

News story: National County Lines Coordination Centre to crack down on drug gangs

The UK response to county lines drug crime has been significantly strengthened as the £3.6 million National County Lines Coordination Centre became fully operational today (Friday 21 September).

A new multi-agency 38-strong team of experts from the National Crime Agency (NCA), police forces and regional organised crime units will work together to develop the national intelligence picture of the complexity and scale of the threat, prioritise action against the most serious offenders, and engage with partners across government, including in the health, welfare and education spheres, to tackle the wider issues.

County lines crime relates to the supply of Class A drugs, primarily crack cocaine and heroin, from urban cities to market towns, coastal areas and rural locations by young people, using a branded mobile phone line.

Gangs and criminal networks use extreme violence and intimidation to establish and maintain markets, with practices including forcing vulnerable people from their homes to establish a base to sell drugs.

The county lines model involves modern slavery and exploitation of children alongside drugs supply and violent crime. The most recent national assessment of county lines, compiled by the NCA, suggests that there were more than 1000 lines in operation nationally with links to increasing levels of serious violence.

There are already 200 active county lines investigations underway, but the introduction of the centre will allow police forces to intensify their operations.

Welcoming the launch of the National County Lines Coordination Centre, Minister for Crime, Victoria Atkins said:

Using vulnerable young people to travel across the country to sell drugs is an appalling crime and we are cracking down on the gangs and networks responsible for these deplorable acts.

The National County Lines Coordination Centre will strengthen the law enforcement response to this issue and enable police forces to work together to tackle a crime that crosses regions and demands a multi-agency approach.

We are determined to put an end to the serious violence blighting communities. This measure will address one of the key drivers of these tragic crimes.

NCA Director General (Operations), Steve Rodhouse, said:

The NCA is committed to protecting the public by tackling the serious and organised crime threats which cause the greatest harm to the UK.

County lines is a national problem. Supply gangs are responsible for high levels of violence in addition to the exploitation and abuse of vulnerable adults and children.

Law enforcement collectively has been stepping up its response, working to identify and take effective action in areas of the country with the most significant problems.

In addition to helping the NCA and policing partners to work together more effectively and deliver a more comprehensive response to the county lines threat, the centre will assist the development of a whole-system, multi-agency approach which is vital to ensuring that vulnerable people are identified and safeguarded, understanding factors behind demand for drugs, and recovering proceeds of crime.

The National Police Chiefs' Council lead for gangs, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Duncan Ball, said:

The very nature of county lines offending means that we can only truly tackle it by bringing together all UK police forces, law enforcement agencies and other partners to create a unified national response.

Thanks to the Home Office's support, police forces and the NCA will now have the opportunity to better identify and target those criminal networks who run county lines and, with partners, safeguard vulnerable children and adults who are exploited to facilitate this drug supply.

Through this collaboration, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the NCA will provide national coordination, guidance and support to the frontline officers and staff who are working tirelessly to bring these ruthless gangs to justice.

The National County Lines Coordination Centre is the latest measure in the government's response to the recent rise in serious violence, set out in the £40 million [Serious Violence Strategy](#), which places a new focus on early intervention alongside robust law enforcement.

As part of the strategy's analysis into the rise in violent crime, county lines and the broader drugs market was identified as one of the key drivers. Between 2014 to 2015 and 2016 to 2017, homicides where either the victim or suspect were known to be involved in using or dealing illicit drugs increased from 50% to 57%.

In addition to the National County Lines Coordination Centre, a number of Home Office measures are already in place to tackle county lines. The £13 million [Trusted Relationship Fund](#) helps foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of exploitation. Local areas facing new gang-related threats can apply for match funding reviews and guidance for frontline professionals on how to identify potential victims.