challenge that was raised by a number of contributors is the continuing and growing demand for drugs. Many remarked that without this demand, the county lines business model would fail to be lucrative for owners and that this could *“transform the picture overnight”*. Some felt that a reduction in drug and alcohol services had contributed to the rise in demand, although others highlighted that certain significant groups of recreational drug users would not make use of these types of services. De-criminalising and bringing drug supply under Government control was cited by some contributors as a potentially highly effective means of removing the current business advantage of county lines.

The difficult balance between vulnerability and criminality

Child criminal exploitation is a fairly new concept and the notion of children who are involved in criminal activity being victims (as well as perpetrators) appears to sit uncomfortably with some organisational cultures and individuals.

Where the vulnerability of children/young people is accepted, the national referral mechanism (NRM) and Modern Slavery Act (MSA) may be, and is beginning to be used. However, this is new legislation and was not written specifically to encompass the child trafficking and criminal exploitation taking place through county lines.

Some contributors to the research felt that, in relation to the MSA and county lines, *“It’s hard to prove, so it’s not popular – they (children) are so terrified that they won’t talk to us – only off tape”* (police) and, *“using the MSA is difficult because young people aren’t disclosing and then it’s difficult for us to take enforcement action”* (community safety partnership).

These, and other views may reflect genuine difficulties with the legislation and/or misunderstanding in how it can be applied. The recent prosecutions under the MSA may help to begin to clarify the most effective way of applying the legislation to county lines criminality and child vulnerability. However, additional review, guidance and support may be needed to maximise what could be a useful tool.

Referral to the NRM, whilst potentially offering the opportunity to avoid being prosecuted for some offences provides little or no specialist support for children to exit county lines activity. Child Trafficking Advocates whose role it is to support children referred to the NRM are available only in a very few pilot areas. This service is limited in capacity and advocates may lack the credibility and specialist expertise in county lines to provide effective help. Currently, the NRM does not offer housing relocation for children. A need for *“access to safe housing is an essential element of support for some who are really entrenched.”*, as illustrated by some of the children supported through the

county lines specialist casework in Kent. If increased use of the NRM is to be encouraged in order to protect children involved in county lines, greater and more specialist support needs to be in place to enable the good intentions of the process to be realised.

Being placed on the NRM does not automatically protect a child from being prosecuted. If there is evidence that they are exploiting other, often younger children, they can also be prosecuted under the MSA. The hierarchy of exploitation is central to the county lines business model and there is a danger that some children may continue to be prosecuted even where the offence has been committed under extreme coercion, including threat to life. Children placed on the NRM can also be more attractive to line owners because they are immune from prosecution from some crimes.

The pros and cons of ‘being in the system’

It is important to acknowledge that in some instances, it may be appropriate to charge a child involved in county lines activity with an offence. It is a difficult judgement call and needs to be made on a case by case basis. There are advantages and disadvantages for the child in both decisions – to charge or not to charge:

Option	Advantage for child	Disadvantage for child
Release without charge	Child not criminalised	Child’s safety/life may be in imminent danger, especially if drugs/money are confiscated and/or they are regarded as a grass, and there may be no safeguarding in place Out of area child may not be escorted home Child may not meet threshold for social services because of the current focus on safeguarding within the context of the family. Child may not have access to any specialist services
Arrest and charge	Child will be under YOS and/or Social Services and may receive some support as a result. Tag/curfew may make child less attractive to line owner.	Child has to experience full criminal justice process, is criminalised and has a record Child may receive a custodial sentence and become entrenched in criminal justice system Child may be given a non-custodial sentence and regarded as a ‘grass’ by line elders/owner Child may not have access to any specialist county line services
Referral to NRM	Child not criminalised and may be provided with some advocacy and support.	Current access to support is limited. Under 18s have no automatic right to relocation for safety. Child may not have access to any specialist county lines services Child may be at risk of reprisals from line because the referral triggers an investigation under the MSA Child potentially more attractive to line owner because they have some level of ‘immunity’ from prosecution

Release with no further action may be decided upon with the best of intentions, in order not to criminalise a child. The police service has been working towards drastically reducing overnight custody for children which would appear to be a very positive move. However, some serious risks

can result when children are released, because of children slipping through the safeguarding net and the lack of specialist services.

The child's safety and quite possibly, life, may be in immediate danger if money/drugs have been confiscated. If the child is not known to statutory services, there may be no safeguarding mechanism in place, and the child may not be regarded as reaching the threshold for services.

Where a child is charged and, for example, given a court order, they will at least be under the supervision of the youth offending service. Whilst this may not always be an effective means of support, it does provide some form of contact with services and potentially an element of safeguarding. Social services may also be involved, but again, staff may not have the specialist knowledge and skills required to provide effective support. There may also be a delay between a child being released from custody (with or without charge), and any form of safeguarding or support being put in place. During this period, children can be highly vulnerable and at risk.

Police forces' positive motivations to try to avoid keeping children in custody overnight can mean that a child is released outside of 9-5 working hours – *"There is a real gap in out of hours services. Commissioned services often respond out of hours, out of goodness but there's no official response"*. (Offender Management, London)

Additional risks for children away from home

A further issue and risk for the child can arise when they are arrested away from their home area. Unless they are met by a trusted, skilled and informed professional on release, they may be in significant danger. Arrangements for returning children to their home areas currently appear very patchy. This is reported to be partly due to resourcing issues – social services in the home area may not be willing or able to send a member of staff to collect a child who is hundreds of miles from home and, likewise, police forces may not be willing or able to have an officer escort a child home. In addition, there can be a 'territorial' approach where both the home and arresting area are reluctant to take responsibility for returning the child home – *"I was wandering the streets last night till 10.30pm with a 17 year old county lines gang member because neither his home YOT/social care department or our social care, police or court felt he was their responsibility."* (YOT manager in the area where the child was arrested and released)

Delays in collecting out of area children from custody and the issues and risks facing them in returning to their home area add to the challenges *"A 14 year old from London was remanded by the court into local authority care. He was ready to be collected at 2pm. No-one came for him until 8pm and he didn't want to go back to his children's home because of fear of violence from the gang. The court staff were making him cocoa to try and help him feel better. There was no-one that could help him and he was definitely at risk."* (YOT manager from a county area)

The newly commissioned MOPAC pan London county lines service should help to address the need to meet and support London children arrested in other parts of the country – *"The journey back to London is an ideal opportunity to get a breakthrough with a kid."* (police). However, similar services will need to be established, and/or more effective protocols developed between agencies to address this issue for children from outside of London who are trafficked through county lines.

HM Inspector of Constabulary concluded that there is *"an imperative for cultural change in the police service if children and young people who run away from home or care are to have the trust that the police will help them"* (Missing children: who cares? – HMIC, 2016). This in part refers to

the need for police forces to use appropriately the different categories of ‘absent’ and ‘missing’, the latter indicating a higher risk to the child, and to develop approaches and partnership responses that are sympathetic and approachable. The establishment of police teams that combine missing and child exploitation, for example, Kent’s Missing and Child Exploitation Team (MCET), should help take this forward.

Children going missing and the response of statutory and voluntary sector services is a complex area of its own and has been the subject of detailed research including ‘Making Connections’ (The Children’s Society, July 2017). This research identified the issues around the inconsistent offer of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) and a lack of information sharing between agencies when RHIs are completed. In addition, actions recommended in the RHIs, including safeguarding referrals, were often not responded to. Children in out of area care placements were identified as being at particular risk of falling through the net.

Feedback from contributors to the scoping report indicates that RHIs, even where they are carried out by skilled workers, appear to have little impact in terms of preventing further missing episodes from children involved in county lines activity. This may be for a number of reasons including:

- the person carrying out the interview lacks the specialist skills and/or professional curiosity to *“dig below the surface and find out what’s really going on”* (police)
- that the RHI is not being linked to a wider assessment framework for the child, including appropriate referral to further specialist services
- that the RHI is a short intervention and children in this situation will require substantial and longer term support to exit the activity that is causing them to be missing

Returning a child home presents a key ‘reachable moment’ and the principle of the RHI appears sound if implemented effectively with appropriate follow up and specialist support. Missing People deliver RHIs in some areas and have made some referrals from this work to their SafeCall phone support service. One London borough is piloting the provision of 6 sessions of support after a child returns from a missing episode and it will be interesting to see what impact this might have.

