

## Child Criminal Exploitation

### Overview Description

#### What is Child Criminal Exploitation?

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:

- In exchange for something the victim needs or wants
- For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator
- Through violence or the threat of violence

The victim may have been criminal exploited even if the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (Home Office, 2018).

CCE is a broad term and is often a feature in other stand-alone operations such as modern slavery and human trafficking. Some examples of CCE are:

children being coerced into selling and transporting drugs in county lines operations

children being forced to work in cannabis factories

children being forced to shoplift or pickpocket

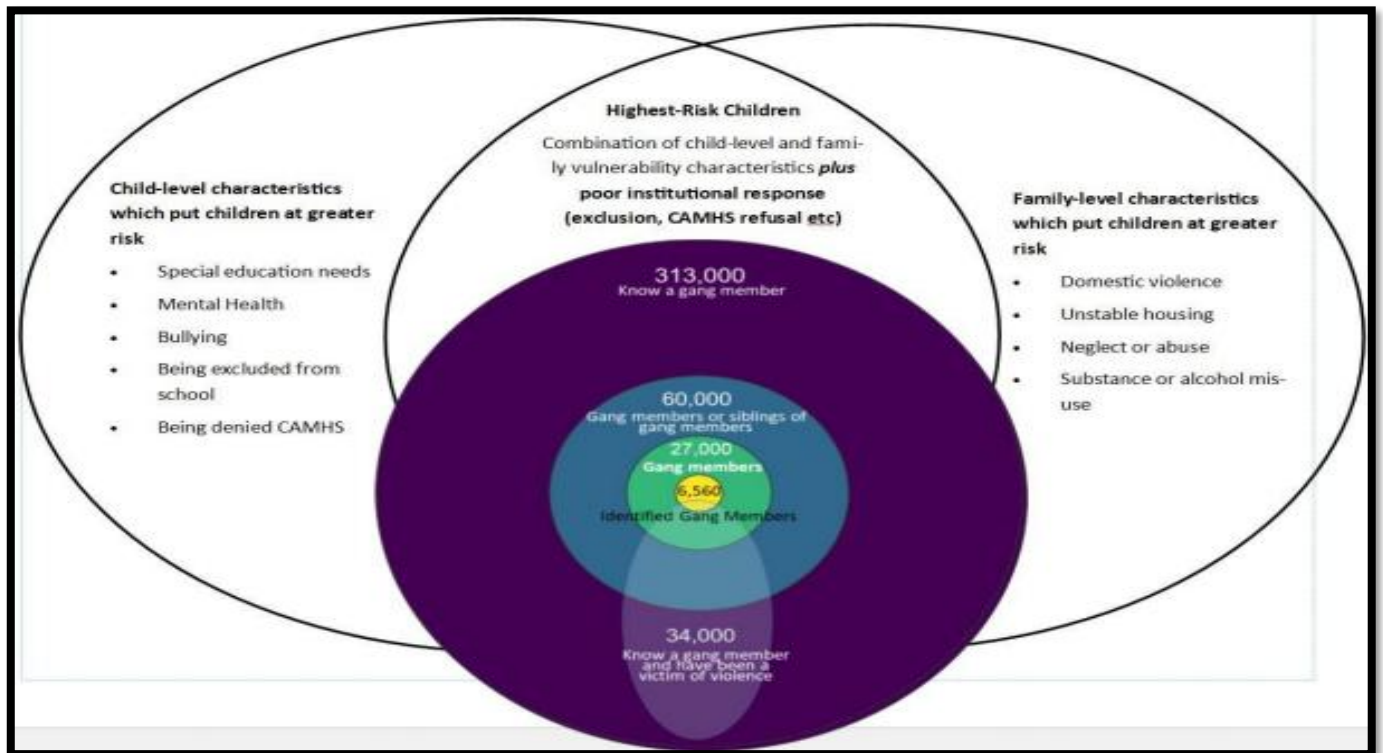
children being forced to work as child soldiers

