

Both sides of the coin: The Police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in county lines drug offending

In 2019, HMICFRS inspected how county lines drug trafficking is dealt with at local, regional and national levels. The inspection concentrated on how the police and National Crime Agency identify and treat children and other vulnerable people involved in county lines offending.

The report was published on 10th January 2020 and made ten recommendations.

The full report can be viewed here

<https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/both-sides-of-the-coin-police-nca-response-vulnerable-people-county-lines-drug-offending.pdf>

Police and Crime Commissioner's response

I welcome Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report 'Both sides of the coin: The Police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in 'county lines' drug offending' published in January 2020.

Following consultation with the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police I am pleased to provide the following response.

County Lines offending is an insidious issue which can corrode communities and devastate lives. I and the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police are united in our efforts to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from county lines activity and all forms of exploitation.

I welcome each of the 10 recommendations within this report and whilst I appreciate that many of the deadlines associated with those recommendations may need to be extended in some cases due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I look forward to the action that each will generate. I understand that none of the recommendations are focused specifically on Devon and Cornwall Police, however the learning from this report could be of interest to all 43 police forces in England and Wales.

I am confident that Devon and Cornwall Police has suitable arrangements in place to respond to the challenges of county lines, but that is not to say that we and others cannot do more. County Lines offending does not occur in isolation. These are complex issues affecting vulnerable individuals and whole communities and can often be intrinsically linked with a range of other crimes such as serious violence. This is why I, with the Chief Constable, have invested £1 million a year to develop a new approach to prevent serious violence in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly with partner organisations.



I am assured that Devon and Cornwall Police: has been striving to pursue offenders through prosecution and disruption; prepares for when serious and organised crime occurs and mitigate its impact; works to protect individuals, organisations and systems from the effects of serious and organised crime; prevents people from engaging in serious and organised crime.

One example of the Force's approach to pursuing offenders through prosecution was last year when the Force successfully worked to bring a gang of county lines offenders from London, and operating in Devon, to justice. This gang used children as young as 13 to deliver drugs. Six of the seven defendants were jailed for between three years and three months and eight years and two months. I commend the Force for bringing these offenders to justice, and I do not underestimate the legacy of those crimes for each of the children involved.

The Force has also been incredibly creative in some of its approaches to tackling the exploitation of children and young people. For example, our **Turning Corners** project which secured £500,000 from the Home Office and was created within South Devon and Torbay aimed to identify, divert and safeguard young people who were at risk of Criminal Exploitation. This specific activity brought together an extensive range of partners and was also the first example of civil legislation being harnessed by the Force in the form of adult and youth civil gang injunctions being used to protect those involved and deter harmful behaviours.

The report refers to barriers to effective partnership working including the sharing of information across agencies and states that 'many previous reports have recommended sharing information more effectively. These often follow deaths, serious injuries or public service failings. I absolutely agree that we must learn from history and ensure that the sharing of information to protect vulnerable people and enable law enforcement, not only works seamlessly but is well understood by all. As such I will be particularly pleased to welcome the outcome of recommendation 4 within the report.

I am confident that the Force has also worked hard to raise awareness of county lines offending with the public, and to encourage reporting either to the Force directly or anonymously through Crime Stoppers. Coincidentally the Force is running a new County Lines awareness raising campaign at the time of my writing this response.

I thank HMICFRS for this report and its insight which is useful to me in my role as police and crime commissioner. Whilst the fight against county lines offending and its root causes are ongoing, I am confident that the report's findings will be valuable to Devon and Cornwall Police. I look forward to learning more about the report's

recommendations and how they are bringing about positive changes to policing and ultimately, the safety of our communities.

Alison Hernandez
Police and Crime Commissioner
Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly