

North Somerset Multi-Agency Adult Safeguarding Procedures



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County lines guidance

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Introduction

Criminal exploitation of children, young people, and adults who draw upon care and support for the supply of drugs, and transportation of the associated money and weapons, has a devastating impact on victims, families and local communities. However, it is often not recognised by those who are best placed to spot it. This guidance is intended to explain the nature of this harm to enable partners to recognise its signs and respond appropriately so that victims and potential victims get the protection and support they need.

What does county lines refer to?

'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 often attempt to exploit children and adults with care and support needs to act as runners to move and store drugs and money. They often use coercion, intimidation, violence including sexual violence and weapons.

County lines gangs target vulnerable people, such as:

- children and young people, who are recruited to deal drugs locally but also moved around the country, usually by train, to deal drugs for gangs
- people who live on their own and/or who are isolated from others
- people living with addiction
- people experiencing poor mental health and/or who have a diagnosed mental health condition
- autistic people
- people with a learning disability
- people with unmanageable debt
- single mothers

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Cuckooing

'Cuckooing' is a method commonly associated with County Lines, where offenders from outside of the area take over the homes of local residents to create bases from

which they supply local drug and/or weapon markets, store money or stolen goods, perpetrate sexual abuse, or simply as a place to sleep. From cases nationally and locally, it is understood that this method can often involve serious violence, coercion and manipulation, often targeting vulnerable people such as people in addiction, single mothers, and people with learning disabilities.

Children and adults with care and support needs may not see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. So, it is important that we all play our part to understand County Lines and speak out if we have concerns.

Spotting the signs

A person involved in County Lines activity may show some of these signs:

- consistently going missing, or being found 'out of area'
- being secretive about who they are talking to
- unexplained possession of money, clothes or mobile phones
- increase in texts or phone calls received
- relationships with controlling individuals, or gang association
- leaving their home without explanation
- suspicion of self-harm, physical assault, or unexplained injuries
- significant changes in routine
- changes in emotional wellbeing and physical presentation
- a person seen in different cars and taxis driven by unknown individuals
- a person who presents as unfamiliar with their community or where they are
- unfamiliar vehicles outside a property and new people in the area who are visiting or moving into the property of a vulnerable person

Reporting concerns

Trust your instincts. Even if someone isn't involved in county lines drug dealing, they may be being exploited in some other way, so it's always worth speaking out.

When reporting county lines or cuckooing, try to provide any:

- names
- addresses or locations

- ages or age ranges of children/adults and groomers/perpetrators
- number plates, makes and models of any vehicles involved
- details as to why you suspect county lines or cuckooing

If you are concerned someone may be a victim of county lines or cuckooing, report it to Avon and Somerset Police:

- online – [fill in their online form to inform them of a suspected crime form](#)
- in person – visit a police station
- anonymously to Crimestoppers – [visit their website](#) or call 0800 555 111

Call **999** if you think someone is in immediate danger.

Additional resources

[Grooming - Runaway Helpline](#)

[Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance](#)

[Understanding County Lines: resources and information | Crimestoppers](#)

[County-Lines-workbook-DIGITAL-compressed.pdf](#)

[County Lines Toolkit For Professionals | The Children's Society](#)

[Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)

[National County Lines Coordination Centre](#)

[What is Cuckooing? - Ann Craft Trust](#)