children being forced to threaten or harm other people

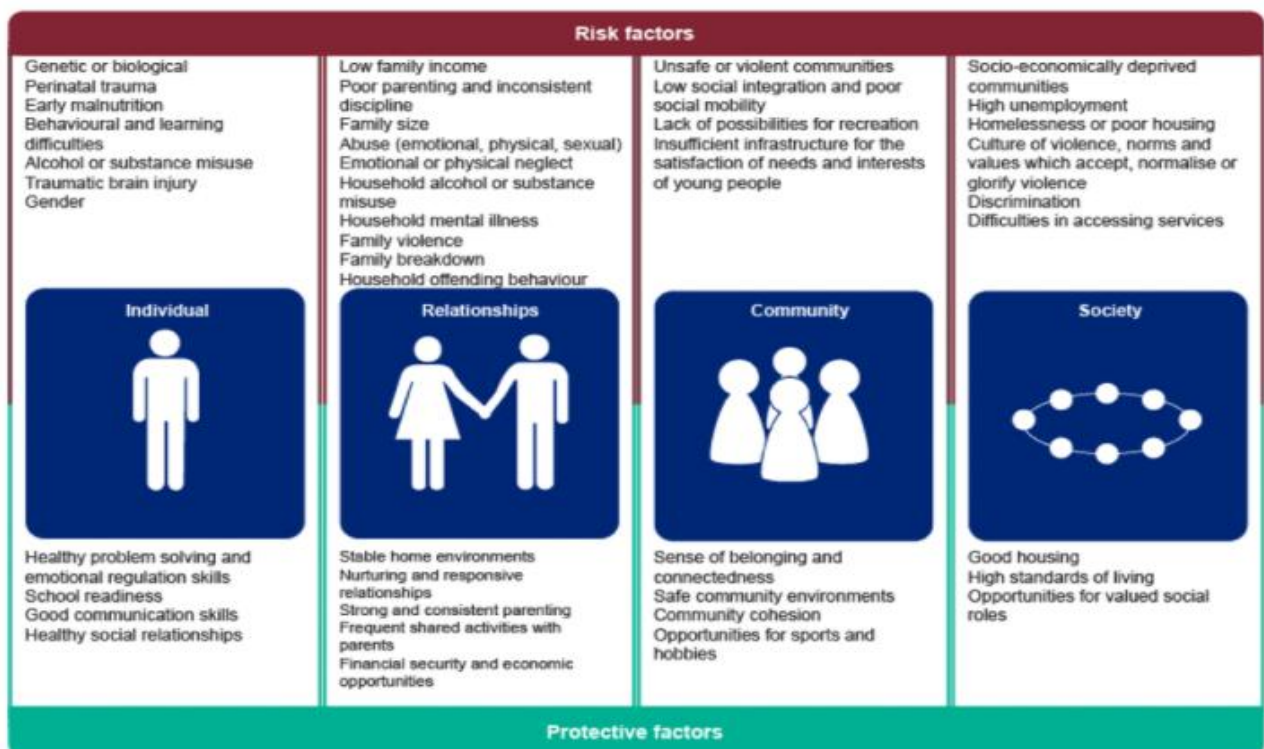
The criminal exploitation of children includes a combination of:

- **Pull factors**: children performing tasks for others resulting in them gaining accommodation, food, gifts, status, money, drugs, or a sense of safety, belonging and affection.
- **Push factors**: disruptive and unsafe home environments (including drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence etc); child needs being neglected (e.g. lack of belonging and no primary attachment figure), lack of support network
- **Control**: children can be controlled through brain-washing, violence and threats of violence, grooming, supplying an addiction, emotional and physical abuse

**Who are the children most at risk?** Any child can be at risk of exploitation but some vulnerabilities place children at greater risk



