

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP17/4

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL -
24 FEBRUARY 2017**

SUBJECT: EXPLORING COUNTY LINES IN SUFFOLK

SUMMARY:

1. This paper provides an overview of how County Lines gangs related drug dealing operate across Suffolk; outlining the types of criminality gangs are involved in, the nature of violence used and it will also explore our response and partnership work.
2. It is important to highlight that our analytical department are currently completing a detailed review of the police activity and threats and risks linked to the County Lines across Suffolk, which should be complete by early February 2017. This work will provide a more detailed overview of the current issues in Suffolk and will provide data for analysis and review.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. County lines gangs related drug dealing remains a key threat for Suffolk and other police forces across the region / country, generating a need for multi-agency responses with safeguarding at the very fore of priorities.
2. The Accountability and Performance Panel is asked to note the content of the report, and the work being undertaken to address the supply of drugs in Suffolk

DETAIL OF THE SUBMISSION

1. KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Definition of County Lines

- 1.1 Section 34 (5) of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 defines gang-related drug dealing activity as;

“The lawful production, supply, importation or exportation of a controlled drug which occurs in the course of, or is otherwise related to, the activities of a group that;

- a) *Consists of at least 3 people; and*
- b) *Has one or more characteristics that enable its members to be identified by others as a group.”*

- 1.2 A ‘county lines’ gang features the additional criteria;

- The gang/ gang members are based or have origin within an urban city location
- They have established a market in a rural town, (such as a county or coastal town) into which they supply Class A drugs, specifically crack cocaine and heroin
- They utilise a mobile phone number to facilitate drug deals
- Their criminality systemically exploits young and vulnerable persons.

Overview of the problem

- 1.3 ‘County lines’ and the supply of Class A drugs, from urban hubs to county towns utilising mobile phones as deal lines, continues to be a widespread feature of gang activity. This is a national problem and exists across all forces within the Eastern Region.
- 1.4 Gangs typically use children and vulnerable young people to deliver drugs to customers and this often involves deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage* and/or grooming.
- 1.5 A recent National Crime Agency (NCA) report found that county line gangs pose a significant threat to vulnerable adults and children upon whom they rely to conduct and or to facilitate this criminality.
- 1.6 Knives are the most common weapon however homemade weapons, bats, hammers, tasers, boiling water and acid are also utilised in county lines operating across the country.
- 1.7 Gang members and those they exploit are generally transient between urban hubs and county markets, but there is an emerging trend for some to settle within the community in which the county lines market is established.
- 1.8 Despite gangs often consisting of larger groups, only a small number of members will be present in each county location at any given time and gang members are rotated between county locations to try and evade detection.
- 1.9 Across the Eastern region gang nominals are not just coming from London. Suffolk is also affected by gangs operating out of Essex.

** Debt bondage is the use of force and coercion to exploit vulnerable adults. In some instances victims have become homeless, being forced to leave their address in fear of violence from gang members.*

How County Lines Operate

- 1.10 The use of mobile phones is a key part of the criminal network. Positively, on 22 January 2017 the Home Secretary announced legislative plans to shut down the 'deal lines' to help tackle the problem. The government are planning to amend the Digital Economy Bill and if this is passed, the law will compel the relevant communications provider to disconnect a mobile, SIM card or phone number where it can be proved they are being used in connection with drug offences.
- 1.11 The runners in some cases will utilise local drug dealers or local vulnerable people's addresses to operate from. This is known as 'Cuckooing'; the practice whereby runners will target vulnerable persons; current drug users, single females, persons with mental health issues.
- 1.12 The nature of this activity causes disputes with other gang members or local drug dealers for the custom and hence many violent incidents occur because of this.
- 1.13 This activity is also connected with the exploitation of vulnerable young children who are recruited to courier drugs and money. Although Child Sexual Exploitation is not the driving factor in county lines exploiting children, there is a link between girls who are being exploited to hold and deal drugs, and gang members wishing to sexually exploit them.

