

Multi-Agency Intelligence Briefing

Cuckooing, County Lines and Gangs

May 2018

This briefing has been produced on behalf of the Newcastle Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards and presents intelligence gathered from a range of different agencies in relation to County Lines, Cuckooing and gang activity within Newcastle upon Tyne. The intention of this paper is to raise professional awareness and ensure that practitioners are familiar with the steps they can take should they come across any concerns relating to these areas.

Background

Newcastle does not have a long standing association as a city with a gang culture or a gang violence problem. However, whilst there may not be evidence of a widespread gang culture in Newcastle, there is without doubt the existence of groups of people, involved in violence or the threats of violence, who self-identify as being members of a gang(s) and there have been instances of gang related violence including concerns relating to **County Lines** and **Cuckooing**.

County Lines

County lines is a term used by the police and other law enforcement agencies to describe an approach taken by some criminal groups within the UK to distribute drugs and conduct other criminal activities in other areas of the country.

- The offenders often originate from large urban areas and use children and other vulnerable people to deliver drugs/ other illegal commodities to customers.
- This often involves deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming.

The proceeds of this criminality are returned to the large urban areas from which the criminality originates.

Cuckooing

This is a term used to describe activity which often accompanies 'County Lines' offending. It involves a local property, generally occupied by a vulnerable person, being taken over by offenders and being used as a base for their activities. The use of the property is usually secured by force or coercion. The vulnerable person may see the offenders as their "friends."

Local Picture

Intelligence has been shared via safeguarding procedures which points to the existence of at least two known groups within Newcastle who have been involved in a feud defined by cyclical acts of provocation and violence. It is understood that some members of each group are involved in drug dealing, robbery, money laundering and the exploitation of children and adults at risk.

At this stage the number of individuals associated with these groups, as a percentage of the overall population of the city is extremely small, and that whilst there have been concerns in relation to criminal activity perpetrated by these groups, not all members of these groups will have been involved in this activity.

Safeguarding concerns have been raised in relation to the activity of these groups including both the potential for adults at risk to be drawn into gangs and the targeting of adults at risks through the cuckooing, exploitation and violence.

Drug Supply

Some of the activity connected to cuckooing, county lines and urban street gangs is the association with drug supply. In 2016, a national Home Office drug supply report published in DrugWise^[1] survey (2016) reported ‘unprecedented levels’ of availability and purity of class A drugs in the UK, with heroin, cocaine, crack and synthetic cannabinoids remaining the drugs continuing to cause the biggest problems for the vulnerable groups in society.

The recent UK Focal Point Drug Report^[2] also details issues with increasing supply, particularly linked to the cocaine and crack cocaine market which are linked to increased drug related deaths and harms. Of particular concern is the change in national drug markets and expansion in supply networks and distributions lines, including a phenomenon known as ‘county lines’, where distribution lines have increased by drug dealers from large conurbations now targeting the ‘country lines’ of smaller towns, with an aim to replace the declining populations of older heroin user with a new, younger cohort. This often involves exploitation of vulnerable or young people as drug runners, and the taking over of properties in which to deal from (known as ‘cuckooing’).

The drug market is notably profitable, and increased purity also poses a risk and threat – more profit for dealers but an issue for users due to inconsistent drug purity

^[1] <http://www.drugwise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Highwaysandbyways.pdf>

^[2] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/united-kingdom-drug-situation-focal-point-annual-report>

or mixing agents (so user's tolerance levels will be impacted). There is also link with increased exploitation, violence and weapons. Locally, we have seen increases in drug related deaths and harms associated with injecting drug use (including infections or injuries). Use of multiple substances is also frequent (including alcohol), which adds more risk to the user.

Key Messages

Signs and Indicators

- Changes in behaviour
- Unexplained periods of absence or non-engagement
- New peer groups or relationships
- Fear of reprisal from gang members or violence
- Disclosure of "friends" having moved into the persons property
- Parties or "sessions" taking place in persons property (if change form usual behaviour)
- Unexplained changes in finances including increased interest in making money
- Increased use of drugs and/or alcohol

Language – you may be particularly concerned if you hear the following terms being used;

- County Lines is known to be described by young people as "going country", "going OT" or "going to the trap"
- Making reference to the "4:6" or "TNS" (known groups)
- "Straightener" – organised fight to resolve a dispute
- "Session" - party

Reporting

If you have any concerns or intelligence to share please report these to:

- Northumbria Police by telephone on **101** or **999** in an emergency
- Email forceintelligence@northumbria.pnn.police.uk
You can share intelligence via this email address even if you do not know the full details of the person(s) involved. Sharing of small details helps to inform an intelligence picture.

If you are concerned about a child or adult at risk please report your concerns via existing safeguarding children and adult's procedures