



*Identifying and disseminating emerging practice in the prevention, identification and disruption of county lines exploitation*

## PROGRESS REPORT **20-21**



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# Purpose & Introduction



This report will describe the purpose and aims of the County Lines Pathfinder, and the progress that has been made in developing and implementing this programme of work across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. It will detail challenges encountered, and make recommendations for further development and future delivery.

It will detail the focus of the work in each county and the testing, evaluation and learning which has taken place, and share plans for the wide dissemination of this learning.

It additionally contains a description of ongoing work to enable a better understanding of the extent and effect of County Lines exploitation across the Pathfinder region, and work to review existing policy.

The Youth Justice Board's Strategic Plan for 2019-2022 sets addressing Serious Youth Violence as one of their priorities, including an aim to see "a reduction in the number of children being exploited through involvement with county lines". Their pathfinder approach assists local authorities and partners to pilot, develop and disseminate potential solutions to system-wide challenges.

Using NCA data on the number of county lines across England and Wales, the Youth Justice Board provided funding to support Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire to identify and disseminate emerging practice in the prevention, identification and disruption of county lines activity and associated exploitation.

# PURPOSE & Introduction



*“County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The ‘County Line’ is the mobile phone line used to take orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend”* National Crime Agency

The County Lines Pathfinder is funded until March 2022 to:

1. Develop and evaluate practice and approaches to reduce the number of children being exploited through county lines
2. Collate and disseminate learning widely across England and Wales in a way that other services can apply it

Thematic areas of focus in the pathfinder include:

- Governance models
- Practice models
- Specialist team models
- Workforce development
- Enforcement and disruption
- Community engagement
- Multi-agency partnership responses
- Agility and responsiveness

# Purpose & Introduction



The Pathfinder Project Lead in each county is developing an in-depth knowledge of existing and developing practice both within their county and related to their areas of focus - researching, testing, evaluating and sharing practice and approaches across the Pathfinder region to better support children, their caregivers and staff, and to better prevent, identify and disrupt county lines exploitation.

We expect the work of the pathfinder to contribute to a reduction in serious youth violence, and in the number of children being exploited through county lines by:

1. Improved awareness of county lines across a wide professional base
2. Improved identification of children and young people involved in, or at risk from, county lines
3. Reduced need for county lines related statutory interventions
4. Greater range of practice and approaches in place for professionals to utilise
5. Improved understanding and collaboration between sectors and agencies
6. Increasingly relevant and effective practice informed by the voice of stakeholders
7. Increased confidence in tackling county lines across a wide range of stakeholders
8. Improved practice in disrupting county lines activity

# Governance



The County Lines Pathfinder Team comprises a manager, a project lead in each county and a part-time analyst. The team is supported by, and reports to, the programme Governance Board which comprises representation from the following organisations:

- Norfolk County Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Essex County Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- The Association of Directors of Childrens Services
- The National County Lines Coordination Centre
- Eastern Region Special Operations Unit
- The Youth Justice Board

The Governance Board meets 6-weekly to receive progress reports and to make any pertinent decisions. In addition, the programme manager meets quarterly with the Youth Justice Board to report on progress, share learning and plan for wide dissemination of learning. Norfolk County Council is the grant holder on behalf of the four eastern-region Pathfinder counties.

Our external evaluation partners, Traverse Ltd., are supporting the Pathfinder with a review of existing policy and system responses relative to county lines, and to assess data and mapping requirements to support effective practice.

# Why a County Lines Pathfinder?



Defining County Lines is complex, with developing understanding, definitions and interpretations. In 2018, the UK Government described county lines as “...a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.”

The National Crime Agency (NCA) describes county lines as “... where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The ‘County Line’ is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend.”

County lines is the business model of drug dealing which uses a dedicated line of communication (‘deal line’) to take orders for drugs and send mass marketing texts offering deals and promotions, for example free samples or two for one deals. These are often mobile phone lines, but could also be social media or web-enabled lines of communication. The lines are often branded, and the NCA estimates 1,050-1,100 deal lines to be active in the UK during any given month.

County Lines is usually associated with heroin and crack cocaine and the primary motivation for county lines activity is financial gain (Spicer, 2019). The NCA estimates that each line generates annual profits in excess of £800,000, creating a £500m drug industry linked to murder, violence and exploitation (Ministry of Justice, 2019).