County Lines in Suffolk

- 1.14 County lines are a problem across all policing commands in Suffolk. The main towns affected are Newmarket, Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich, Felixstowe and Lowestoft.
- 1.15 At a tactical level, the three operations in existence across Suffolk are well established and are operating to tackle the immediate threat and risks. There are three operations running to help address the issue; Operation London (West), Operation Volcanic (South) and Operation Boulevard (East). Op Volcanic was commissioned in June 2013, Op London was commissioned in December 2014 and most recently Operation Boulevard in December 2015.
- 1.16 All three operations share common objectives; to disrupt the various drugs markets to the extent that Class A drug dealing is constrained; to ensure that the wider public are not adversely affected by any increase in serious acquisitive crime or violent crime that accompanies any widespread increase in Class A drug availability; and to make the locations a long term hostile environment for those involved in the unlawful supply of Class A drugs.
- 1.17 There is also commonality in the approach across all three operations in terms of the working strategies, which include:
 - Minimising the risk of harm to the wider public.
 - Minimising the risk of harm to any individual identified at risk.
 - Identifying/early intervention with young/other persons who are being exploited by age or other vulnerabilities.
 - Maximising the safety of Police, Police Staff and Partner agencies.

- Ensuring that any actions carried out regarding the above are proportionate, necessary and in accordance with any legal requirements.
- Identifying dealers of Class A controlled drugs within the main towns and the surrounding areas of Suffolk.
- Frustrating, dismantling and disrupting dealers of Class A controlled drugs and by gathering intelligence / evidence on other persons involved in the supply of Class A controlled drugs.
- Gaining sufficient intelligence / evidence in order that those persons responsible are brought to justice and placed before the appropriate courts.
- Reducing the availability and the need for Class A controlled drugs.
- Maintaining public confidence within the Suffolk Constabulary.
- Effectively manage a communication strategy on behalf of the Constabulary.

1.18 The benefit of this approach is that each policing area can tie in with local partnerships at a tactical level to help address the problem and there has been a great deal of activity across all areas to deal with the issues. However, there is a need to bring this work together at a countywide level, particularly with partners so that there is joint impetus on addressing the problem from a long term perspective.

Exploring the Issues

1.19 The Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) has recently completed some analysis on the scale of the problem across the region. There have been 11 violent related incidents between 01/09/2016 and 02/01/2017 in Suffolk. Five of these have involved both a weapon and an injury. There have been no murders, although there has been an attempted murder relating to an incident in Foundation Street in Ipswich in December 2016, which is currently an on-going investigation.

1.20 The Home Office has previously conducted a Peer Review (November 2014) in relation to Operation Volcanic and this led to adjustment in our activity and response.

Our Response

Intelligence Development and Tasking

1.21 Local intelligence teams develop and collate intelligence across police and law enforcement agencies. They are also working with the Metropolitan Police to support their ongoing activities around high risk individuals frequenting the Norfolk and Suffolk area.

1.22 From a regional perspective, scanning for incidents related to gangs and county lines has significantly improved in recent months. It has recently been agreed that a regional approach would be developed to assess and manage the threat, risk and harm and this remains under development.

1.23 There is no current standardised method of flagging county lines related incidents across the region and options for addressing this are currently being scoped.

Disruption/Enforcement activity

- 1.24 Each policing command in Suffolk has a proactive team to help focus enforcement activity around the county lines. In terms of established posts, there are 3 sergeants and 30 Police officers in these teams. However, the effective strength and deployment of officers in these teams on a day-day basis is below this.
- 1.25 There is also a countywide drugs team (1 Sergeant and 6 police officers), which operates from Ipswich.
- 1.26 These teams are tasked with arrests, searches and warrants to help tackle the threats and risks.
- 1.27 As part of Operation Volcanic, there have been a number of weapon sweeps in Jubilee Park where knives have been recovered, as this is an area that has been subject to drug dealing. This has been done in conjunction with partners and the media have also provided coverage of this activity.
- 1.28 Utilising traffic and ANPR resources, there have been numerous targeted high profile days of action across the county. The continued progression of the improvement plan around the deployment of ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) is in progress, as well as seeking to increase the amount of staff qualified to use it.
- 1.29 The plan is to have a countywide week of prevention/enforcement activity which is currently being scoped.
- 1.30 There is a continuing need to work with British Transport Police (BTP) and other forces in the region on joint initiatives.