Finally, some parents are reluctant to report to the police that their children are missing and instead may use social media to make appeals for any information. A key reason for their reluctance to report their children missing seems to be that they fear the involvement of the authorities *“and their children being taken away”*. There is also evidence that a small minority of parents may be complicit in their child’s involvement in county lines and therefore do not report missing episodes.

Understanding contextual safeguarding and the nature of the risks to children

Social work training and practice is framed by the Children’s Act and therefore focuses on risk and safeguarding in the family context. In the county lines context, this can and does result in children not being regarded as reaching the threshold for services because the family circumstances may be stable and external risk is not factored in:

- *“It doesn’t take into account the community risks and the complexity of the children we have. The Act and the scope of safeguarding needs to change.”* (integrated gangs team)

- *“He was referred to the MASH because he was in possession of drugs and a knife but still wasn’t regarded as meeting the threshold.”* (community safety partnership)

An awareness of contextual safeguarding which involves fully assessing the wider risks to the child posed by their environment outside of the family has only recently been recognised. It is critical in understanding the risks affecting children involved in county lines.

Because the county lines issue has only recently been acknowledged, particularly outside of London, many social workers and YOT workers can face challenges because they don’t have the specialist knowledge and experience to be able to support involved children:

- *“We don’t know enough, even if you have some idea of what’s going on, if you don’t have that specialist knowledge, you can’t really help properly”* (YOT worker)
- *“Having people from London (specialist voluntary sector caseworkers) who have been involved in that kind of thing in their past and have the experience is really helpful because we learn so much from them. Without that, we wouldn’t really know what was going on or how to help.”* (social worker)

In addition, the safeguarding processes and different social workers involved can present issues with this group of children. Where some risk to the child is identified they will be assessed as a ‘child in need’ which means 6 weekly contact from the social worker. This can be escalated to a child protection plan with much more frequent contact. Adolescent team social workers in some areas may not deal with child protection cases, which, if there is a change in circumstances (not unusual for children involved in county lines), an unhelpful chain of events can unfold, as illustrated by the following example:

‘The child was allocated an adolescent social worker, having been identified as a child in need. This social worker is part of the adolescent team and has some understanding of what is happening to the child (helped by a voluntary sector specialist). There is an incident resulting in the child being put under child protection because of a severe risk to the child’s life. His social worker changes because adolescent team workers in her area don’t deal with child protection. The new social worker isn’t experienced in working with adolescents, doesn’t fully understand the risks involved and doesn’t realise that the child needs to be relocated immediately because of the risk to his life.’

If the child had been able to remain under the care of the adolescent team and voluntary sector specialist worker, using the ‘single trusted adult’ principle whereby the child is able to keep the relationship that works best for them, this situation could have been avoided.

The finite resources available across all statutory sector services were highlighted as presenting challenges in responding effectively to children involved in county lines (and other violence/crime) – *“Our resources are stretched. The children that we would have judged as meeting the threshold for services a couple of years ago no longer meet the threshold because we don’t have the funds to support them. In that way, the threshold has gone up.”* (social services)

“Because services are so strung out, they (children on county lines) don’t meet the threshold because they don’t appear to be in immediate risk. And, it’s not a criticism, but they don’t really have anything set up for this kind of thing.” (police)

“Children’s services and YOT have withdrawn their outreach work because of funding. We’re wondering if some of the most entrenched ones (children) would be more suitable for the IOM than YOT to get the management they need. But we don’t know what that would look like and we’d still need some resources.” (police)

Understanding the very serious level of risk facing children involved in, and trying to exit county lines is pivotal to the safety of the child, but appears to be rarely understood fully, even by professionals working in the statutory or voluntary sector, unless they have had specialist training or personal experience. In the words of a mother, *“Child protection don’t have a gangs category”* and a YOT manager *“I’m not sure that the police really understand the danger when they take drugs off them and then release them.”*

Children can be in extreme danger for a number of reasons:

- having drugs and/or money confiscated by the police
- suspected of being ‘snitches’ – especially if released from police custody without charge
- having been coerced into working for another, rival line
- suspected or known to be trying to exit county lines activity

Drug debt is a particularly difficult issue that affects children involved in county lines. This debt can be created through a number of ways including where drugs/money has been confiscated by the police, or where the child has been subject to robbery, including false robbery by a member of the line. When a child has a drug debt, this is used by the line as a means of coercive control, commonly referred to as debt bondage. As outlined, not all professionals understand the implications of debt bondage, including the severe risk to life and limb.

The question of how the debt is, or should be, handled is a linked but separate issue. Approaches vary according to the individual circumstances but may include parents or children trying to pay off the debt. Where there is significant police enforcement activity focused on the line(s) involved in the debt, the threat to the child’s life may be reduced while line members are trying to keep a low profile. This tactic is being used in some police forces areas. However, it is by no means fool proof, and the increased threat to the line can lead to escalations in violent attacks and retribution.

Critical differences between child sexual exploitation (CSE) and county lines

There seem to be similarities between county lines and CSE in the way in which both have ‘crept up’ on statutory agencies and exploded into major issues, and in the need to view children as exploited rather than complicit. CSE can be a feature of county lines. However, there are significant differences between the two forms of exploitation and *“it’s dangerous to assume that just because someone understands CSE, they also understand county lines – you can’t just use the same approaches that you would with CSE.”* (community safety partnership)

This is an important point to note for both the statutory and voluntary sectors. A key difference is that whilst those risks and safeguarding issues associated with CSE are certainly very serious and damaging to the child, there is an additional risk to life and limb associated with county lines involvement (and exit). Put bluntly, the ‘commodity’ in CSE is the child, whereas the commodity in county lines is the drugs and money.

In county lines, children are viewed as *“expendable foot soldiers – if one gets sent down or killed, there are plenty more to take their place”* (police) and *“there’s almost a waiting list of kids wanting*

to go country.” (head of community safety). Extreme violence including breaking and severing of limbs, stabbing, shooting, and other forms of mutilation etc. are not uncommon, and the constant threat of these either in relation to drug debt, perceived misdemeanours or coercive control is also commonplace. In addition, whilst the ‘hourly rate’ of a child working on a county line is often very low (because it’s a 24/7 job), a ‘daily rate’ of £100 can be perceived as very attractive, as can the potential for ‘promotion’ within the line structure. These additional ‘lures’ appear to make the exploitation subtly different from CSE, and can make exiting the activity very difficult for an impressionable adolescent keen to have money and status.

Those staff and organisations (statutory and voluntary sector) with expertise in CSE may not be able to provide the specialist support needed by children involved in county lines. Indeed, some CSE specialist organisations recognise this difference in skills sets and make referrals to services that have expertise with county lines, gangs and youth violence. Recruiting staff with the cultural competence or lived experience and specialist training specific to extreme violence, gangs and county lines could enable such organisations to develop the skills and knowledge to provide effective support.

Disengaging in education

Children involved in county lines are often outside mainstream education, many being referred to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Once there, children rarely move back into mainstream education even where the arrangements were intended to be temporary *“he was excluded and went to the PRU in Year 8. He’s now in Year 11”* (mother)

Provision in the PRU does not seem to engage the children and offers very little substance – *“they do this twilight timetable where they go into school for one hour at four o’clock – so, of course they can get up to all sorts of stuff all day and no-one would know, and I’m not sure what they are supposed to achieve in an hour a day.”* (social worker)

PRUs are generally not well regarded by the agencies, parents and children contributing to the scoping research. They appear to be fertile ground for recruitment and continuing involvement in a variety of negative activities including county lines. Exclusion from school does appear to be a highly significant trigger point for the escalation of county lines involvement for children who might be on the fringes of such activity.