Spicer, J. (2019). ‘That’s their brand, their business’: How police officers are interpreting County Lines. *Policing and Society*, 29(8), 873-886. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1445742>

Ministry of Justice (2019) ‘Knife and offensive weapon sentencing statistics: October to December 2018’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/knife-and-offensive-weapon-sentencing-statistics-october-to-december-2018>



# Why a County Lines Pathfinder?



Due, in part, to the saturation of drug dealers in city centres some gangs and organised criminal groups began moving and selling drugs in smaller market and coastal towns where there is less competition, perpetrators are less known to local police (Spicer, 2019) and there is generally less police presence (Robinson, McLean and Densley, 2019). A typical structure in this model consists of county lines managers who have often established the line and manage the supply network at a senior level (normally remaining in the urban base); county lines operatives who are generally younger individuals moving and replenishing drugs and money stocks (Andell and Pitts, 2018) and managing the 'deal line' (including direct and digital marketing); and county lines runners at the bottom of the chain, who are often children or vulnerable adults involved in packaging and street level dealing to the end user (Harding, 2020).

However, it is important to note that not all county lines cross local authority or police boundaries. The model is constantly evolving and diversifying, and it's not unusual to see satellite or franchise hubs which are locally based as the traditional county lines model embeds and establishes a local base from which to supply drugs 24/7, or where local suppliers replicate a county lines model as they see its success used elsewhere. Children from the host town are at heightened risk of exploitation as exploiters target local children to package and sell the drugs to reduce the risk of travelling with large quantities. Although drug supply underpins county lines offending, exploitation is an integral part of the business model. In the county lines model, managers can maximise their profits and concurrently reduce their risk of identification and prosecution by using young and/or vulnerable people to hold, move and sell the drugs. There is a clear direction of travel from the NCA to disrupt and enforce action against those at the top of the county lines supply chain.

County lines exploitation victims are often children, who are groomed with money, gifts or through sexual and violent relationships. Once 'recruited' methods of control include debt bondage (including staged robberies); sexual abuse (including for blackmail and humiliation purposes) and/or physical violence or kidnap against victims and their families (real and threatened), which are used to coerce victims to become dealers and enforce debts. Unfortunately the lack of a statutory definition for child criminal exploitation means they may be identified as perpetrators, rather than victims, of crime.

# Why a County Lines Pathfinder?



County lines offending appears to be increasing nationwide but it is difficult to obtain an accurate figure on the extent of county lines exploitation, either UK-wide or across the Pathfinder region. This is because there is no national directive on data recording and sharing, resulting in inconsistent recording methods which don't capture the extent of knowledge held across various organisations and services. The Serious Violence Duty, which is expected to come into effect in 2022, places a duty on public bodies to share data and intelligence and jointly plan to prevent serious violence; fulfilment of this duty will help to address the data gaps which currently exist and enable local authorities to take shared responsibility, generating a much more comprehensive picture of the extent and effect of county lines exploitation.

Furthermore, inconsistent assessment of criminal exploitation risk, in part due to misunderstanding of the determinant factors of both county lines, and of what constitutes child criminal exploitation, mean it is often not identified and recorded as such. However, it is not disputed that an increase in county lines results in increased levels of violence, exploitation, class A drug use and, potentially, acquisitive crime in our communities (Ford, 2018).

County Lines exploitation and Serious Youth Violence are intrinsically linked, and have a devastating impact on children, vulnerable adults, families and communities. The violence, serious injury and potential loss of life associated with the competition over county lines disproportionately affects the associated runners and drug users, protecting those at the top of the supply chain. Any exploitation is typified by a power imbalance and those most commonly exploited are males aged 15-17, although children as young as 10 have been identified. The NCA reports that 90% of those exploited are male but we recognise that females are likely to be underrepresented in official figures as they are less likely to arouse suspicion therefore avoiding detection. Exploiters are diversifying methods to target and exploit less typically vulnerable children of all ages, genders, ethnicities and social classes. However they all exhibit a common vulnerability: they are all children.

