

Press release: Criminal exploitation and 'county lines': learn from past mistakes, report finds

Summary:

- lessons must be learned from past sexual exploitation cases
- all children, not just the most vulnerable, are at risk of criminal exploitation
- agencies should not underestimate the risk of criminal exploitation in their areas
- children should be seen as victims, not perpetrators
- awareness-raising is crucial in preventing criminal exploitation

Local agencies must learn lessons from past sexual exploitation cases if they are to effectively respond to 'county lines' drug running and other forms of child criminal exploitation, [a new report finds](#).

The thematic report, from inspectorates Ofsted, HMI Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HMI Probation, also calls on agencies not to underestimate the risk of child criminal exploitation in their areas.

[Read 'Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery'](#) – this is an addendum to the 2016 report 'Time to listen'.

The in-depth inspections scrutinised practice in children's social care, education, health services, the police, youth offending services and probation services across 3 local authority areas.

Today's report illustrates the nationwide scale of criminal exploitation, with all areas – urban, rural, affluent as well as deprived – affected. Child victims come from a wide range of backgrounds. And while the most vulnerable are obvious targets for gangs, there are examples of private school children being groomed too.

Much has been done by many local partnerships across the country to deal with child sexual exploitation in their areas, the report recognises. But this success must be built upon and shared so that other forms of exploitation, like county lines drug running, can be dealt with effectively.

Inspectors found that some partners do not have a grip on the scale of criminal exploitation in their area. Poor intelligence-sharing sometimes hampers wider recognition and understanding of criminal exploitation, and, in turn, the ability to effectively respond to children. This includes missing the risks to some children, or identifying them too late.

The report calls on all agencies to get the basics right. Making sure that there are clear systems in place at the 'front door' of services that first come into contact with children is essential, so that children at risk are identified and receive a prompt and appropriate response.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, will also raise her concerns about the scale of criminal exploitation at the [National Children and Adults Services conference](#) in Manchester today.

Ms Spielman is expected to say:

Local partners must be quick to learn and quick to act. But not all agencies fully understand the scale of the problem in their area. And regional and national networks of exploitation of children are even less well understood.

It is also a concern that some agencies are still not looking past the behaviour of grooming victims to the root cause. If we have learnt anything from past exploitation cases, it should be to 'see the child, not the problem'.

The inspectorates call for a 'culture shift', so that front line staff both recognise the signs of criminal exploitation, and see children as victims despite their apparent offending behaviour.

Better training for all agencies, but especially the police, is vital, the report argues. In the areas inspected, police had made some progress in recognising the context of criminal exploitation when dealing with children in possession of drugs. However, all police forces admitted that it was still possible that children could be prosecuted, despite clear evidence that they were being exploited.

The report calls for a whole system approach to address the perpetrators, to protect and support victims, as well as preventing exploitation by raising awareness in the community and disrupting criminal activity. In one of the areas visited, inspectors saw examples of innovative work to disrupt criminal exploitation from some agencies.

Agencies and professionals must work together with parents and children to alert them to the signs of grooming, exploitation and county lines. The report shows that children are often being groomed or tricked into working before they recognise the dangers, and often before parents or professionals realise what is happening. Inspectors saw clear efforts to raise awareness in the local community in the areas visited.

Schools and colleges are also essential partners in the whole-system approach. Some schools are working hard to understand, reduce and prevent the risks of county lines. However, this awareness needs to be developed and supported across the country.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care said:

Tackling child criminal exploitation, including county lines, is a big challenge for agencies and professionals nationally and locally. It can be done, but agencies must make sure that they have the building blocks in place to work quickly and effectively.

Children who are being exploited cannot wait for agencies that are lagging behind or failing to recognise this issue. In responding to this dangerous situation, we must not repeat the mistakes of the past, where some partners were too slow to recognise the risk of child sexual exploitation in their areas, or somehow felt that it 'doesn't happen here'.

Wendy Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, said:

Criminally exploited children can only get the help they need when they've been recognised as a victim. We've found that when frontline officers handle cases involving children suspected of a criminal offence, they can be too quick to accept what they see at face value. Instead of seeing a vulnerable child in desperate need, they can see a criminal in the making. When officers ask the right questions – is this child being exploited? Are they at risk? – they can take the right steps to keep children safe and bring the real perpetrators to justice.

Professor Ursula Gallagher, Deputy Chief Inspector at the Care Quality Commission and lead for children's health and safeguarding, said:

Healthcare professionals and anyone working with children have a responsibility to look for the signs of exploitation, to use their curiosity and compassion, and not judge a child for their behaviour or the situation they are in.

This is why we work with other regulators to test how well individual parts of a system are working together to protect children and young people and to make clear what we expect of a high-performing area.

But it doesn't stop there. Services and systems as a whole need to consider how they share what they know with people working beyond their own locality, because people exploiting children do not limit their activity by geographical boundaries, and important safeguarding information must be able to follow children in order to protect them.

Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

We welcome this important report. The inspection shows that

children of all backgrounds can be forced into criminal and sexual exploitation. What is also clear is that agencies and professionals need to do more to recognise the extent of the problem and intervene early. Youth offending teams are well placed to spot the signs of exploitation and we were pleased to see some good work recognised in this report. However it is clear that more needs to be done to make sure that all agencies are working together to protect children.