The education system is highly competitive and sensitive to Ofsted inspections, exam results, public image, and parental and community pressure. Children with poor behaviour and low attainment adversely affect these factors and there appear to be no incentives and little specialist support to try and keep children affected by county lines involvement engaged in education.

Incentivising mainstream schools, particularly academies, by introducing assessments around the frequency and nature of exclusions might help to address the issue, perhaps with a requirement to provide some form of ‘cool off units’ within mainstream campuses to encourage better movement back into mainstream education.

Children being supported by St Giles Trust caseworkers through the county lines pilot are showing much better engagement in education, including some working towards GCSEs. This demonstrates that it is possible for children to recover from long periods of complete disengagement with education, but this requires sustained and significant one-to-one support.

Care and housing

Challenges and failings in the local authority care system are highlighted as a key issue across all areas. Poor quality and/or badly located children's homes ie: in high risk housing areas, are providing ideal conditions for county lines exploitation – *"we have a high number of children's homes in the area and we know that they are really ripe for exploitation, either with children being placed here out of area who are already involved, or others just grooming the children in there."* (community safety partnership)

The currently unregulated 16+ children's accommodation sector is a particularly big issue cited by many areas, not least because local authorities have no means of ensuring improvements – *"we have no power at all, and we can't shut down homes that we would never consider placing a child in because they offer no support and it puts them at risk."* (children's services)

Local authorities placing children out of area in unsuitable or substandard accommodation without the right support and without informing the host authorities is a key issue. Many areas contributing to the scoping report, identify this as significantly raising the level of vulnerability and potential for exploitation in their local areas – *"They (local authority from another part of the country) are sending kids to a children's home that our council won't use, and this children's home doesn't report missing episodes so it's a prime target for county lines and no-one really knows what's going on."* (YOT manager)

Levels of out of area placement appear very high. Some areas contributing to the scoping research reported that around 40-60% of looked after children are not from the locality. This situation can *"create a really big risk for the children because they are vulnerable and isolated, and a risk for our local area too."* (social worker), a comment backed up by the findings of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults (March 2017).

In addition, families who are relocated to new areas (often in significant numbers) are typically those who have experienced problems and whose children may have been involved in gang and youth violence. This adds to the difficulties facing areas that already have too few services to be able to respond effectively.

Health

Youth violence has for some time been regarded as a public health issue by a number of practitioners and experts. Children involved in county lines experience varying degrees of assault, including sexual assault and violent attacks, as well as a range of mental health issues. Some will present at hospital A&E/Major Trauma Centres (MTC), either as 'walk ins' or by ambulance.

Whilst experiencing trauma and violence is clearly very negative for the child, it can present an opportunity for engagement. When children are injured and frightened, even when their injuries are not life threatening/changing, there is a brief window of opportunity – the teachable or reachable moment.

Specialist intervention services delivered by Redthread are only currently available in London and Nottingham MTCs. St Giles Trust also delivers a casework service from the Royal London MTC trauma ward, and Redthread is due to launch an intervention service Birmingham in the summer.

For these services to be effective, they need to *"not just be an A&E based service, but on the ward too. People with traumatic injuries tend to do worse because they don't come in for follow up. But*

when they have a service on the trauma ward and in the community, they come in. I've seen the caseworker berating a young person for thirty minutes because he hadn't come – he didn't put the phone down, he listened and he came to clinic. The DNA (did not attend) used to be huge for clinic – it's not now.” (Senior consultant, major trauma unit)

Emerging practice to address the issues

Discussions with organisations and individuals indicate that the challenges of supporting vulnerable children being exploited on county lines are considerable and growing, suggesting that even where there are pockets of effective practice, these are currently not widespread enough to be making measurable impact. Effective approaches seemed to be typified by individuals who have actively gained appropriate knowledge and awareness, who are skilled with the client group and who have developed effective working relationships with other agencies. Currently, whole organisation, systematic effective practices appear not to be in place.

That said, there are some established and emerging approaches and services that seem to be having positive impact either in directly addressing the needs of children or beginning to put the structures, processes and organisational cultures in place to enable this to happen. Some examples are given below. These are just a few illustrations of the type of work that is being delivered or developed and there will be other examples around the country.

It is also important to note that some of the examples described are not specifically for children involved in county lines activity. It is the case that not all elements of support have to be specialist in their entirety. However, these elements and services do require specialist staff and appropriate culturally competent, trauma informed practice if they are to provide the level of identification, assessment, risk management and support needed by this group of children.

Internal and external partnership in the police force

There are good examples of how the police are working to identify more effectively children involved in county lines and to provide more effective responses. For example, Margate's Missing Children & Exploitation Team (MCET) includes a range of officers including detectives and links in with Raptor enforcement officers, and, most recently BTP. This team also liaises with social services and YOT, and is now working with St Giles Trust specialist county lines caseworkers. Schools and PRUs have been harder to engage but work is continuing to bring in these essential partners.

Police officers working on tackling county lines in one London borough where exploited children were being found in 19 different force areas have taken a very pro-active approach. Met police from the borough are deployed into operations in the county areas to deal with vulnerable children found during the operation. This borough has also developed the approach of combining missing, exploited and trafficked into a single matrix and team, with this team meeting at the same time as the serious youth violence team to ensure good joining up. These partnerships also involve specialist voluntary sector and health partners.

An example of effective cross boundary police working is between South Wales and the Metropolitan Police (Met). This relationship has been established over a number of years,

responding to the need to tackle organised crime links between the two areas, and is now able to respond to the significant county lines traffic between London and the Cardiff/Swansea area.

In addition, the Met and Eastern Region Specialist Operations Unit (ERSOU) are working together to share intelligence on the threat of county lines across the Eastern Region. This will be used to provide a more *“joined up response to the main threats county lines poses across the region.”*

The National County Lines Co-ordination Centre proposed in the Government’s new Serious Violence Strategy has the potential to help enable more effective cross border working by helping to *“bring the law enforcement together.”*

Taking a vulnerability approach

A number of police forces and local authorities are developing processes for identifying and responding to children (and adults) that, rather than using labels such as ‘county lines’ or CSE, instead take vulnerability as the overarching way of regarding the risks to the individual.

Once individuals are identified, this approach is being used in assessing risk and in safeguarding processes. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this development, however, it may enable much more effective and comprehensive responses to children involved in county lines by ensuring that the various ways in which they can ‘present’ are picked up on more quickly. The approach could also help in tackling the silo working which hampers current responses.

One London borough is in the process of reviewing and re-writing their child protection guidance to take into account risks outside of the family, including county lines. This is part of wider work in the borough to ensure that *“we understand issues around vulnerability without being in silos and that we have the operational structures in place to facilitate this”*. The approach is currently being assessed and a report should be available in due course.

Effective cross agency working

Many London boroughs and larger cities have developed a range of different and relatively well established models and processes for cross agency working, led by the local authorities. These include integrated gangs teams that involve YOT, social services, police, probation and embedded specialist voluntary sector case workers. Whilst these partnerships are established and have positive impact, contributors were clear that there is still much more that needs to be done to respond effectively to children involved in county lines.

Brighton, through their violence, vulnerability and exploitation (VVE) strategy which incorporates county lines, are in the process of transforming service management for vulnerable children by bringing together all relevant services for this group. Crucially, this will mean that children who form a trusted relationship with one member of staff can remain under their care through all the various processes involved in a safeguarding/CJS journey. The city is also in the process of appointing a VVE coordinator for the city who will be based in the community safety team, enabling adult and children’s safeguarding to be brought together.

In Kent, the MCET team has brought together missing children and exploitation – *“Previously, we didn’t really understand the risks to the young people, we were so fragmented. MCET means we can join the dots between CSE, gang and county lines related and missing children.”*

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are potentially good starting points for cross agency work - *“A good CSP is the glue for tackling county lines and exploitation. It’s core to risk analysis, contextual safeguarding and the multi-agency approach that you need.”* (CSP lead)

CSPs appear to vary in their effectiveness and reach. Where they are proactive, well informed and actively involve all relevant partners, the comment above certainly seems to be borne out. South Devon has a particularly proactive community safety team that is leading a cross agency response to the rapidly growing number of county lines spreading across Devon and Cornwall. This approach is described as a case study in more detail on pages 27-28.