# What Was the Plan 20 to 21?



## Objectives:

- Establish up to date picture of operating model of county lines in region which recognises complexities
- Establish indicative baseline information (including recommendation for minimum dataset)
- Scope existing responses, and identify existing and developing practice across the region
- Evaluate existing and developing practice
- Develop innovative practice
- Disseminate initial findings



## Main activities:

Establish indicative baseline data and an accurate narrative of the current operating model of county lines in region

Scope existing responses to county lines exploitation

Each area will develop and share cross– county, an in-depth knowledge of existing and developing practice in their local area

Each area will research and identify good practice in a number of focus areas

Each area will develop and evaluate new and innovate approaches

# Impact & Mapping

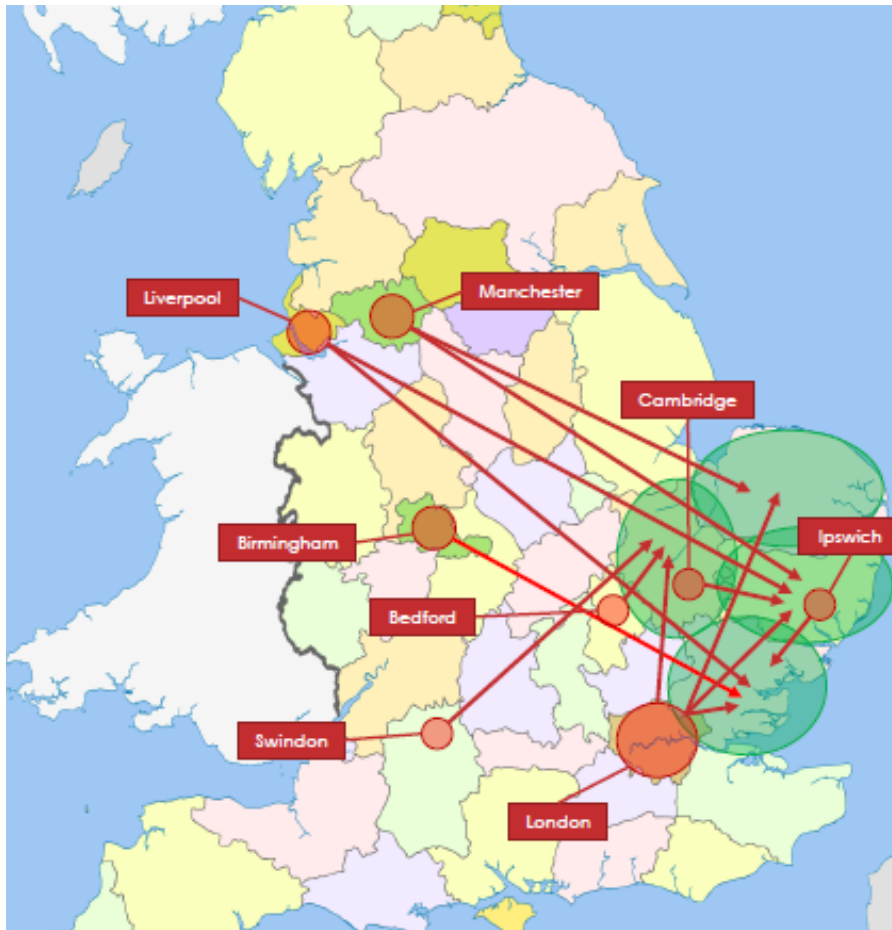


County lines is complex! Traverse supported us to map stakeholder knowledge and observation of county lines across the Pathfinder in order to identify **Common Themes** through facilitation of an online workshop and subsequent online survey. Key findings are summarised in the following 6 pages.

