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INFORMATION BRIEFING

This is produced by the BSCB to help professionals, community members and volunteers understand how we respond to Exploitation so that together we can continuously improve practice and our response to Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults.

This briefing addresses three areas:

- What Criminal Exploitation is;
- What is your responsibility;
- What you should do.



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PRACTICE REPOSE TO CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

WHAT IS CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION?

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

KEY TERMS

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

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

Children and young people are also expected to support the recruitment of other young people into the gang/group. These individuals are at serious risk

PRACTICE TIPS

Focus on supporting families of children and young people to provide a sense of belonging

Target families with no father or male present

Target families of children and young people who go missing

Provide interventions to families where there is domestic violence

Provide support to parents of adolescents where there is a risk of family breakdown

Provide opportunities for young people involved / at risk of exploitation to participate in group activities

Prioritise and make use of existing youth and community development organisations and initiatives alongside individual and family focused interventions

of criminalisation, sexual exploitation and exposure to violence. Criminal exploitation, like other forms of abuse and exploitation, is a safeguarding concern and constitutes abuse **even if** the person appears to have readily become involved.

Clean skins’ / ‘tinys’ are young people that are groomed usually from middle class backgrounds, who do not have an existing criminal record or have not attracted the attention of police or security forces, but are vulnerable due to bereavement, domestic discord etc.

Organised Crime involves an organised criminal group of individuals normally led by adults for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise).

Sexual Exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. People in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them. People may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed and exploited online.

Modern Slavery & Trafficking is when people are being exploited using the county lines model to transport and sell more than drugs. Weapons, sex and money are also being traded in this way and if they are victims of trafficking professionals should report concerns to the [National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\)](#) to ensure victims receive the appropriate support. See also [SWCPP Trafficked Children](#).

If the young person/ vulnerable adult appears to be **‘going ops’** (going oppositional to the gang/group) then they are made to evidence that they will correct their behaviour quickly e.g. spend more time with the gang or not attend school. If the gang/group become concerned that young person / vulnerable adult appears to be ‘going ops’ then there is an explicit threat of being **‘banged’**. This can vary from threats to be beaten or in more extreme cases stabbed. There can also be indirect threats to harm family members too.

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

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

Contextual Safeguarding seeks to understand the risks beyond the family. It extends the capacity to safeguard from the home to the neighbourhood, and other places where children and vulnerable adults spend their time, including schools and colleges. Contextual Safeguarding theory considers the dynamic ‘interplay’ between the child, family, peers, school, and neighbourhood; and the ‘weight of influence’ presented by the attitude of their peers. Those seeking to safeguard young people therefore need to assess and intervene in these places.

PRACTICE TIPS

Practitioners may prioritise signposting young people who are NEET towards education, training and employment opportunities

Recognise that not all employment opportunities offer young people sufficient money, status or sense of belonging – some young people in employment may therefore benefit from signposting to alternative opportunities to gain these benefits

Acknowledge that young people may possess the capacity to make choices and act according to self interest

Acknowledge that young people who become involved in exploitation may be seeking friendships, belonging, approval, excitement, money and status.

“As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse, or exploitation from outside their families.” Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR?

There signs we can look out for, which could be (non exhaustive):

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

CONTACT

If you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of harm contact 999 or if a non-emergency call 101.

If you are worried about a child contact First Response on **0117 903 6444** or complete an [online form](#)

For out of hours service call the Emergency Duty Team on 01273 335905

For an Adult with care and support needs who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse and neglect, contact [Care Direct](#) on 0117 922 2700

Any agency is encouraged to share information as intelligence with the police especially where there are concerns in relation to Child Exploitation by calling 101 (for non urgent calls, 999 if an emergency). It should be made clear that the information being shared is for intelligence purposes.

WHAT SHOULD OUR RESPONSE BE?

“Contextual Safeguarding ... means assessment of children should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child’s life, that are a threat to their safety, and/or welfare ... so, it’s important that schools and colleges provide as much information as possible as part of the referral process.” [Keeping Children Safe in Education, \(2018\).](#)

We need to assess children across the Continuum of Need and appropriately respond at each level. The [Bristol Multi Agency Threshold Guidance](#) is the framework for all those who work with children and families to provide early help and targeted and specialist support for children, young people, their families and carers.

Similarly, if an Adult with care and support needs is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect and can’t protect themselves from abuse or neglect because of their care and support needs then a safeguarding referral must be made to [Care Direct](#).

Operation Topaz has been established in Bristol in which specialist leadership and direction is provided to investigations to maximise the potential for positive outcomes and provide a problem solving and proactive approach that disrupts child exploitation. The activity that is undertaken focuses on the three core principles of: Intelligence processing, assessment and prioritisation; Victim Identification and Engagement; Disruption of child exploitation offenders until such time as a disclosure is secured and investigation initiated. The Police require close communication and co-operation from agencies to help protect individual young people and end the activities of perpetrators. The police in general rely heavily on partner organisations in the sharing of background information on victims, suspects and vulnerable young people so that informed decisions on joint action can be made.

Operational Gang & Street Conflict Strategy Implementation Group

The group maps and reviews current gangs’ activities in the city and the delivery structure of the [Bristol Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy](#). It is responsible for: Gang Involvement and Youth Violence work from a Safeguarding perspective; Sharing of information about the risks and threats individuals face from being drawn into street crime involving gangs, guns and knives; Participation in the work plan produced to mitigate those risks; Involving partners, including community partners, in the support and delivery of the strategic priorities.

The government also offers guidance for frontline professionals on dealing with County Lines exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. This is part of the government’s approach to ending gang violence and exploitation.

[Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines](#)

For local Guidance
access [Bristol South
West Child Protection
Procedures](#)



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USEFUL CONTACTS

Full Circle @Docklands exists to provide support to a currently diverse community to enhance life opportunities and to raise aspiration through access to a wide range of services, activities and advice delivered in a holistic way. They promote social inclusion and community cohesion in all aspects of their work, with families' voices and opinions to influence positive change in St Pauls and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Growing Futures deliver small group sessions to young people identified as being at risk of (or engaged in) gang/criminal activity. Full Circle and ACE will work with Growing Futures and NIIaari to identify young people in need and referrals from Families in Focus and Social care Units.

St Pauls Adventure Playground (APE): Team Teen Tuesdays @ St Pauls- APG Working in partnership with ACE, Empire Fighting Chance, Off the Record, Full Circle, Bristol City Council and Imayla – This project is for 11-16 year olds particularly targeting young people who are at risk of being involved in gangs and street violence.

St Pauls Consortium: Outreach work: Community Engagement Days: one session per week (From 2 till 6 every Sunday afternoon).

Horn Youth Concern: This organisation offers Sports sessions with qualified local coaches in football and basketball, Workshops – healthy relationships, Drug & Alcohol awareness, bullying, knife crime & Street conflict/Gang awareness in partnership with Albaseera Bristol Centre and Talo initiative. This project also links in with Full Circle to organise a football tournament at the end of the summer.