

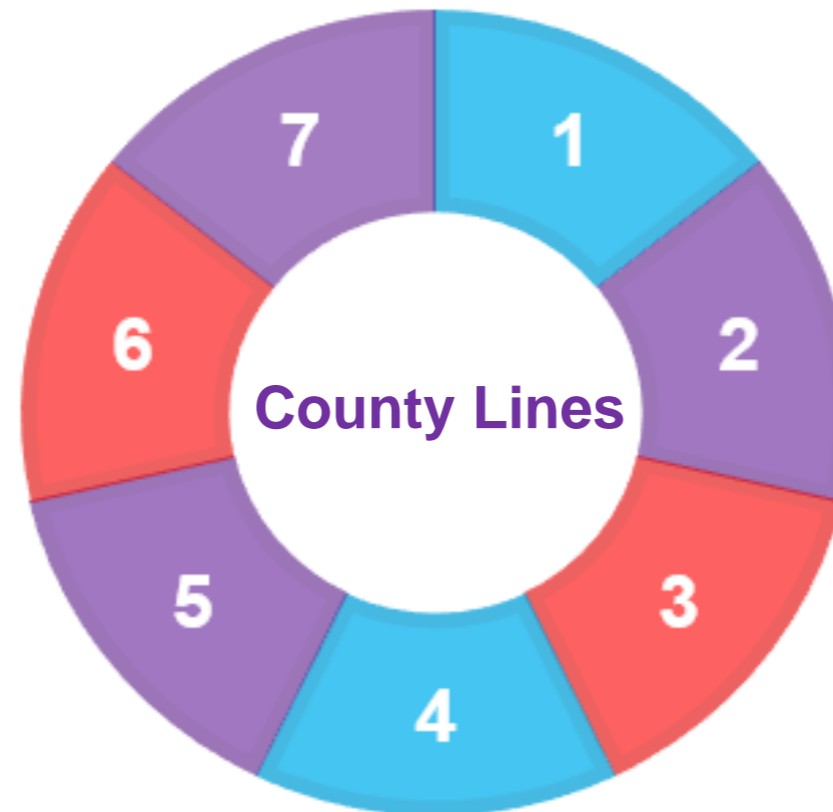
7 MINUTE BRIEFING

County Lines



**KNOWSLEY
SAFEGUARDING
ADULTS BOARD**

PREVENTION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP



1. What is County Lines?

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in transporting illegal drugs from one area to another and is often across police and local authority boundaries.

It is called county lines because dealers use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs. The criminals often exploit vulnerable adults to move and store drugs/ money and regularly use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons to get what they want.

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing, and exploitation has a devastating impact on vulnerable adults and local communities.

2. Controlling the victim

Even if it appears that the person has agreed to be involved, county lines activity can still be exploitation. It can consist of force and/or threats or acts of violence as well as offering goods in return for compliance.

Vulnerable adults who use drugs, are in financial difficulty or have mental health problems are at greatest risk of being exploited by county lines gangs. These adults are groomed through offers of 'free' drugs, causing them to accumulate debts which can only be paid off by participating in county lines activities (also known as debt bondage).

Sometimes drug dealers will take over the home of a vulnerable person – this is known as cuckooing.

3. Vulnerable Factors

Vulnerability factors for country lines victims can include:

- Previous experience of neglect, physical and / or sexual abuse, either as a child or adult
- Unsafe or unstable home or homelessness
- Social isolation or difficulties in forming relationships
- Lack of stable or regular income
- Physical or learning disabilities
- Mental health or substance misuse issues – Class A drug users are often targeted as their lifestyles leave them vulnerable to exploitation, particularly in relation to gangs taking over their accommodation.
- History of social care involvement

4. Signs to look for

Some signs to look out for include:

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- Change in person's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Unexplained injuries
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets

7. Further information

Read the [full guidance](#) for more detailed information on County Lines exploitation.

[County Lines - National Crime Agency](#)

6. What to do if you have concerns

If you believe a vulnerable person may be at risk from county lines exploitation raise a concern by completing the [referral form](#). If you believe a person is in immediate risk of harm, you should contact the police.

If you're concerned about drug-related crime in your area or think someone may be a victim of drug exploitation, please call the police on 101. If it's an emergency, please call 999.

If you're in danger but you can't talk on the phone, you should still call 999, then [follow these instructions](#) for silent 999 call depending on whether you're calling from a mobile or a landline.

5. Use of social media

Ways Organised Crime Gangs (OCGs) use social media can include:

- Advertising drugs by sharing photos or videos
- Statuses showing money, new drugs or when the dealer is open for business
- Dealers sharing 'stories' to followers, using social platforms to expand their network with 'suggested' friends
- Using hashtags linked to drugs
- Using emojis as code for drug, violence and sexual activities, eg the snowflake emoji (for buying cocaine), 8-ball emoji (for buying an eighth of an ounce) or the rocket emoji (for purity of drugs)