The inspectorates' findings are published today [14 November 2018] as an [addendum to the 2016 report: 'Time to listen – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children'](#).

[Press release: New era at Sellafield as Thorp reprocessing ends](#)

The site's Thorp plant has completed its 24-year mission to reprocess spent nuclear fuel from around the world.

[Press release: New era at Sellafield as Thorp reprocessing ends](#)

Opened in 1994, Thorp is one of only two commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing plants in the world.

It has reprocessed more than 9,000 tonnes of fuel from 30 customers in nine countries around the world. It generated an estimated £9bn in revenue.

The last batch of fuel to be reprocessed began its journey through the plant at 11.32am on Friday 9 November.

There will be no redundancies as a result of the switch-off. All employees in roles no longer required have been offered alternative jobs in the business.

Thorp will continue to serve the UK until the 2070s as a storage facility for spent fuel.

Meanwhile, Sellafield is being reinvented as a centre of expertise for nuclear clean-up.

This will unlock 100 years' worth of opportunity for the site's workforce, supply chain, and community.

Paul Foster, Sellafield Ltd's Chief Executive Officer, said:

As we look forward to an exciting future, we want to celebrate the best of our past.

The end of reprocessing at Thorp is one of the most important events in Sellafield's history.

Thorp has been a West Cumbrian success story. It has delivered jobs, skills, pride, and prestige.

Our community came together in the fight to get it built, through the 'Trust Us' campaign.

Together we completed one of the largest and most complex construction projects ever undertaken in Europe.

And during 24 years of operations, we safely reprocessed 9,331 tonnes of fuel from 30 customers in nine countries.

We helped to keep the lights on in the UK and around the world and generated £9bn in revenue for the UK.

I'm immensely proud of Thorp's contribution and I'd like to thank the workforce for their unwavering dedication and professionalism throughout a period of unprecedented change.

Thorp (or the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant) is one third of a mile long.

It dominates a huge central strip of the Sellafield site and is the largest structure on the site.

Costing £1.8bn to build, it was paid for by its future customers.

The decision to cease reprocessing was taken in 2012 in response to a significant downturn in demand.

The international market for reprocessing has shifted significantly since Thorp's construction, with the majority of customers now opting to store rather than reprocess their fuel.

[Press release: Back to school to inspire engineers of the future](#)

Highways England is building bridges to inspire the next generation of engineers through a variety of educational activities across the South West.

[Press release: Back to school to inspire engineers of the future](#)

Ongoing and planned engagement with schools and colleges in Wiltshire, Somerset and Cornwall is helping to highlight numerous engineering opportunities within the highways industry and inspire young people to consider engineering as a rewarding career.

Next week the company will be involved in a bridge-building exercise with pupils from a Somerset school.

The team behind the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dualling scheme will visit Countess Gytha Primary School in Queen Camel on 23 November, helping Year 6 pupils to design and build K'Nex bridges as well as giving the youngsters an insight into the design of the route and what animals have been found during survey work.

Hannah Sanderson, Project Manager for the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester scheme, said:

Highways England is very focused on inspiring young people to consider engineering as a rewarding career.

It should be a fun experience for the youngsters, and we're really looking forward to taking our branch of engineering into the classroom.

Responsible for improving, managing and maintaining England's motorways and major A roads, the company is working with schools and colleges across the country as part of the Year of Engineering campaign.

By bringing young people face to face with engineering experiences and role models, the campaign aims to showcase the creativity and innovation of engineering careers and widen the pool of young people from all backgrounds who are willing to consider the profession.

As part of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

Insights programme, Highways England also took part in a recent initiative with Wiltshire schools.

Maria Madeley, a primary teacher and science co-ordinator at Minety School, spent a week with the company earlier in the year, gaining an understanding of the engineering and geotechnical work around structures and roads across the strategic network.

This enabled Maria to build a curriculum around road building for her Year 5 and Year 6 pupils. And after Highways England spent a day teaching the children about smart motorways, bridge building and the geology of rocks, it culminated in a British Science Association-funded How Real Stuff Works event at Malmesbury School.



Minety School teacher Maria Madeley, left, with Garry Packer and Emma Grayson of Highways England and her pupils' bridge design at the British Science Association's How Real Stuff Works event at Malmesbury School

Elsewhere, the team behind the A417 Missing Link project engaged three Gloucestershire schools in chocolate-based STEM projects recently, while earlier this year the A303 Stonehenge project team met with Amesbury Primary School pupils, educating the children about the company's environmental and archaeological work, as well as safety and engineering aspects of the proposed scheme.

Esther Gordon-Smith, the team's legacy and benefits lead, also took part in Wiltshire Council's Science and Engineering Fair last month, delivering a 'STEM serves society' presentation to teachers and school leaders.

The A30 Chiverton to Carland Cross team are also seeking to build relationships with schools and communities alongside the route in Cornwall, and have just launched a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) initiative.

The schools' outreach programme is designed to engage children from four to 18 in fun, hands-on activities.

Any schools interested in receiving a STEAM visit, can email:
A30ChivertontoCarlandCross@highwaysengland.co.uk

For more information [visit the Year of Engineering website.](#)

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.