

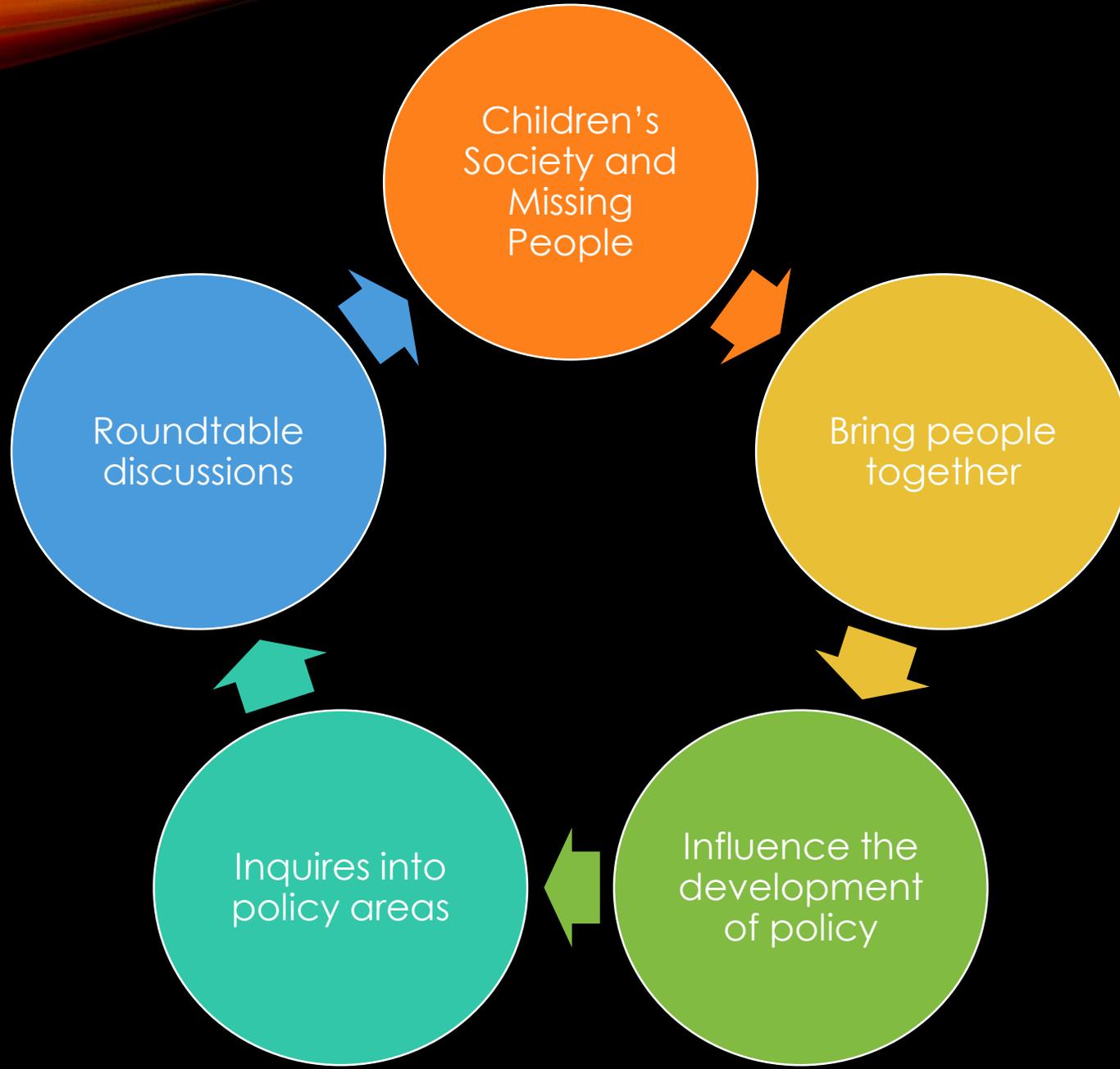


# COUNTY LINES

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Member of Parliament for Stockport

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing  
Children and Adults



## **June 2012**

Report on Children missing from home and care out of borough placements

## **July 2017**

Children who go missing and are exploited by gangs to sell drugs ... seen to make a choice in the same way as victims of CSE 'child prostitutes' ....grooming not understood response to both parents and young people inadequate

## **May 2016**

Inquiry into the safeguarding of 'absent children' boys seen as low risk lack of awareness of extent of gang exploitation

## **December 2017**

An APPG meeting brought together experts to discuss how children and young people could be better safeguarded from involvement in county lines following a survey to police forces asking them to identify increases in violent crime attributable to rise in county lines activity

# What is County Lines

Organised crime gangs extending the supply and sale of Class A drugs into new markets

Use of children and young people

Establishing a base usually the home of a vulnerable adult (cuckooing)

Accompanied by high levels of violence

Exploitation of the vulnerability of children

# DEFINITION OF CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

**Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.**

Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy April 2018

# SCALE OF COUNTY LINES

National Crime Agency report in 2017 suggested there are more than 720 county lines, this has since been revised to approx. 1,500!

Children's commissioner – as many as 50,000 children aged ten – 15 could be involved with gangs

£2.5bn a year made by drug gangs

476 arrests of drug couriers by British Transport Police

The majority of children being recruited by county lines networks are 15-17 years old and are male. The youngest reported child was 12 years old.

In 2016 the NCA found that in 50% of responses females were also found to be exploited and groomed by criminal gangs.

Girls who are exploited along are at increased risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

# WHO IS TARGETED

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## Ofsted, HMICFRS, CQC, HMI Probation's thematic report on Criminal exploitation and 'county lines' November, 2018

“All children are vulnerable to criminal exploitation... Professionals and parent should not assume that the most vulnerable children are the only vulnerable children.”