Children's Commissioner for England, Keeping Kids Safe. 2019

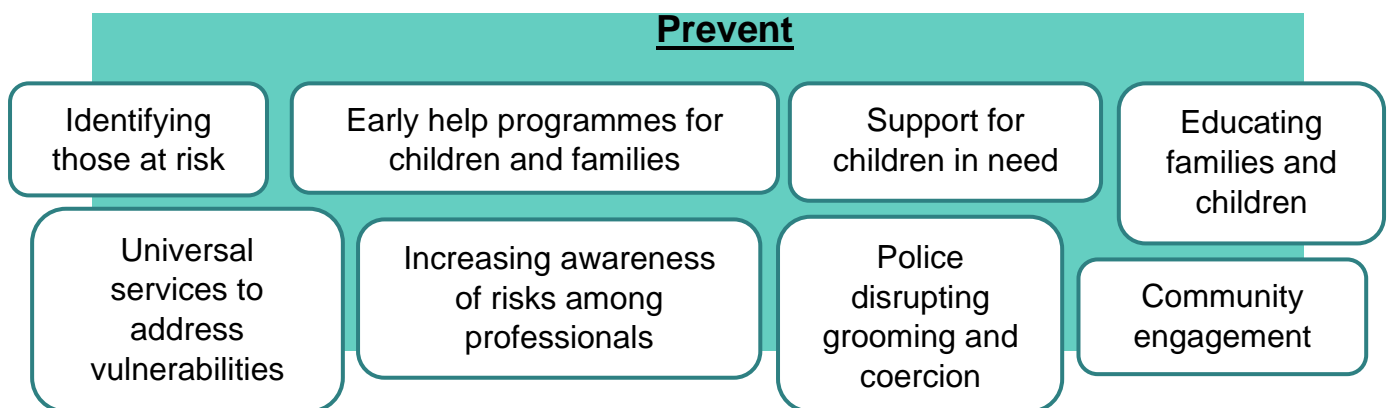


## What are some of the indicators for CCE?

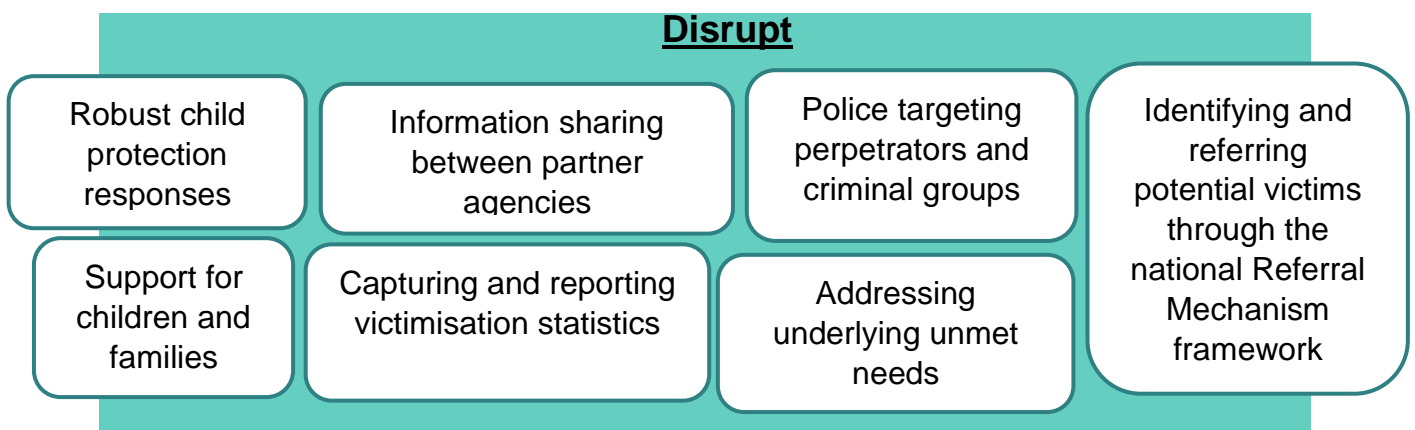
- Persistently going missing from school or home and/or being found out of area
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes or mobile phones;
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls;
- Relationships with controlling/older individuals or groups;
- Leaving home/care without explanation;
- Suspicion of physical assault/unexplained injuries;
- Parental concerns; and
- Carrying weapons.

