

Environmental, Communities and Fire Select Committee
7th November 2019
Crime & Disorder Background Report – Exploitation & County Lines
Report by Acting Chief Executive

Summary

This report is presented in accordance with the Community Safety Annual Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder. The ability of partners to respond to exploitation resulting from County Lines is identified as essential to meet existing and future challenges for the Safer West Sussex Partnership in relation to identifying threat, harm, risk and vulnerability across West Sussex.

The focus for scrutiny

The current partnership approach to County Lines, understanding the scale, scope and impact of this form of exploitation and consider whether the partnership response and multi-agency activity is currently effective in addressing the threat, risk and harm posed to individuals and communities in West Sussex.

In particular, that the Committee:

- (1) Considers and comment on the current and proposed partnership approach to tackling exploitation and County Lines.
- (2) Considers opportunities to engage with communities and use of networks to share public messages.
- (3) Encourages training/awareness of exploitation risks for elected councillors at all levels of local government.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 County lines should be considered within the wider context of exploitation rather than as stand alone crime and disorder issue as it includes a range of differing types of exploitative criminal activity (e.g. modern slavery, serious and organised crime, serious violence) and consequentially differing types of harm which can have significant and long lasting impact.
- 1.2 Partners have worked jointly to create a shared ambition for West Sussex to be a county against exploitation. This commitment document was developed through a series of multi-agency co-production workshops as a collaboration between the Health & Wellbeing Board, West Sussex Safeguarding Children

Partnership (WSSCP), West Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board (WSSAB), and Safer West Sussex Partnership (SWSP).

- 1.3 "County Lines" is a term used when drug gangs from big cities expand their operations to smaller towns, often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs.
- 1.4 These dealers will use dedicated mobile phone lines, known as "deal lines", to take orders from drug users. Heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine are the most common drugs being supplied and ordered.
- 1.5 In most instances, the user or customers will live in a different area to where the dealers and networks are based, so drug runners are needed to transport the drugs and collect payment.
- 1.6 A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers frequently target children and adults – often with mental health or addiction problems – to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement.
- 1.7 In some cases dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing. These properties are often referred to as 'trap houses' where the drugs are cut ready to be distributed.
- 1.8 Analysis by the National Crime Agency (NCA) suggests there are over 2000 individual 'deal lines' in the UK linked to over 1000 branded county lines.
- 1.9 The Safer West Sussex Partnership has developed a local response to tackling and disrupting serious and organised crime (SOC) across the county through the development of multi-agency partnership groups aligned to the three policing hubs across West Sussex and overseen by the Partnership Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (PTTCG).
- 1.10 Police and partnership disruption activity and tactics coordinated through our local SOC Partnership Groups in 2018/19 has resulted in the execution of warrants, closure orders, multi-agency days of action against licensed premises and taxi companies, work with youth groups and schools, liaison around rehousing of residents, joint safeguarding visits to cuckooed properties, stop and search, high visibility patrols and public and social media engagement.
- 1.11 County lines intensification weeks take place throughout the year. These weeks include police operations, partnership safeguarding activity and public media campaigns under the branding 'FORTRESS' to raise awareness of county lines to increase identification of risks and promote reporting. There have been three intensification weeks in 2019 with the most recent taking place in October.
- 1.12 In 2017 this Select Committee supported the development of a community intelligence partnership approach in West Sussex. A trial took place of 'direct input' of intelligence from partners under the various County and District Community Safety Partnerships and the three SOC Groups.