Merseyside is in the process of developing Fusion, a multi-agency virtual hub which includes a matrix of risk factors to identify children at risk of or involved in child criminal exploitation. This is intended to work across all agencies so that the child can be assessed and a virtual action plan put in place, with an ‘owner’ to ensure that the plan is taken forward.

Working in partnership with voluntary sector specialists

In areas where specialist services are available, the most effective model involves close partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors. The importance of *“voluntary sector services that work with the statutory services is key – we need to all be working in partnership for the same goal – the child.”* (police)

The majority of contributors to the scoping research felt that having specialist voluntary sector services, primarily one-to-one casework would make a significant positive impact in helping children to exit county lines activity - *“They (children) need help from people on the ground with the expertise and time to really help them get out of being involved – it needs to be face-to-face, they need to be able to trust someone so that they’ll work with them.”* (local authority).

The relationship of trust required for effective support was a recurring theme in discussions. Whilst independent, voluntary sector workers are not the only people with whom children can form these relationships, most contributors and other published sources (English Coalition for Runaway Children, the Children’s Society etc) recognised that they were the most likely candidates and that it was extremely helpful or even essential to have access to this type of service if children are to be adequately supported.

The only specialist county lines casework services are currently being piloted by St Giles Trust in Kent and South Wales, with very positive results. There are a small number of other experienced organisations including, but not exclusively, Safer London, Redthread, Abianda and Catch 22 that deliver a range of services focused on gangs and serious youth violence, including some children involved in county lines. Missing People is piloting a nationally available, specialist phone support service, Safecall, for children and family members affected by county lines, in partnership with St Giles Trust. It is providing some useful support, particularly for parents, and has the potential to offer something in areas where there are no on the ground services.

A key feature of successful voluntary sector involvement in addressing county lines issues is working in close partnership with statutory services, whilst maintaining a clearly identifiable and independent role. The value of involving specialist voluntary sector services is explored in more detail later in the report, and further examples of good practice are discussed in more detail in the linked evaluation report.

Although the service is under the auspices of the police rather than a voluntary sector organisation, the Great Expectations mentoring project in Gloucestershire offers some support for young people affected by gangs and youth violence and has drawn on a voluntary sector model in its development. Funded by the PCC, this project involves ex-offenders and those on release on temporary licence (ROTL) as mentors, enabling them to use their lived experience for the benefit of young people who need support to move away from negative activity. It involves the Constabulary's youth engagement officers, Gloucester City Homes, HM Prison Service, the probation service, the County Council's Families First programme and social care.

Early intervention

There is a mass of provision that falls under the broad heading of early intervention. Many areas across the country have services that fall under this umbrella and the term can mean very different things. This scoping research focused on early intervention for those already involved in county lines activity, rather than diversion activities to prevent involvement. That said, a number of contributors felt that the reduction in youth services and activities to engage young people has left *"the door open for people who want to exploit them because they don't have anything better to occupy them"* (mother)

Attempting to identify early intervention that is specifically able to reach children who are already involved in some form of county lines activity is challenging. Youth intervention services in some areas do appear to play an effective role in trying to keep children from being criminalised by offering alternatives to sentencing where offences are admitted. However, this approach seems patchy and the route is most effective where staff have the specialist knowledge of county lines involvement to be able to offer appropriate support.

One example of innovation in trying to prevent entrenchment in county lines activity is being taken forward by the London Borough of Redbridge that is developing a 'crash pad' in a four bedroom property to provide temporary 'breathing space' for children who don't want to return home straight away. This facility, along with the new 'children on the edge of care service', the Family Intervention Team (FIT) is designed to try and prevent the escalation of events for children involved in county lines, gangs and other negative activity. The FIT involves a cross agency partnership with a number of voluntary sector organisations as well as statutory services. Edge of care services are being considered in a number of different areas and appear to be a good development for exploited/at risk of being exploited children.

South Devon CSP also has a very proactive Youth Intervention Team that works closely with social services and YOT. This is described in more detail later in the report.

Educational and training opportunities

The importance of engaging children who have been excluded from mainstream education was discussed earlier in the report. Raising aspirations and providing children with the skills to get well paid work *"as a credible alternative to working on a county line"* is a critical element of support. Merseyside police are developing Operation Haggrid with training partners to develop an alternative education programme providing 2-3 years vocational training in construction, hospitality and catering, for those from Years 7/8. This is following an early Durham based model in land based industries that has had very good results with children who were in or at risk of being in the criminal

justice system. Also in Merseyside, Everton football club has established the Everton Free School in Liverpool, which is an alternative learning provision giving excluded children referred to them by mainstream schools and local authorities a full education that leads to qualifications and jobs. This appears very different from the PRU experience.

The Pendlebury Centre in Stockport is a PRU that appears to take a very positive and effective approach to supporting excluded children. The centre provides a specialist multi agency approach with full time placements and outreach support to students who require additional help with their social, emotional and mental health needs. Rated excellent by Ofsted, key features include a strong partnership approach with mainstream schools (all pupils at Key Stage 3 will attend their mainstream school once a week), children's mental health services and other organisations. The Centre is a National Support School, providing support to help other PRUs improve their provision.

The Harris Academy in London also includes Harris Inspire, an alternative education provision. Rated good by Ofsted in 2016, this appears to have links with its mainstream provision that should enable young people to move back into the main academy provision.

Trauma informed practice

The level and severity of trauma experienced by children involved in county lines can be extreme. This can include adverse childhood experiences (ACE) within the family before, and during their involvement in county lines, and/or the significant physical and psychological violence perpetrated on them as a result of their involvement. This is not just through acts of violence and threats against the child but includes trauma experienced as a result of their own violent behaviour and observing violent events such as assaults, rape and murder.

“A growing body of research identifies the harmful effects that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; occurring during childhood or adolescence; eg, child maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence) have on health throughout life” (The Lancet, August 2017)

In carrying out the scoping research, a number of areas both in London and the large cities and some in other parts of the country have either adopted a trauma informed approach that recognises this finding, or are in the process of carrying out the staff and organisational development to do so. As with other approaches to practice, this will need to be part of all organisations' (statutory and voluntary) cultures for it to achieve full positive impact.

Specialist county lines staff training and development

Specialist knowledge and cultural competence are required to understand fully the needs of the child and risks they are experiencing. Some local authorities, police forces, YOTs, children's homes and schools have taken up opportunities for professional training and development from specialists such as St Giles Trust and Safer London. These can be very effective, especially where they provide staff with strategies and practical ideas as well as understanding and awareness. In addition to formal training sessions, the evaluation of pilot services being delivered by St Giles Trust and Missing People shows that working alongside voluntary sector specialist worker also helps develop understanding and skills.

Sharing effective practice

Some areas, most notably London boroughs have been actively sharing their approaches with others to help develop a more consistent statutory sector approach. For example, London boroughs working actively with Kent and Essex. Through the scoping process, further links have been made between different areas in order that they can exchange ideas and learn from each other's developing practice in this very challenging and rapidly changing area of work. Providing a light touch mechanism for this exchange to continue would help to build a national, evidence based response.

A case study of work in progress

In order to show how a range of different activities and developments are being progressed to try and tackle county lines in an 'outlying' area that has not previously experienced major issues with this type of serious youth violence, trafficking and child criminal exploitation, South Devon CSP's work is presented as a brief case study. An example such as this is useful in demonstrating the scope of work entailed and how responses are being developed from 'point zero'.

South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership

This CSP is taking a highly proactive approach to tackling county lines, and specifically to address the issue of children involved or at risk of being involved in this activity. Newton Abbot, just outside Exeter, is the major town and has an established and large local group/gang of children who, until recently, have been involved in a variety of 'traditional' anti-social and criminal activity. The level of enforcement activity to tackle county lines in Exeter, combined with an increase in the number and reach of county lines in Devon and Cornwall and ready source of local recruits in the existing gang means that Newton Abbot is ripe for significant county lines exploitation. Added to this, the town has good transport links to a number of coastal drugs hotspots where there is significant demand for drugs.