## What can professionals do?

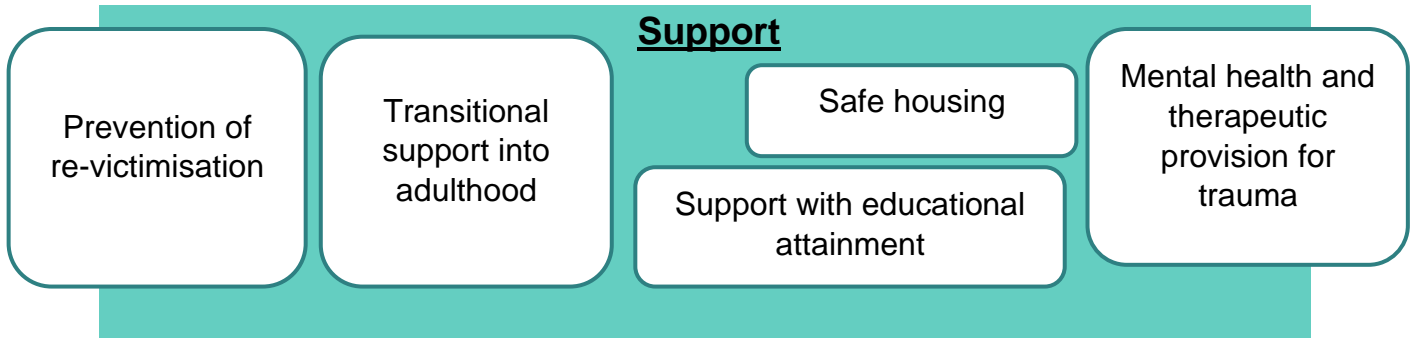
### Prevent



### Disrupt



### Support



Key messages when working with children who have been criminally exploited:

- A **child-centred approach**: Action should be focused upon the child's needs – practitioners should be aware that children do not always acknowledge what may be an exploitative and abusive situation. Practitioners should view a referral as the beginning of the process of enquiry, not as an accusation.
- **Holistic assessment**: the views and feelings of the CYP must be considered, and those of their parents/carers (if appropriate). Family circumstances should also be considered when deciding how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of CYP. The focus should be on early identification and intervention.
- **Responsive and pro-active**: practitioners should be aware and alert to the potential signs and indicators of CCE and should exercise personal curiosity in their day to day work. It is better to help children and young people as early as possible, before issues escalate and become more damaging.
- **Relationship-based**: professionals should work to establish and maintain trusting relationships with the CYP and create safe spaces for disclosure. There also needs to be effective joint working between different agencies and practitioners.
- **Responsibility**: CYP are the victims and the responsibility for the criminal exploitation lies with the abuser. The focus of police investigations and prosecutions should be on those who coerce, exploit and abuse CYP.

### Research base:

Every Child Protected Against Trafficking Report

<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/new-research-reveals-the-alarming-reality-of-child-modern-slavery-in-the-uk-and-calls-for-urgent-action-to-protect-children>

Longfield, A. (2019). Keeping kids safe: Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation: February 2019.

Ofsted. (2018, November 1). *Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum*.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bebe2ac40f0b667b363e279/Protecting\\_children\\_from\\_criminal\\_exploitation\\_human\\_trafficking\\_modern\\_slavery\\_addendum\\_141118.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bebe2ac40f0b667b363e279/Protecting_children_from_criminal_exploitation_human_trafficking_modern_slavery_addendum_141118.pdf)

Public Health England. (2021, February 1). *County Lines exploitation: Applying All Our Health*. Government Publications.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/county-lines-exploitation-applying-all-our-health/county-lines-exploitation-applying-all-our-health#:~:text=County%20Lines%20is%20associated%20with,in%20the%20child's%20emotional%20wellbeing>

## Resources:

**AFRUKA** in Manchester offer parent coffee mornings for parents worried about their child becoming involved in gangs/county lines and/or other criminal exploitation.