- 1.13 This has provided a route for professionals and partners to submit intelligence directly to the police. Training for professionals was facilitated by staff from the WSCC Community Safety and Wellbeing Team.
- 1.14 To date over 350 intelligence logs have been submitted relating to crimes including drugs, modern slavery, exploitation, cuckooing and firearms. These intelligence submissions have directly resulted in the safeguarding of young people and adults as well as criminal investigations.
- 1.15 The Community Safety & Wellbeing Service has delivered County Lines Awareness Training since April 2018. Participation levels now exceed over 750 professionals from partnership organisations (including mental health services, D&B's, Schools, WSF&RS, A&E staff & Safeguarding Nurses). These sessions have increased awareness within partner agencies about county line drug supply and cuckooing.
- 1.16 The Youth Offending Service (YOS) management board has funded 3 training sessions on child criminal exploitation and gangs with Junior Smart from St Giles Trust and founder of the SOS Gangs project.
- 1.17 The Crawley Community Safety Partnership and Crawley and Mid Sussex Serious and Organised Crime Partnership Group have arranged the Safer Crawley Schools Event to be held in November to deliver a workshop to 1,300 Year 9 pupils which will cover building resilience to criminal exploitation by gangs & county lines to be delivered in partnership with St Giles Trust.
- 1.18 Community Safety and Wellbeing have also led on delivering training for Modern Slavery, including the Modern Slavery Single Point of Contact training for our customer facing services and safeguarding board partners in order to improve practitioners understanding of our statutory duties under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Modern Slavery Basic Awareness Training is now available to all staff via our Learning & Development Gateway.
- 1.19 Children identified as being at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation are referred through MASH and triaged to understand the level of risk. These children are discussed at the weekly Missing and Exploitation Operational Group (MEOG) to ensure that appropriate mitigation is support is identified. Children identified as being most at risk are escalated to the complex safeguarding meeting.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 The Safer West Sussex Partnership will continue to develop new activity to address emerging risks, respond to current threats to individuals and communities by working collaboratively with the newly appointed Sussex Police County Lines Coordinator to ensure that partnership activity remains focussed on tackling the issues associated with county lines exploitation.
- 2.2 Everywhere we go, everything we see, and everyone we meet can have an impact on us and our perception of 'feeling safe'. Moreover, we are all influenced by contexts such as our home environment, who we associate with, where we work/study and our wider neighbourhoods and the communities that we belong to.

- 2.3 Contextual Safeguarding is a concept that draws upon this understanding of 'context' and highlights the importance of using information from a wide range of sources to think about how we can tackle an issue from a different angle or perspective.
- 2.4 The Community Safety and Wellbeing Team will lead the development of a contextual safeguarding approach in West Sussex to Contextual Safeguarding to empower professionals to think beyond individual risk to consider the role other agencies and communities play in safeguarding. Embedded into practice, it can address lower risk and prevent escalation to crisis, reduce fear of crime and improve the local environment and visual quality of an area whilst enabling better communication with communities.
- 2.5 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services are due to publish their County Lines inspection report later this year and the Community Safety and Wellbeing team will support work collaboratively with partners to review and consider any recommendations.

3. Resources

- 3.1 The Partnership Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (TTCG) provides a mechanism that enables partners to access resourcing and expertise.

Factors taken into account

4. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee

- 4.1 The current partnership approach to County Lines, understanding the scale, scope and impact of this form of exploitation and consider whether the partnership response and multi-agency activity is currently effective in addressing the threat, risk and harm posed to individuals and communities in West Sussex.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 This is an information item, consultation was not required.

6. Risk Implications and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
N/A	There are no risk management implications

7. Other Options Considered

- 7.1 This is a scrutiny paper and an information item, therefore not relevant.

8. Equality Duty

- 8.1 No impact.

9. Social Value

9.1 No implications.

10. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 10.1 The Police and Justice Act 2006 brought in powers for Scrutiny to investigate the work being undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). This was a power to look at the work of the partnership as a whole rather than a power to scrutinise individual partners.
- 10.2 The Act requires Local Authorities to designate a committee as a crime and disorder committee with responsibility for the 'responsible authorities' (CSP Partners). The Environmental, communities and Fire Select Committee is the designated Committee to carry out this review annually.

11. Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 The proposal has no implications under the Human Rights Act 1998.

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None