Investigations

- 1.31 There is a scale-able approach to investigations, and Senior Investigation Officers (SIOs) are appointed for any higher levels of criminality such as higher value possession with intent to supply offences or serious violence offences.
- 1.32 The Protecting Vulnerable People Directorate have provided investigative resource to operations set up to deal with issues of vulnerability and child sexual exploitation, following incidents of young girls going missing from Suffolk and being exploited.
- 1.33 It is important to utilise the Local Criminal Justice Board to ensure that there is focus on issues of 'aggravating or mitigating' circumstances leading to the appropriate disposal and / or safeguarding of a person in custody.

Partnership Working

- 1.34 Each operation engages with a range of partners at a tactical level including, housing, local authorities, probation, drugs support agencies and charities, youth offending, children and young people services, health and mental health. These partnerships help to support the vulnerable individuals who are targeted and offer them support to address their drug dealing habit, or it can involve working with partners to take positive action using anti-social behaviour legislation to close down premises that are being used for drug dealing. Likewise, Youth Offending and Children and Young People's services offer support to teenagers who may either be offending and / or going missing and are being exploited by drug dealers.
- 1.35 Despite the good partnership activity that is happening locally, there is a need to consider how this can be brought together at a strategic level across the county to

tackle the wider and longer term issues. There are discussions underway about how this can be achieved. In order to do so there is a pressing need to clarify where these issues are addressed at a strategic level across Suffolk and embedding ownership across the partnership network. Some examples of joint work that are being progressed through these channels could include:

- Raising awareness countywide amongst partners of intelligence relating to knife crime and vulnerable persons utilising public health and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's).
- Addressing the issues with towns within which prisons are located, to which gang members are sentenced, leading visitors to identify new market opportunities. The intention is to work with the Prisoner Governors at a county wide partnership network on this matter.
- Working to tackle the unrelenting recruitment, coercion and exploitation of young and vulnerable persons and developing the capacity to protect these individuals; Key partners that need to be involved in this are education, mental health and Children and Young People's Services.
- Working with local housing providers as the provision of local housing authority accommodation for gang members, associates or associated vulnerable persons facilitates opportunities for gangs to branch out into new towns and there is a new trend for some gang members to settle in local communities. Of particular note is establishing appropriate information sharing arrangements.
- Working with businesses, particularly, Abellio Anglia and the banks to raise awareness and ensure that opportunities for sharing information are maximised.

1.36 In terms of the policing partnerships, scoping is currently underway to hold a regional forum to look at options to co-ordinate as well as share and develop best practice. The Head of Joint Protective Services is linked into the County Lines National Working Group and this helps ensure that best practice and new threats are identified.

Reduction of Vulnerability and Safeguarding

1.37 There is a need through effective partnership working to ensure any person who by virtue of age or any other vulnerability is identified early and dynamic multi-agency intervention takes place in order to protect them.

Public Re-assurance and Preventative Policing

1.38 The objective of all the three operations running across Suffolk is to increase visible policing within the areas of community threat and to proactively engage with members of the community. This includes the collection of local community based intelligence to support onwards operations. For example, under Operation Volcanic, there has been community intelligence development weeks prior to enforcement activity.

1.39 The media have been engaged with all three operations. Moving forwards, there is a need to make best use of media to develop an operational plan for bespoke communication messages and proactive campaigning to support the operational objectives of reassurance, education, warning and informing and publication of key outcomes. This needs to be in conjunction with key partners to ensure messaging is consistent and mutually agreed.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1 There are no specific financial implications relating to this paper.

3. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

3.1 There are no other implications and risks to raise in addition to the areas outlined above.

ORIGINATOR CHECKLIST (MUST BE COMPLETED)	PLEASE STATE 'YES' OR 'NO'
Has legal advice been sought on this submission?	No
Has the PCC's Chief Finance Officer been consulted?	No
Have equality, diversity and human rights implications been considered including equality analysis, as appropriate?	N/A
Have human resource implications been considered?	N/A
Is the recommendation consistent with the objectives in the Police and Crime Plan?	Yes
Has consultation been undertaken with people or agencies likely to be affected by the recommendation?	No
Has communications advice been sought on areas of likely media interest and how they might be managed?	No
Have all relevant ethical factors been taken into consideration in developing this submission?	Yes

In relation to the above, please ensure that all relevant issues have been highlighted in the 'other implications and risks' section of the submission.