They also offer a number of different services to parents

<https://afruca.org/>

Language guide for professionals

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/child-exploitation-language-guide#:~:text=DON'T%20use%20language%20implying,when%20trying%20to%20control%20them.>

CCE disruption toolkit

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/794554/6.5120\\_Child\\_exploitation\\_disruption\\_toolkit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794554/6.5120_Child_exploitation_disruption_toolkit.pdf)

Trapped Campaign Manchester

[https://www.programmechallenger.co.uk/public/what\\_we\\_do/trapped/](https://www.programmechallenger.co.uk/public/what_we_do/trapped/)

## Useful websites

<https://www.safe4me.co.uk/portfolio/child-criminal-exploitation-county-lines/>

[https://www.safe4me.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Fearless\\_CountyLinesResource\\_18pp\\_V2\\_online.pdf](https://www.safe4me.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Fearless_CountyLinesResource_18pp_V2_online.pdf)

<https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/vulnerable-children/child-criminal-exploitation/>

<https://safeguarding.network/content/safeguarding-resources/child-criminal-exploitation/>

### Greater Manchester Safeguarding Guidance

<https://greatermanchesterscp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/children-affected-by-gang-activity-or-serious-youth-violence>

<https://greatermanchesterscp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/child-criminal-exploitation>

## Criminal exploitation

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER & DISCUSS

- Am I confident that I would know what to do if I suspected that someone was a victim of criminal exploitation?
- Do I know where to get further help and advice?

Report concerns at [mcsreply@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:mcsreply@manchester.gov.uk) or GMP for intelligence sharing.

Further information & advice on criminal exploitation activities can be found on our website at [www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/resource/criminalexploitation/](http://www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/resource/criminalexploitation/)

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

The term refers to children, young people or adults who are used, through whatever means, to engage in criminal activity by other young people or adults who are able to coerce them to do so.

The coercion is achieved through grooming, intimidation, acts of violence or debt bondage. The individuals involved may not identify themselves as being 'exploited' but it is clearly to their detriment that they are involved in this type of activity.

### WHY IT MATTERS

- Criminal exploitation is a hidden but increasing crime
- Criminal exploitation is typically carried out by organised crime groups and criminal networks.
- Victims will often be used to prepare, store, operate phone lines (County Line) in connection with, and deliver controlled drugs.
- Victims often live in the same local area as the exploiters & will be coerced into engaging in criminal activity within & outside Manchester.
- 'Cuckooing' refers to the exploiters acquiring the use of a local property occupied by an (often vulnerable) adult which they use as a base for their criminal activities.

### WHAT TO DO WE NEED TO KNOW

- GMP & partners continue to develop intelligence on those involved in criminal exploitation.
- Ensure details of vulnerable individuals involved are reported as soon as possible.
- Information & intelligence sharing will allow GMP to look at ways to mitigate the risk & protect vulnerable Members of our communities.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

- GMP has seen examples of extreme violence being perpetrated by and upon those involved.
- This has included reprisal beatings, violent assault, threatening behaviour with firearms and spiralling inter gang rivalry.
- Young and vulnerable people who have been targeted are subjected to criminality which may include sexual exploitation, modern slavery and money laundering.
- These activities will have a negative impact on public confidence if not stopped.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR GANGS

- The impact of local gangs setting up these 'County Lines' networks is a major threat.
- Greater Manchester & Merseyside are two of the four main 'County Lines' exporters nationally.
- The NCA estimate that the 'County Lines' model used by gangs, can generate between £2000 - £3000 per line per day.
- As the upstream gang members are less 'hands on' in relation to possession of drugs, the potential for enforcement on a personal level is reduced.

### WHO IS EXPLOITED

Gangs 'recruit' and exploit children & teens or vulnerable adults to deal drugs on their behalf or hide weapons in areas where there is little intelligence on them and they would not draw attention to police.

Children are seen as an easily controlled, 'cheap' resource. Often, they fall into some form of debt bondage which leads to violence and assaults.



## County Lines - Supporting Vulnerable Young People

### Overview Description



#### What are County Lines?

“The 2018 Home Office Serious Crime Strategy states the NPCC definition of a County Line 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” (The National Crime Agency, 2020).

