

APPENDIX 2

Briefing for Essex County Council Members scrutiny committee on the 14th February 2019.

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Purpose: To enable Members to understand the nature of 'County Lines' and be aware of the impact of this crime model on residents of Essex county.

Understanding the issue – National context.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) prepares an assessment of the extent of county lines on a bi annual basis (the most recent published report is 2017) and is the lead for the national coordination centre for county lines, established late last year.

The 2017 report focuses on the specific method of drug supply commonly referred to as 'county lines'. County lines relates to the supply of class A drugs (primarily crack cocaine and heroin) from an urban hub into rural towns or county locations. This is facilitated by a group who may not necessarily be affiliated as a gang, but who have developed networks across geographical boundaries to access and exploit existing drugs markets in these areas.

Generally, this activity commonly involves: -

- *A branded mobile phone line is established in the market, to which orders are placed by introduced customers. The line will commonly (but not exclusively) be controlled by a third party, remote from the market.*
- *Exploitation of young or vulnerable persons, to achieve the storage and/or supply of drugs, movement of cash proceeds and to secure the use of dwellings (commonly referred to as cuckooing).*
- *Exploited individuals regularly travelling between the urban hub and the county market, to replenish stock and deliver cash.*
- *An inclination to use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives, corrosives and firearms.*

Cuckooing :

County lines groups will target new premises by pursuing vulnerable individuals who attend recovery groups, dependency units and areas associated with those experiencing problems. They are seeking to establish relationships with vulnerable individuals for access to their homes. Once they gain control over the victim, whether through drug dependency, debt or as part of their relationship, groups move in. Once this happens the risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence increases. In some instances, drug users may appear to be complicit in allowing their home to be used, however the issue of true consent is questionable, as many drugs users will not necessarily see themselves as being vulnerable.

County lines groups are able to adapt their methods with ease and frequency. Changeable methods include their use/exploitation of:-

- Transport; including method, route, frequency, payment, person travelling.
- Phones; including changing handsets, SIM cards, numbers (sometimes frequently), varying the line's location and those who control it.
- Accommodation; including the exploitation of a wider set of vulnerable people, use of hotels, holiday lets, serviced apartments, caravans.
- Children; including 'clean skins' (those without a record), missing persons, children in care, children exposed to broader vulnerable issues.
- Vulnerable; including drug users, those with mental health issues, those with physical health issues, those at a point of crisis.
- Complicit individuals; including different businesses or individuals.
- Money laundering; including running cash, depositing proceeds into bank accounts of multiple network associates.

The Essex picture.

Increases in the number of young people involved with county lines activity (principally drug supply) has been a feature of both YOS and Social Work teams for at least the last 2 years. Significant increases have been noted in possession with intent to supply charges and offences involving violence. All of the YOS teams (5 in total across the county) report that dealing with the consequence of county lines affects the work and ability of the service to keep young people safe.

To try to increase prevention and early intervention opportunities, the YOS funded Gang Prevention Service (GPS) rolled out fully in 2018 countywide to offer a consultation and direct work service to young people and their families. This provides for targeted early intervention and acts as a conduit for universal services (schools in particular) to access professional advice on young people who may be vulnerable to becoming exploited by organised criminals. Over 100 young people are currently being supported and most importantly a high number of consultations offered to schools and CSPs.

What is Working Well?

Good joint working between YOTs and Children's Social Care teams, focusing on effective protection of young people through MACE and Child in Need and Child Protection Plans. This means that there are, in the main, effective safety plans in place and use of established meetings to agree joint support arrangements where indicated.

Within the YOS (and more broadly in CSC) the use of a transparent approach to working with families in YOS with risk management meetings being held with young person and family present enables clarity of understanding about the extent of concern. This means

