

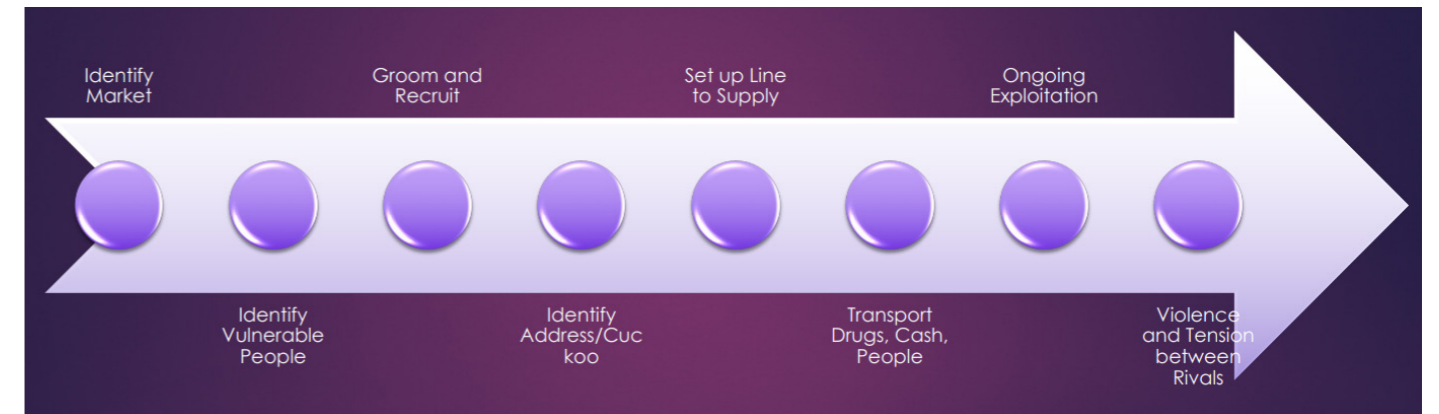
County Lines is a term used to describe criminal exploitation by gangs/groups which export illegal drugs within the UK. These gangs may use dedicated mobile phone lines or another form of 'deal line'. Such gangs are known to exploit children and young people to move and store drugs and money, often using coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. This is a form of Child Criminal Exploitation.

[National County lines Coordination Centre Awareness Raising Video](#)

The [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#) defines Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) occurring where *"an individual or group use 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, or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator"*. The full definition can be found within **section 1.41** of the National Guidance.

How a County Line develops

The organised criminal group/gang will identify a market in which they can set up their operation and sell drugs. Members of that group will identify local vulnerable people. This may include individuals who use drugs, have additional support needs, are struggling financially or are children and young people.



Future Voices, Extra-Familial Abuse, 2024

Cuckooing

As the group build their infrastructure, they will need a location to store and supply the drugs from. They may exploit a person's vulnerability to do this, e.g. use somebody's home. This is often referred to as cuckooing.

Once the infrastructure is in place, the group arrange to transport drugs, money, weapons and people. Individuals who 'work', 'use' or 'trap' within the model suffer ongoing exploitation. Violence is routinely used to control, alongside other forms of physical, emotional, sexual and financial harm.

County Lines and Cuckooing

What can increase a child or young person's vulnerability to exploitation, such as County Lines?

The need to 'belong' can increase risk. A difficult dynamic is created for those children and young people that have low self-worth or low self-esteem as a 'need' can be met through the relationship or circumstance in which they are being exploited.

[Alfie's Story Part 1 \(youtube.com\)](#) and [Alfie's Story Part 2 \(youtube.com\)](#) are based on

true events and demonstrate well the exploitation of a young person through County Lines.

[Alfie's Story Part 3 | Explicit version \(youtube.com\)](#) and [Alfie's Story Part 4 | Explicit version \(youtube.com\)](#) further demonstrate the reality of exploitation.

Possible indicators of Exploitation linked to County Lines

- ▶ Unexplained quantities of cash, gifts, items of clothing, jewellery, electronic devices, etc.
- ▶ Change in appearance indicative of being within a neglective or harmful environment, e.g. poor hygiene, marks, sleep deprived, etc.
- ▶ Multiple phones which are in very regular use, often low value phone with no GPS tracking.
- ▶ New relationships formed with different individuals or groups from other areas.
- ▶ Notable changes in behaviour.
- ▶ Possession of oils or lubricants that could indicate operation of maintenance of weapons or internal concealment of substances.
- ▶ Leaving home at different times of the day or multiple times, or going 'missing' for periods of time and travelling locally or nationally without reason to travel.
- ▶ Possession of weapons, illegal substances or drug related paraphernalia including scales, wraps and bags.
- ▶ In possession of keys to properties or hotel rooms.
- ▶ New or reoccurring injuries and infections.

What should you do if you have a concern that a child or young person is being exploited?

- ▶ Follow the Aberdeenshire [Child Protection in Education](#) guidance by speak to your Schools' Child Protection Coordinator (CPC) or another member of senior management if they are not available.
- ▶ Complete Part 1 of the [Child Safety and Wellbeing Concern Sheet](#) and share this with the CPC.
- ▶ The CPC will use this information to discuss with Social Work and decide on appropriate next steps where required.