**Looked After Children (LAC)** are widely recognised as being at disproportionate risk of being groomed and exploited in county lines. This is partially due to the result of traumatic childhood experiences; which can leave children with a craving for forms of belonging and approval, even when they are damaging in their nature. Additionally, as some LAC children and young people are moved into residential care and accommodation, sometimes at a great distance from their home area and occasionally in unregulated settings, their vulnerability to criminal exploitation increases (Caluori, Corlett and Scott, 2020).

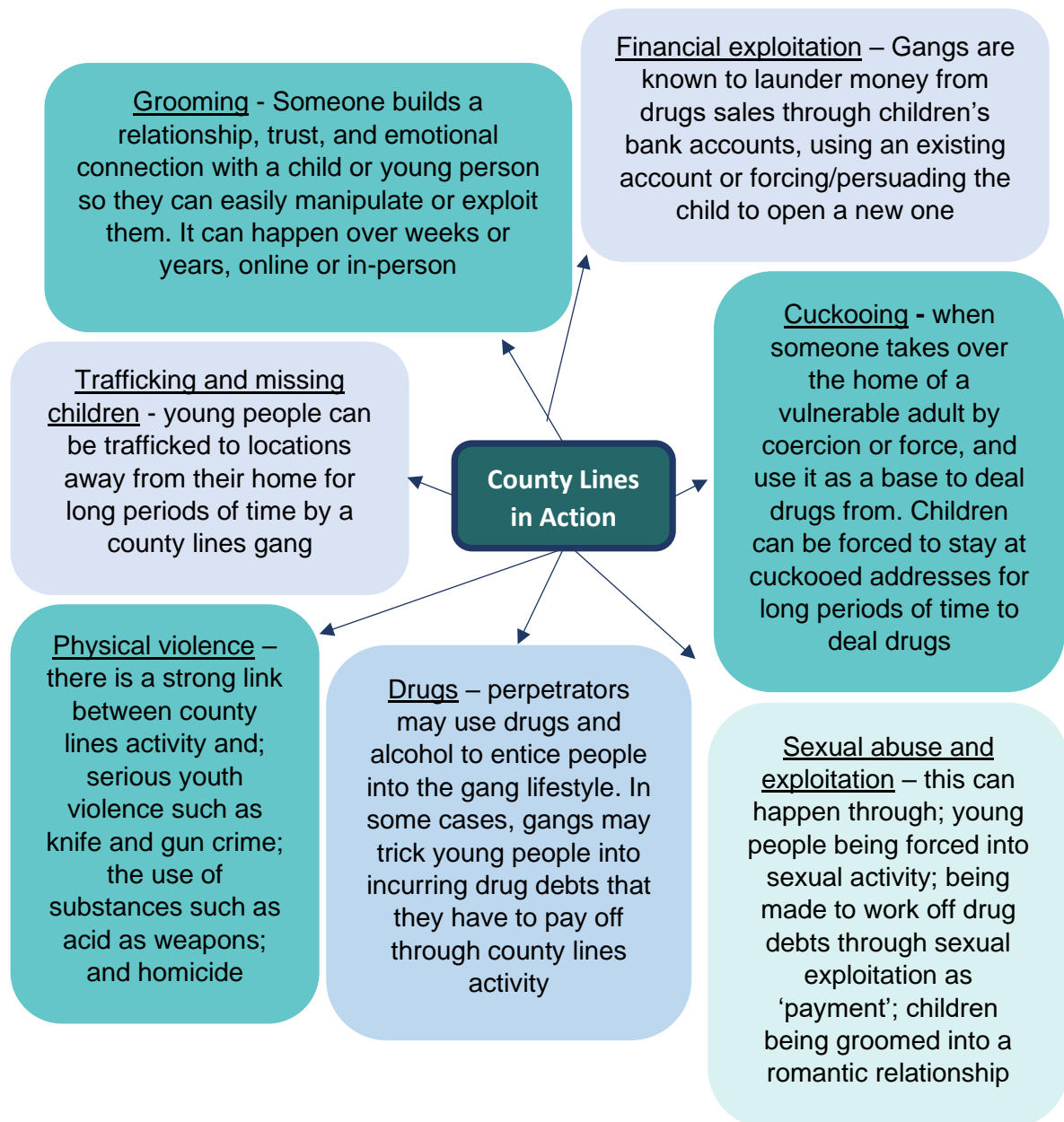
### Context

County Lines is a major, cross-cutting issue that often overlaps with other forms of abuse and criminal exploitation (Home Office, 2020). The complexity of these networks, the regularity of gang recruitment, and the often-insidious nature in which this happens, makes it almost impossible to know the true numbers of involvement.

Recent intelligence assessment estimates that **2,000 individual phone numbers** were identified as being on established county line networks across the UK (Guardian, 2019), with **90% of English police forces** having seen county line activity in their area (The Children’s Society). The growing number of county line operations and gang involvement has been linked to the increases in serious youth violence, notably **knife crime** which has seen a **49% increase** from when records began in 2011, to the year ending December 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

In Greater Manchester, latest figures show that referrals of children to social care increasingly identify ‘**gang involvement**’ as a factor and there has also been a **26% increase** in children going missing from 2018/19-2019/20 (Manchester Evening News, 2021). Both of these points indicate a growing number of children getting exploited by county line operations.

## What does County Lines involve?



## Who is more vulnerable to county lines exploitation?

- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)
- Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example)
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Being excluded from mainstream education/ attending a Pupil Referral Unit.
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- Not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Economic vulnerability



## Recognising County Lines

### In your community:

- Usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or **social housing** property