There was already some evidence of county lines influence in the local gang and the CSP used the opportunity of their locality review to begin to identify how they could tackle the issue to try and prevent a rapid escalation of county lines activity. Key activity and development has included:

- Significant work to get the understanding and buy in of key partners at strategic (including elected members), management and front line levels. In addition to the range of core CSP partners, police problem solvers and analysts, health professionals and schools/colleges are fully engaged with the work.
- Production of a specific county lines serious and organised crime profile by Devon & Cornwall Police, in partnership with Safer Devon, Safer Cornwall, Safer Plymouth and Safer Communities Torbay. This document provides a really helpful explanation of county lines and a comprehensive analysis and review of the local area, media coverage, current approaches, partnership involvement, potential legal opportunities and next steps. This ensures that all partners have shared knowledge and understanding of the issues.
- A strategic profile of youth gangs which again helps all partners to understand the issues, including the trauma informed approach and the vulnerability of local children to exploitation by county lines.

- Providing safeguarding training, including missing children and exploitation to fairground companies and using this as part of the requirements for licensing.
- Development of a multi-agency vulnerability screening tool which enables county lines affected children (and adults) to be much more effectively identified, and by any agency.
- Through an adolescent risk strategy, removing the boundaries between social care and youth intervention so that when there is a referral to the MASH, a contextual safeguarding approach means that the child is assessed to meet the threshold for support, even where family support is good.
- A highly pro-active youth intervention team that works in partnership with all agencies to support children to avoid escalation of criminal exploitation.
- A new innovative partnership with HMP Channings Wood where the prison’s psychologist is working with the CSP to share approaches to dealing with gangs, drawing on MoJ work and experience within the prison community. This is enabling the psychologist to also have access to continuing professional development by working with the CSP.
- Commissioning specialist training for professionals across the CSP, and in local schools/colleges.

Margate Task Force has also undertaken a number of innovative developments which included an in depth mapping of a wide range of risks across the town. This identified, for example, the interaction between the location of children’s homes and other high risk factors such as crack houses etc. The multi-agency Task Force has spearheaded the development of innovative cross agency work. Education and health providers have been more difficult to engage but intensive work is ongoing to achieve this. The role of the task force is explored in more detailed in the evaluation report of pilot activity.

A scarcity and urgent need for independent voluntary sector specialist services

The vast majority of areas in the scoping research highlighted the lack of, and need for specialist services delivered by the voluntary sector. There is particular need outside of London, however, many London boroughs that already have good voluntary sector provision are in the process of developing and commissioning additional support in recognition of the specialist nature of the work and the volume of need.

In conducting the scoping research, one-to-one casework and mentoring support was most commonly cited by statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations and mothers as the intervention that they feel would be most effective in addressing the needs of vulnerable children involved in county lines, as well as being the most urgently needed service. This gap in support was not reported primarily as a result of a lack of capacity in statutory services, although a number of contributors felt that they are under pressure and – *“We don’t have the time to provide them with the amount of support they might need. But it’s not just that, we’re often not the right people because they don’t want to engage with us because we’re ‘the authorities’.”* (YOT worker)

Statutory agencies feel that that this type of support, delivered by *“an independent person with the right skills”* is as an urgent need because *“relationship building with young people is key – in terms of*

disclosure, community safety and safeguarding. The caseworker is not seen as a threat and they can engage in a way that we can't." (integrated gangs team)

At a number of events, meetings and individual discussions carried out for the research, a key question frequently asked was *"What do I refer them to?"*. This included social workers and YOT workers as well as police. These professionals understood very clearly the need to identify those children at risk of, and involved in county lines activities, but remarked:

- *"I can see that we need to know how to identify them, but where do I refer them to? Who has the expertise to help them? I have a young man who needs help but I don't know where to refer him."* (social worker in an area with no specialist provision)
- *"We don't have any gangs or county lines provision and potentially that would be a big help. We're talking to the third sector about what they might be able to offer. We've had a huge increase in violence – the type of violence from the big cities is now being replicated by local dealers and they're adopting county lines methods. We have no experience of that and no services to match it."* (police in mainly rural area)

Even where statutory organisations felt that they were delivering an effective response to issues, the value of having specialist partners to draw on was highlighted, particularly with respect to one-to-one casework - *"they bring an independent role – there is massive distrust of the police and they often don't want to know social services either. Voluntary sector people with the right specialist knowledge can take a vital role with young people that can't be filled even by a really skilled person in the statutory services."* (police force)

Parents and children also commented on the importance of having specialist support from someone independent and with the right attributes to enable engagement, reflected by one mother who explained, *"My son has taken on a black victim mentality, taught to him by the gang members. 80 or so police officers have tried to engage with him and social services and youth workers have been hopeless. The only way that he would engage is with a guy who's lived that life. That worker (voluntary sector specialist caseworker) was credible – he had the right demeanour, dress and language. After four sessions, things are going really well."*

The evaluation of St Giles Trust county lines pilot casework support in Kent and London highlights the unique and valuable role that a specialist caseworker provides. The full evaluation report provides the detailed assessment of the pilot to date. A summary of the key points includes:

Casework support is enabling children who are entrenched in county lines activity to begin to exit and make positive choices to re-engage with education, statutory services, healthier activities and family relationships. Key success factors include:

- **The 'lived experience' and cultural competence** that gives them the credibility with children, enables relationships of trust and mutual respect to be established, and helps to increase understanding and awareness for parents and for other professionals:
 - Child:** *"I know she speaks the truth because she's done things too"*
 - Mother:** *"she connects with him on a level that I can't because she's been there and he knows it, and she can help him to get himself out of it."*

Social Worker: *“She’s established relationships with complex kids that we’ve really struggled with. They disclose more, and more quickly which means that we can get the intervention going sooner and avoid them getting more entrenched.”* (social worker)

- **Specialist experience in supporting vulnerable children involved in county lines activity.** Importantly, caseworkers have an in depth understanding of the risks to life faced by children involved in, or trying to exit county lines, particularly with regard to drug debt. Their expertise in contextual safeguarding and the trauma informed approach is invaluable.
- **Supporting the family** (generally mother or main carer) as well as the child
- **Dedication and tenacity** – to keep working to engage children (and families) who are completely disengaged and often actively hostile to statutory services.
- **Flexibility** – to take support to the child and to adapt the style, intensity and nature of support to meet individual need.
- **Openness and teamwork with statutory services**, maintaining the confidentiality of the relationship with the child whilst facilitating better engagement with services, more effective safeguarding
- **A clearly defined and independent role** that is complementary to those of the various statutory services
- **‘Serious casework approach’**, working in partnership with other voluntary sector and private services that can offer sport, leisure, training, addiction support, housing and other provision as appropriate.
- **Cost savings and value for money:**
Kent Police has estimated that the casework is providing significant cost savings. Kent Police estimate that, based on a cohort of 27 children, there is a saving of £271,253 over 6 months from reductions in missing episodes. This doesn’t take into account savings for wider police and other services – social services, YOT etc., including savings on secure accommodation and out of area placement.

The pilot of Missing People’s SafeCall service demonstrates a similar range of highly effective attributes in terms of workers taking an independent role that ensures confidentiality, close partnership working with statutory sector professionals, supporting family members and tenacity in making initial contact. In the words of mothers supported through the SafeCall service:

“She let me talk and she listened. It didn’t matter what I talked about. It was fantastic. You can’t do that with social services. I needed someone I could just talk things through with, without being judged. She (worker) picked me up and made me stronger at a point when I didn’t think I could be.”

“I needed that person (SafeCall worker). It was really good to have someone independent from the authorities who understood what it was all about”.

“She (SafeCall worker) cared about me. She suggested that I talk to my doctor to get some help.”