“Children not in education were at heightened risk”

Private schools pupils being recruited to avoid detection

## APPG

At the APPG's roundtable in July 2017 we heard from a middle-class mother about how her son who had fallen victim to criminally exploitation

From the survey of police forces we found, victims deliberately targeted for their vulnerability – children, people with mental health issues and learning difficulties and existing drug users.

Targeting of children in PRUs and children's homes

## NCA County Lines Violence, Exploitation and Drug Supply, 2017

65% reported exploitation of children

37% reported exploitation of adults with mental health problems

“Children assessed as vulnerable due to missing episodes do appear to be more regularly linked directly through association to drug networks operating in the areas they reside” NPCC force.

# TARGETING CHILDREN IN OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS

- 61% of children now placed away from their home area ( increase of 64% since 2012)
- Rate of children going missing has increased by 100% since 2015
- Lack of data on outcomes for children. Are they safer? Are other children safer?
- Isolated , more difficult for SW's to support
- Notifications still not working
- ( Sir Alan Wood Residential Care leadership Board)

# TARGETING PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS

- Children's Commissioners Report 2018 Stability Index
- Twice as likely to experience school instability
- She says that insatiability of school and care placements lead to vulnerability to exploitation by gangs or abuse
- Edward Timpson former children's minister is reviewing school exclusions

# HOW COUNTY LINES HAS CHANGED

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The wide and successful media coverage of County Lines has seen changes in the way gangs operate.

The County Lines model has developed like all business models, some gangs are comparable to franchises

Gangs are beginning to establish recruitment hubs outside of metropolitan cities

Using local children they hope to avoid detection...

They are also expanding their market beyond Class A drugs; many gangs now supply cars, money, knives and firearms. Rochdale a recent example

*It became so **frustrating** as all services that were assigned to working with my son in this period... were **all working as separate entities** – with this came, on many occasions, **lack of communication, oversight or duplication of what was meant to be done or not take place**, this caused me great **distress.**”*

- Fragmented safeguarding system
- Child as victim or child as offender

# DISRUPTING GANGS

Criminal Behaviour Orders

Child Abduction Warning Notices

Change attitudes towards drug dealer

Human Trafficking legislation – Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Sixteen people have been arrested after a year-long investigation into the exploitation of children and adults by drugs barons in Rochdale last week.

Being convicted of trafficking carries heavy sentences

# St Giles Trust pilot scheme

Home Office funded project in Kent to give support to children involved in County Lines. Police worked with St Giles Trust and Missing People through scheme.

Three initiatives: One-to-one casework support, phone support service (Missing People), peer advisory service.

Of the children who engaged with casework almost all of them were white boys, aged 13-18, in PRUs and with a history missing episodes.

30% lived in LA care/living away from home

Other common traits were being under the youth offending service, having special needs, drug use, 'issues' with alcohol and experiences of serious assault or violence

Interventions saw a significant reduction in missing incidents

Kent police estimate £271,253 of savings from fall in missing incidents alone.

# CO-DESIGNING SERVICES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

# ACHIEVING CHANGE TOGETHER

ACT provided intensive early support to 25 young people working with them and their families. These were predominantly girls under 16 with a range of complex difficulties. All of the young people were assessed as either being 'on the edge of care', or in care placements that were at risk of breakdown.

One of the features of the project was involving the girls in co –designing the services that they thought would work for them and social workers responding to the young people's priorities which was not necessarily their exploitation.

The project also challenges the view that children and young people need to be moved from their local communities to manage risk of exploitation.

The evaluation of the project said that escalation had been avoided and no secure placements were used.

# ANDREW ROWLAND RESEARCH

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Andrew Rowland is a paediatric consultant and professor at Salford University

He recently held a consultation with 56 young people, in years 7 and 9, from two schools in Greater Manchester.

The consultation looked to gain children's opinions on a young people's advocacy centre in Greater Manchester

- Find out what young people thought about an advocacy house in North England

- Determine how young people could be involved in the co-designing and co-production

One reason children suggest an Advocacy House might be needed was mental health.

Whether it was due to bullying, anxiety, isolation, 'feeling sad' or increasing pressure and stress. Mental Health was an obvious theme amongst the children.

**NOT JUST A THOUGHT**

# CHANGE HOW WE APPROACH SAFEGUARDING

# Working Together to Safeguard Children: July 2018

- **Work of Carleen Firmin University of Bedfordshire** [www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk](http://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)
- The guidance highlights that practitioners should be alert to potential need for early help for children who are:
  - **frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home**
  - **at risk of modern slavery, trafficking or exploitation**
  - **showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups**

## **Collecting information is not an end in itself but needs to inform intervention and prevention of harm**

- Children are vulnerable to exploitation out of the family home, in the wider community; i.e. schools, within peer groups, online, exploitation is not limited to CSE but also to criminal exploitation, youth violence, gang affiliation gangs, extremism leading to radicalisation and online abuse.
- **Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care. ( environmental protection plan)**
- Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They should look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child.”

# Trusted Relationship Fund

The Home Office has recently launched the **Trusted Relationship Fund**

- £13 million fund to help youth workers, police, nurses and other professionals form close, protective relationships with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, county lines gang crime or relationship abuse.
- Establishing a safe space where young people can share their concerns with professionals who will listen to them
- Providing specialist counselling services
- Delivering positive activities including sport, music, arts and volunteering
- Improving the way local organisations work together to support the most vulnerable young people
- Working with children who repeatedly go missing to ensure that they are kept safe and well

# WHAT WE NEED TO DO

- Communicate
- Work with the community, parents and young people to prevent and disrupt
- Change attitudes to children