- An increase in number of **comings and goings** /people entering and leaving at all times of the day and night
- Increase in **cars or bikes outside**, offenders will often have new vehicles outside the property, or frequently use taxis or hire cars
- Possible increase in **anti-social behaviour** in and around the property
- Increase in **litter** outside
- Disengagement with support services/healthcare services
- The property may appear almost **sparse of valuable possessions** inside and go into a state of disrepair
- Signs of drug use

### In individuals:

- Frequently **going missing** from school/college, home or care and unwillingness to explain whereabouts
- Travelling to locations, or being found in areas they have no obvious connections with, including seaside or market towns, and **carrying weapons**
- Acquiring money, clothes, accessories or mobile phones which they seem unable to account for
- Receiving **excessive texts or phone calls** throughout the day and having multiple mobile phones or sim cards
- Withdrawing or having sudden **changes in personality**, behaviour or the language they use
- Having relationships with controlling or older individuals in groups
- Unexplained injuries**, self-harming or significant changes in mental health

**The importance of reporting:** If you think a child is in immediate danger, you should call **999**. If you think a child is involved in county lines, but not in immediate danger, you should share this information with relevant agencies; school/college, social care.

## How can professionals support young people?

### Prevention:

- **Raising Awareness** of what county lines is, how young people are targeted and recruited, and what healthy relationships look like. This can be done through whole-school assemblies, class discussions or smaller group work. Schools should ensure children know who they can talk to if they have any concerns.
- **Detached youth work** to identify and support vulnerable young people.
- **Sharing information with parents and carers**, so there is a shared understanding of changes and concerns.
- **Training for staff and professionals** working with children, particularly those that are vulnerable. Early recognition of potential signs and acting on these – trust your instincts.
- **Share concerns** with trusted professionals. If you would rather remain anonymous, you could contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#). You could also call [Childline](#) and speak to a counsellor about your concerns.