“My son went missing. He was 14. I called Missing People because he’d been gone for 5 days. I’d done a big campaign and eventually I found out he’d been arrested. When my son came back you’re left in no man’s land – you feel completely lost after the initial flurry of the police and social services; nobody explains how to deal with these things. So I called Missing People and spoke to (the SafeCall worker). He was really, really good. He understood what was happening, he was independent so I could talk to him about everything and he gave me really good reassurance. People were pulling me in all directions, giving me their advice and opinions. He told me to go with my gut feeling and that was really helpful.”

SafeCall workers have provided effective support to mediate between parents and statutory services whilst maintaining strong relationships of trusts with the parents and young people that they have supported.

A full appraisal of both the St Giles Trust casework and Missing People’s SafeCall services is presented in the linked evaluation report.

There are a small number of experienced and skilled organisations that provide services for children and young people involved in serious youth violence and/or gang activities. These include Safer London (London), Abianda (London), Catch 22 (London, Liverpool, Wolverhampton, Bristol) and Redthread (London, Nottingham and Birmingham). This is not an exhaustive list and there are other organisations delivering valuable services, mostly in larger cities.

Some of the children that all of these services work with will be involved in county lines and their significant backgrounds in youth violence and gangs work provides a good skills and knowledge base for effective delivery. The named organisations and others work in a variety of partnerships, including with St Giles Trust and Missing People.

Whilst there is some provision outside of London, it appears patchy, even in the larger cities. Some smaller youth violence/gangs service are very effective at engaging children in their services, including through informal mentoring, but their remit may not be to provide the long term, in-depth casework that provides sustained movement into positive lifestyles.

The MOPAC funded county lines service due to start in summer 2018, involving Safer London, St Giles Trust and Abianda, will help provide greater capacity, including for London children arrested/found out of their home area. However, this will not address the urgent need in other parts of the country.

In addition, whilst all services are vulnerable to an ever more stringent funding environment, some of these services are under imminent threat of closure due to lack of funding, including one which was due to close at the end of March 2018. Sustainable funding for specialist casework is vital because it is not a short term intervention. On average, a child may need to be supported for 12 months. Clearly, if the funding available is only for this, or a shorter length of time, it will not be sufficient to enable the kinds of positive progress and outcomes that can really help children exit county lines.

A number of micro services and other providers may use informal mentoring to support children. Mentoring can be a very useful tool, especially where the mentor has lived experience, good training and supervision from a paid member of staff. That said, there is a significant difference between mentoring and casework. The latter involves a flexible yet rigorous range of work with a child/young person that includes significant planning, target setting, review, advocacy and liaison with a range of other services as required. Many children will require casework of varying intensity, and the

involvement of mentoring support can be very helpful in maximising the effectiveness of the casework.

Specialist phone service

Missing People has particular expertise in the ‘missing episodes’ element of county lines activity, common to many children being criminally exploited, enabling the organisation to develop the SafeCall phone service. Most respondents taking part in the scoping research did not highlight a phone service as a priority, however, a group of young people on the edge of involvement in county lines activity did feel a confidential phone service would be very helpful. Young people felt that other more ‘generalist’ phone support such as Childline wouldn’t be able to provide what they would need. Comparing the Childline and Missing People websites, it seems that the latter would be much more likely to engage a young person involved in county lines activity to make a call. In addition, mothers were particularly keen to have access to information through phone, web or any other means.

There isn’t another specialist phone service of this type being offered and it is clearly of value to those parents, professionals and children that have participated in the pilot. SafeCall also has the key advantage of national coverage, enabling children and parents to at least have access to some information and support in areas where there are no specialist services.

The pilot has identified that whilst children are reluctant to engage with a phone service, family members, mainly mothers, are finding it very useful, as are the professionals that the SafeCall staff liaise with. The proportion of parents and carers making use of the SafeCall service, the absence of any specialist phone support of this type and the significant number of requests for support received by St Giles Trust, Missing People and other organisations from the parents of children involved in county lines, indicates that phone and web based services for family members could be very helpful.

As well as offering much needed support, a specialist phone service has the potential to offer very helpful referral to appropriate face-to-face provision that can continue the support to enable children to exit county lines activity. Of course, there would need to be much wider national availability of specialist casework services for this to work in practice.

CSE specialisms are helpful but not directly transferable

There are some third sector organisations that have long and distinguished track records of working with children who are abused, particularly through CSE. This is extremely valuable work at which they are skilled. However, whilst they are skilled at delivering support to this group of exploited children, their experience and skills sets would need to be widened to provide the type of help that county lines affected children need – *“CSE is one thing, and we all have a much better understanding of that and the risks to the child, but county lines is something else. I know that we’ve needed to learn much more about it, and that we don’t have any organisations locally that have that level of understanding at the moment.”* (youth intervention team)

Delivering services to this group, or providing advice and guidance to professionals/organisations without the necessary training and cultural competence in respect of county lines may be ineffective. More seriously, it could potentially result in increased risks to the child if the worker

does not have an in depth understanding of county lines involvement and its inherent risks to the children, their family member and staff involved in supporting them to exit.

Specialist training may enable these organisations to deliver safely and effectively, but would need to be accompanied by the necessary cultural competence and/or lived experience of staff and whole organisation knowledge specific to criminal exploitation of children involved in county lines.

Micro providers

There are a number of very small ‘micro’ services for those involved in gangs (and possibly county lines). Typically, these are established by one person who has been very seriously affected, often through the murder of a child or relative. They have the lived experience and cultural competence that can be so powerful in reaching children who are entrenched, and in explaining to statutory and other services the viewpoint of family members and communities.

These providers deliver very valuable support in a local area, including informal mentoring, raising awareness and mobilising the community. This can be very helpful alongside other services such as casework and statutory services. In addition, the people involved in delivering micro services are often not constrained by the frameworks and processes used by other services (including the voluntary sector). This can have benefits in terms of engagement in the community, but may also have drawbacks in delivering a consistent and balanced offer. Bringing such services and individuals under the umbrella of a statutory service, for example, a youth offending team, or a larger third sector organisation with the relevant expertise, may be helpful. This approach has been identified in one area involved in the scoping research and may well be being used more widely.

Schools awareness programmes and training for professionals

Training for professionals in statutory and voluntary sector organisations and awareness raising sessions in schools was also highlighted by statutory services (police, social/children’s services, youth offending) and parents as *“really important in terms of trying to prevent young people from getting involved in the first place”*, as well as *“spotting the early signs of involvement and knowing what to do about it”*.

As with one-to-one services to support children, there is a range of school/college packages designed to help children gain greater awareness of grooming, CSE, gangs, drugs and other dangers. These include drama-based approaches, PHSE resources and a number of small ‘consultancies’ offering awareness raising sessions. Reports from contributors highlight that these vary in specialist focus, quality and effectiveness. Some appear to be particularly powerful, especially where delivered by individuals with lived experience who have particular credibility and traction with sometimes resistant and disengaged children.

Training for professionals again includes a wide variety of offers of varying effectiveness. In common with awareness raising for children, professionals training has enhanced impact when delivered by those with lived experience and cultural competence – *“your experience, your training, the way you delivered, your energy, your style, your language, your story, your journey was totally amazing”* (recipient of training) For organisations and individuals that may find ideas such as the vulnerability of children involved in county lines difficult to accept, this type of first hand experience delivered through training can help to tackle such cultural barriers and potential stereotyping.

A trainer who was previously involved in county lines for over 4 years was observed presenting to large group of police officers. They were able to ask a whole range of questions about how and why she became involved, and how and when she would have wanted the police to help her, enabling them to take away practical strategies for being more aware of county lines involved children and how to help them.

It is also very helpful for those delivering training to have an understanding of the processes and structures that professionals (teachers, social workers, YOT workers) work with and the challenges that they face in trying to support children involved with county lines. This *“means that they understand the world that we need to operate in and they can help us make the processes that we need to use more effective for the young people.”* (social services)

A very powerful short film has recently been produced giving a dramatic illustration of what it means to be involved in a county line, including the trauma and violence involved in being a runner and the grim experience of a trap house. Used as part of a wider session with professionals, the film could clearly play a role in raising awareness of the issues, dangers and vulnerabilities faced by children. It could also have a huge impact for children but because of the nature of the film, would need very careful contextualisation and a high level of specialist support available post showing.