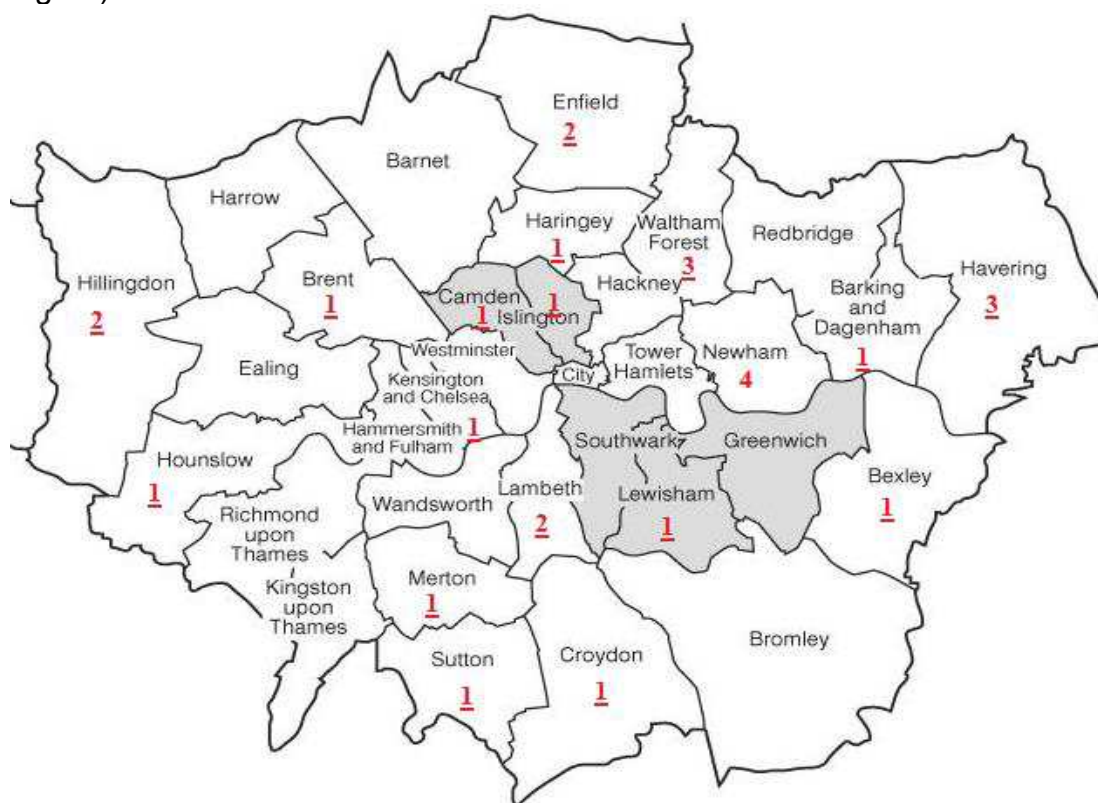
that wherever possible joint support plans can be agreed with families – a known factor in reducing the reach of criminal groups.

The levels of skills of staff in YOS and confidence to work with young people involved in county lines (recognised in the recent HMI Probation Inspection where the service was rated as Outstanding) means that in the main the service is able to work directly with young people without the need to refer on and thus risk fracturing a good relationship.

The development and adoption of the Violence and Vulnerability Framework (led by the OPFCC and adopted by Safer Essex in September 2018) will lead to improved joint working and information sharing with Essex Police, supported by a recent joint bid to the Home Office who awarded of over £600,000 in grant funding. This will enable the creation of an information hub promoting different levels of information sharing with secondments from Essex YOS and Essex Police. It is expected that this will be enable quadrants/CSPs to more fully understand the extent of the threat in their areas as well as coordinate increased service provision through non- statutory sector providers.

What needs to improve?

There is a pressing need to create proactive, rather than reactive, regular dialogue with London Boroughs especially around opportunities to share intelligence on use of supported independent accommodation (SIA's) by London Boroughs, which is currently an area of concern. The map below shows the number of current placements by each London Authority - ether in foster care or in supported independent accommodation units for 16 plus young people in Essex (and known to the YOS so the actual number may be much higher).



As SIA's are unregulated accommodation units there is no opportunity for Essex CSC to intervene nor are OFSTED able to apply regulatory pressure for any unit not delivering a good service. However, more could be done with District Councils who can apply restrictions under the planning regulations and this has been done with good outcomes in parts of Essex.

There are also too many young people who are not in school (either because they have very inadequate part time tables or have been encouraged not to attend) and this is having a negative impact upon enabling them to think about their futures and makes the lure of the so called financial rewards harder to resist. Over 60% of the YOS case load are not in full time education and within this around 30% are not in any education (around 100 young people at any one time).

Information sharing remains an ongoing issue and while improving internally in Essex, more needs to happen to create better information flows between the Metropolitan Police and other national forces who will be dealing with Essex young people exploited by drug dealers linked to county lines.