### Support for YP currently involved:

- **Following Greater Manchester's [Safeguarding Procedures](#)** and ensuring a child or young person knows there is a way out through conversations and signposting to relevant services.
- **Multi-agency working and information sharing** is essential in protecting the welfare of the child, especially due to movement around the country. Should include participation from social care, community safety teams, schools, police and youth offending teams.
- **Services** such as [Catch-22](#) work with children and young people of any age to help get them out of situations that they are worried about. [St Giles](#) is a specialist service that helps young people make safe and sustained exit from county line involvement. [Fearless](#) is a service that allows young people to pass on information about crime anonymously. [ICTG](#) provides support to all potentially

### Support for YP after county lines involvement:

- **Specialist casework** delivered to young person and family so there is a trusted key worker to provide prolonged support.
- Ensure young people are **treated as victims**, not criminals, and help them rebuild their trust and ensure they are not targeted by criminals groups again through projects such as [Disrupting Exploitation Programme](#)
- **Trauma-informed approaches** to help young people deal specifically with the consequences of trauma and facilitate healing. This should include; the involvement of parents/carers as appropriate; **psychoeducation** about reactions to trauma and **strategies for managing arousal and flashbacks**; and the **processing of trauma-related emotions** including shame, guilt, loss and anger. Services such as [CAMHS](#) could provide psychological support to young people.
- **Person-centred approaches** should be used to ensure the focus is on the young person and how they can achieve their aspirations in the future, rather than on their condition, disability or experiences.

## Words to look out for:

Key Words	Definition
<b>Cuckooing</b>	Cuckooing is when criminal gangs take over the home of a vulnerable person through violence and intimidation, using it as their base for illegal activity.
<b>Going country</b>	This is the most popular term that describes county lines activity. It can also mean the act of travelling to another city/town to deliver drugs or money.
<b>Trapping</b>	The act of selling drugs. Trapping can refer to the act of moving drugs from one town to another or the act of selling drugs in one.
<b>Trap House</b>	A building used as a base for illegal activity. This can often be a cuckooed property.
<b>Trap Line</b>	This refers to when someone owns a mobile phone specifically for the purpose of exploiting children and vulnerable adults.
<b>Debt Slavery</b>	When a young person is forced to work in order to pay off a debt

## Useful Resources

### Podcasts:

- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0009b47>
- <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/content-pages/podcasts/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-and-cuckooing-part-one-greater-manchesters-learning/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2019/sep/19/county-lines-how-drugs-gangs-are-recruiting-children-podcast>

### Documentaries and films:

- 'County Lines' film directed by Henry Blake (2019)
- <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-child-drug-runners-dispatches>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgM6ju2Xi-0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgM6ju2Xi-0&feature=emb_logo)

### Informative resources

- <https://www.programmechallenger.co.uk/practitioner/resources/trapped/>
- [https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/child-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines?qclid=CjwKCAiA9vOABhBfEiwATCi7GPtxOCes3fmP2dxy7EcB0zmehdGIDgCxSLscYhnqHpjAqTGZqIsBHRoC2pAQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/child-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines?qclid=CjwKCAiA9vOABhBfEiwATCi7GPtxOCes3fmP2dxy7EcB0zmehdGIDgCxSLscYhnqHpjAqTGZqIsBHRoC2pAQAvD_BwE)
- <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/36968/1/Working%20County%20Lines.pdf>

- [What Is Trauma-Focused Therapy? | Center for Child Trauma Assessment and Service Planning \(northwestern.edu\)](#)

### **Useful campaigns and organisations**

- Programme Challenger [.programmechallenger.co.uk/county\\_lines/](#)
- GMP County Lines [GMP County Lines info and advice](#)
- Fearless [fearless.org/en/campaigns/county-lines](#)
- Children's Society [our-work/child-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines](#)
- Childline [https://www.childline.org.uk/](#)
- County Lines National Summary [National Summary - Simon Ford \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

### **Further Reading/References**

Caluori, Corlett and Scott (2019). *County Lines and Looked After Children*. Retrieved from: [https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/no-place-at-home.pdf](#)  
[The mental health needs of gang-affiliated young people \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)  
[A Guide to Coroner Services for Bereaved People \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)  
[file \(nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk\)](#)

Manchester Safeguarding Partnership has useful information

Greater Manchester Safeguarding Guidance

[https://greatermanchesterscp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/child-criminal-exploitation](#)

[https://greatermanchesterscp.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/children-affected-by-gang-activity-or-serious-youth-violence](#)

## Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking – what to look out for