How could specialist capacity be built?

There is clearly a need for more specialist services, particularly but not exclusively outside of London. Three ways in which additional capacity could be built include:

- * Providing high quality, specialist training for voluntary sector organisations, using experienced trainers with specialist knowledge and lived experience
- * Specialist caseworkers working alongside workers who need to develop the specialist knowledge and skills to provide peer to peer learning. This would probably need to also include an element of training
- * the St Giles Trust Peer Advisor model training in which people with lived experience are provided with a sector standard NVQ Level 3 Advice and Guidance training programme, enabling them to become professionally qualified volunteer Peer Advisors who can support vulnerable children involved in county lines activity. This professionalised volunteer training programme is the method by which a number of paid St Giles Trust caseworkers have become members of staff. This pipeline model could eventually provide paid workers with this expertise to build capacity in areas with no similar services, at the same time helping some of those previously affected to move into positive careers. Early indications from the evaluation are that Peer Advisors are able to provide effective support, including with challenging cases such as a child heavily involved in county lines who has needed to be placed out of area for his own protection.

Where specialist organisations such as St Giles Trust and Redthread are developing their services in areas where they have not previously had a presence, key success factors include developing positive partnerships with local organisations (statutory and voluntary sector) and ensuring that workers are familiar with the local area. This enables services to be embedded effectively and have credibility with children, their families and other professionals, avoiding the potential risk of *“being seen as parachuting in from London”*.

Franchising is another option, but poses risks in terms of ensuring quality, robustness and effectiveness, particularly with such a challenging and high risk client group.

Moving forward – developing a nationally consistent response

There are serious and increasing challenges posed by county lines and the criminal exploitation of children. Against this backdrop, statutory sector agencies in a number of areas appear to be making progress in developing responses, working differently and recognising the need to learn more about this complex area of crime and vulnerability. Added to this, pilot projects are providing very helpful learning on what works in helping children to exit this activity.

Drawing on this progress and learning, the following recommendations are intended to help move forward with a nationally consistent, evidence based response.

- Continue to pilot and evaluate the St Giles Trust specialist county lines casework service in Kent, London and South Wales, sharing the learning from these pilots to help inform national and local development.
- Consider how specialist one-to-one casework services can be established, particularly outside of London and in high areas of need, ensuring that commissioned services include:
 - Caseworkers with lived experience of/cultural competence with county lines activity.
 - Close partnership working with statutory services including police, youth offending, children/adolescent services, early help and other relevant teams. This should include robust information sharing protocols.
 - Partnership between voluntary sector services to make best use of local knowledge, resources and specialisms.
- Given the cost savings that specialist casework can provide, potential funders such as the PCCs, Local Authorities and others should consider providing funding, ensuring that there is sufficient funding for the length of intervention required for real change (around 12 months) and that funding solutions are able to support children regardless of their home area.
- Continue to pilot and evaluate Missing People’s SafeCall service, with a view to it providing national coverage phone support and information for children involved in county lines and their family members. Develop supported referral routes to St Giles Trust and other available specialist services for any children that do engage with the phone service.
- Consider light touch peer to peer organisational exchange/mentoring opportunities to enable learning more about each other’s approaches and developments, including for:
 - Raising awareness of the nature, extent and impact of county lines activity
 - Accurately identifying vulnerability and county lines involvement
 - Internal joining up across teams and specialisms
 - Appropriate and easy to implement information sharing
 - Effective partnership working with voluntary sector specialists
 - Engaging vital health, housing and education partners

- Introduce training for professionals (statutory and voluntary sector), delivered by specialists with lived experience, to enable staff to:
 - Understand the vulnerabilities of and risks to children who are involved and act accordingly, including with respect to drug debt
 - Develop contextual safeguarding and trauma informed approaches
- Provide specialist support for children referred to the NRM to enable them to be helped to exit safely and effectively the criminal exploitation in which they have been involved.
- Review the current arrangements and lack of regulation for accommodation for those aged 16 and over, including introducing some form of regulation and inspection.
- Review the current position regarding making out of area placements of children, including the arrangements for ensuring that all relevant agencies are made aware of these placements, especially where there are significant risk factors including county lines, CSE etc.
- Identify how academies and PRUs can address the issue of exclusions, including very long term exclusion, and lack of engagement of children in the education provided. Consider how the Ofsted inspection framework could include assessment of exclusions and incentives to ensure that pupils are able to maintain engagement with mainstream education wherever possible.

Terry: how a child can become entrenched in a county line and potential points of exit

This example is a ‘composite’ of a number of different real case studies of boys involved in county lines activities outside of London. It identifies a small number of the events over a 7 year period of Terry’s life, indicating where there might have been moments where he might have been diverted from becoming involved in county lines, and, once involved, receptive to being helped to moving away from the activity. The suggested interventions and organisations best placed to deliver them are what would ideally be in place at the various pivotal points, working with Terry **and** his family. If Terry had been able to access any of those services, the story would probably have taken a different, more positive path.

Age	What’s happening in Terry’s life	Potential reachable and teachable moments	Interventions that might be effective and agency/organisation best placed to deliver
10 - 11	<p>Terry has a younger sister Lucy aged 7. They live in a modest but comfortable home in a town about an hour’s drive from London. Terry is doing well at primary school. His English and Maths are average, he enjoys geography, is a keen swimmer and has good friendships with his peers. Mum works part time as a receptionist in a local garage. Dad is a mechanic and lives nearby with his new partner. He sees the children, but the new partner doesn’t like Terry.</p> <p>Terry starts at the local academy that has three ‘feeder’ primary schools. The first year goes well but then Terry’s two best friends from his primary school begin to get in with a group of boys from a ‘rival’ primary. They are known to the police and Terry doesn’t want to get involved.</p>	<p>Feeling uncomfortable about what is happening at school.</p>	<p>Identifying the early signs of isolation and providing pastoral support. Involving parents as appropriate – School pastoral care</p>
12-13	<p>Terry is beginning to be isolated by his old peer group. He’s of mixed heritage, unusual in his school where the kids are <i>“either black or white, so you end up not fitting in anywhere.”</i> He keeps his head down but is feeling increasing lonely, scared of some of the other kids and his work is beginning to suffer. His parents are a bit concerned but think that it’s just <i>“a normal teenage phase that he’ll get over”</i>.</p> <p>On days where he feels really bad, he pretends to be sick. He goes to school one day and is beaten up by a group of boys who make it look like Terry started it. Terry is excluded for two weeks. He truant more and starts to be abusive to teachers. Terry’s dad is furious with him and blames the problems on Terry’s mum being too soft on him.</p> <p>Terry’s mum notices that his behaviour is changing and she’s worried he’s taking drugs but doesn’t know who to speak to as she doesn’t want ‘the authorities’ involved.</p>	<p>When Terry is beginning to feel isolated and bullied.</p> <p>2 week exclusion from school</p>	<p>Identifying and dealing effectively with bullying, advocacy and support for the child - School – teaching/pastoral care</p> <p>Awareness raising sessions in school on gangs, grooming, CCE, county lines, drugs, violence, including options for 1:1 confidential advice – 3rd Sector gangs/county lines specialist</p> <p>Mentoring and support for Terry & family during exclusion. Advocacy with school. – 3rd sector children’s/exclusion specialist and School pastoral care</p> <p>Phone help line for parents/child - advice about</p>

Age	What's happening in Terry's life	Potential reachable and teachable moments	Interventions that might be effective and agency/organisation best placed to deliver
			child's drug use/involvement and what to do - 3 rd Sector drug and/or child specialist
14-15	<p>Terry has met Charlie, 16, at the skate park. Charlie gives him weed which makes him feel sick first, but then he feels good, and Charlie is a laugh and kind to him. After a couple of weeks of meeting up, Charlie takes Terry to meet some friends of his. They chat about how school isn't worth it, it doesn't get you anywhere, and if you don't fit in there it's fine because "we're with you, we've got your back."</p> <p>Terry is caught with weed on him at school and is permanently excluded. He starts going to the PRU, although he's only expected to attend for 2 hours a day. Many of the boys that hang out with Charlie go to the PRU. Terry's hours at the PRU get reduced to a twilight timetable, one hour a day at 4pm, because of disruptive behaviour. The police are aware of Terry and the other boys that he's hanging out with. Charlie has been arrested several times and has one charge of cannabis possession pending.</p>	<p>Permanent exclusion from school</p> <p>Charlie's arrest and charge</p>	<p>PRU based support service, including child and family support, mentoring, group sessions in PRU - PRU and 3rd sector county lines specialist</p> <p>Early help intervention service from police to refer to professionals with specialist county lines training eg: Youth intervention team</p>
	<p>Charlie says that Terry can hang out with him. He buys him food and says he can earn a bit of money selling weed. Terry feels good – like he's got friends and he's earning, not like the others still at school. A couple of weeks later, Charlie says Terry can earn a lot more if he goes up to London to get a package. Terry's a bit unsure – he's never been to London, but Charlie says it's fine – Ade will meet him there. He goes and gets the package, but on the way back to the station he's mugged – his phone and the package get taken (by the line runners but Terry doesn't realise this). He's terrified but manages to find his way back to the house where he was given the package. Ade is furious, shouts and hits him, and leaves him in a room on his own for 2 hours. Then Ade comes back and says it's OK, you're new, let's start again, but this time you need to carry the stuff differently. He and another elder plug Terry with 100 wraps. He is terrified, ashamed, sick, but feels he can't do anything because he needs to make up for his mistake. He returns to the trap house in his home town and starts dealing the wraps.</p>	<p>Fear after violent assault.</p>	<p>Emergency phone support when he can find a call box providing advice/information/supported referral to a specialist provider in his area 3rd sector specialist county lines phone helpline</p> <p>Specialist county lines one-to-one casework support from someone with lived experience/cultural competence – 3rd sector county lines specialist</p>
14-15	<p>Terry's been working on the line for 3 months. He's started to recruit younger boys. Terry's mum is really worried about him. He goes missing for days, sometimes a week. He comes home looking terrible, but he has new clothes and she doesn't know where he gets the money. He won't talk to her at all, and when he speaks, he sounds different – like he's trying to be someone else. The police are aware of Terry and have questioned him at the skate park on a number of occasions and cautioned him. They suspect</p>	<p>Police caution</p>	<p>Missing children phone help line for parents - 3rd sector specialist county lines phone helpline</p> <p>Early help intervention service from police to refer to professionals with specialist</p>

Age	What's happening in Terry's life	Potential reachable and teachable moments	Interventions that might be effective and agency/organisation best placed to deliver
	<p>his involvement in county lines but are trying to prioritise catching the bigger fish and don't currently have enough evidence to arrest him.</p> <p>Then Terry goes missing for 3 weeks. His mum gets a call to say he's in hospital about 200 miles away. He's been stabbed, arrested and had 50 wraps confiscated, and is very scared about coming back home because of what the line might do next. He's really worried for his sister Lucy – they've made threats about her. Terry's mum goes to get him from hospital and brings him home.</p> <p>Terry is £1,000 in debt to one line and has been working on a rival line, and they found out which is why he was stabbed. He has a complete melt down and wants to stop doing it but doesn't know how he can get himself out – they'll kill him if he tries and nobody understands the risks he faces. The police are making further investigations and Terry thinks he might be seen as a grass, putting him in further danger. He has been referred to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and is assessed as meeting the threshold for support as a child in need. He refuses to meet his social worker (from the adolescent team) and makes sure he's out whenever she's due to visit.</p> <p>After 3 weeks at home with no retribution and feeling better, he has decided that he wants to keep working on the line – to pay off the debt, make a bit of money and then stop. Terry's mum then finds two knives and some wraps in his bedroom – she's terrified and she reports it to the police. They question Terry and add to his charge sheet.</p> <p>Terry is now repeatedly going missing for 2 or more weeks at a time. Social services have escalated his case to child protection but Terry's unwillingness to engage means that there's little they can do. The new social worker, who isn't part of the adolescent team, feels that it's beyond her experience and finds it difficult to know what she can do apart from make sure that she's complying with the child protection legislation. The police feel Terry needs to be put into secure accommodation because they can't think of any other way of stopping him from going missing.</p>	<p>Arrest</p> <p>Hospitalisation</p> <p>Return home</p> <p>Referral to MASH</p> <p>Arrest</p> <p>Child Protection Plan</p>	<p>county lines training eg: Youth intervention team</p> <p>National Referral Mechanism – police</p> <p>But for NRM to be effective, it would need to include specialist support from specialist social services working in partnership with 3rd sector county lines specialist casework service, accessed through presence in the A&E department, linked to ongoing support in the community and able to provide support for the return home.</p> <p>Specialist social services, with one 'trusted worker' through all social services processes, working in partnership with specialist county lines one-to-one casework support from someone with lived experience/cultural competence – 3rd sector county lines specialist</p>
16	<p>Terry is in secure accommodation away from his home area. He recognises some of the boys in there from other lines. He manages to get a phone and keeps in touch with his line. They're not happy with him and he's scared about what's going to happen. He loses touch with his mum and sister – "it's just too hard."</p> <p>Terry's case finally comes up in court and he's sentenced to 10 months in a youth offending institution (YOI).</p>	<p>Being put into secure accommodation</p> <p>Custodial sentence</p>	<p>Specialist county lines one-to-one casework support from someone with lived experience/cultural competence, working in the community and in secure settings – 3rd sector county lines specialist</p>

Age	What's happening in Terry's life	Potential reachable and teachable moments	Interventions that might be effective and agency/organisation best placed to deliver
16	On arrival in the YOI Terry inherits a 'cell debt' so is immediately under the influence of the group that runs his wing. To repay the debt, he's expected to assault another prisoner. After a tough start he establishes himself as part of the group who runs the wing. His county lines experience earns him some respect and he gets friendly with lads from other areas who have had similar experiences.	Arriving at the YOI Incidents in the YOI	Good induction and safeguarding. Use of Listeners, 'first time in custody wings', effective anti-bullying culture. YOI Support from a specialist YOI based worker 3 rd sector county lines specialist
16	Terry is approaching release and doesn't know what will happen next. His YOT worker hasn't attended the three way meetings to discuss his resettlement. His mum and Lucy have moved because they were so worried about being attacked by the line/gang members and his mum is reluctant to have Terry living with them because of him bringing 'danger to our home' and because she's worried he'll just get back in with the gang. After one bad visit from his dad, Terry and he aren't talking and his dad hasn't been back in touch. His dad's partner doesn't want anything to do with Terry.	Pre-release planning	Effective cross agency pre-release planning, including mediation and support with family members. – YOT, Social Services and 3 rd sector county lines specialist.
17	Terry spends his 17 th birthday in the YOI. No-one comes to see him. He's scared and angry. He kicks off and assaults an officer. After a period of segregation, he's moved to another YOI, 200 miles away, 4 weeks from his release. His YOT worker hasn't been able to get to see him and the YOI has been struggling with a serious outbreak of violence. On the day of his release there is no accommodation in place for him, and the YOI are trying to get a YOT worker or social worker to help. Terry is directed to go and see the local YOT team, but he's sick of the authorities and makes a call to one of his old associates.....	Incidents in the YOI Disciplinary action in the YOI Release from YOI	Effective mental health/emotional support from Listeners and/or health service – YOI Effective specialist support on release – YOT/Social Services Meet at the gates support from a specialist caseworker 3 rd sector county lines specialist

Sources

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A range of sources not available in the public domain including county lines mapping and data sets, local strategic county lines profiles and plans, and data gathered as part of the linked evaluation of pilot activity.