## Common Experiences

1	TERM AND DEFINITION	The term County Lines can be misleading for some practitioners in the current climate as county lines activity does not exclusively take place across county boundaries. Traverse suggest the definition is reviewed regularly to reflect the changing business model of operation.
2	GROOMING / RECRUITMENT	Grooming models are complex and continually evolving and adapting. Criminal and sexual exploitation are used to groom and maintain children and vulnerable adults, but motivations for involvement are complex and could also include money, poverty and peer influence. Social media and other platforms are commonly used to identify and groom.
3	TARGETING	While there is no typical profile for victims of county lines exploitation, practitioners identified a number of factors which may indicate a child or young person's enhanced vulnerability to criminal exploitation including: exclusion from mainstream education; poverty and/or low income households; autism and/or learning difficulties; poor mental health; histories of (residential) social care; and substance misuse. This list is by no means exhaustive.
4	RISKS	There are a multitude of risks associated with children's exploitation through county lines, including (but not limited to): disengagement from education resulting in poorer attainment, educational outcomes and limiting opportunities; access leading to substance misuse and addiction; criminalisation risking considerable sentences; lack of support networks as the pressure from county lines exploitation destroys familial and peer relationships; poor physical health and exposure to physical violence; and pervasive and long-lasting mental health impacts from exposure to harmful and frightening environments and 'life experiences beyond their years'.

Stakeholder feedback and local authority data helped us to begin to map county lines activity across the Pathfinder (2020). This map shows the origins and destinations of the main County Lines active in the four Pathfinder localities.



Some lines in the Pathfinder region originate in larger urban bases and follow the traditional county lines supply model, but we also recognise that there are now ‘satellite’ or ‘franchise’ models in operation. Simon Harding (2020) refers to this evolving spectrum of county lines drug supply as professionalisation and diversification of the model, and this can mean that local children are at greater risk of exploitation as line managers/controllers seek to identify local runners.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of known county lines originate in London, with multiple lines active in all four localities.

Other sources of known lines include Liverpool, Manchester, Bedford, Glasgow, Bristol, Swindon, Slough, Luton, Milton Keynes and Bury St Edmunds.

Ipswich also acts as a hub of county lines activity. While multiple lines from London are known to run into Ipswich, the city is also the source of additional lines into Cambridge, Essex and West Suffolk.



Common characteristics among the locations most affected by county lines activity were identified by local stakeholders as:

1	TRANSPORT	It's no coincidence that the areas with the highest county lines activity tend to be large towns or cities with a robust transport infrastructure and direct train links to major urban cities. In some cases these locations can act as both a destination for, and source of, county lines giving them a high degree of strategic significance in both the supply and distribution of drugs, and can result in these locations becoming sites of violent conflict between external gangs and established 'local businesses'.
2	SUBSTANCE MISUSE	Areas with high levels of substance abuse and homelessness are often hotspots of county lines activity and stakeholders speculated that this is due to the existence of an active drug market, and the presence of vulnerable adults who can be coerced into cooperating with county lines gangs.

Stakeholders were also able to identify a number of characteristics common among children exploited through county lines. Whilst there is no typical profile and exploiters are continually adapting their approach to target less typically vulnerable children, we recognise that the following characteristics *may* increase a child's vulnerability to criminal exploitation:

1	MALE
2	AGED 15 - 17
3	Black And Minority Ethnicity (BAME)
4	History of (residential) social care;
5	Exclusion from mainstream education, employment or training
6	Learning difficulties, autism and/or poor mental health



## Common themes in system responses to county lines activity

### **Key Actors and Relationships**

Respondents from all four localities highlighted the central role of youth-focused statutory services and community-facing policing teams in disrupting County Lines activity and safeguarding vulnerable children. Multi-agency teams such as MACE and MASH were also seen as integral to the design and delivery of interventions, as were Community Safety Partnerships. Many respondents also felt that the VCS and health sectors played an important role.

The quality of working relationships between these actors varied widely. Some relationships, such as between statutory services and the VCS sector, were seen as positive across all four localities. Most respondents were also able to point to successful examples of collaboration between police and the VCS sector, particularly larger charitable organisations such as St Giles Trust. In all four localities, multi-agency teams such as MACE were thought to play an important role in facilitating inter-agency coordination.

### **Leadership Structures and Gaps in Provision**

There was disagreement among respondents as to whether there was a clear structure in place to facilitate multi-agency working. In Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, respondents felt that the existence of multi-agency delivery and response plans helped to ensure a consistent approach to tackling County Lines activities across agencies (although there was some concern that adult services were not adequately involved in this). In Suffolk and Essex, respondents saw a need for a more clearly defined structure to guide multi-agency approaches to tackling County Lines.

Some respondents expressed concern that the true “weight” of County Lines activity across the four localities was not widely understood among practitioners who were not directly involved in tackling such activity. This was perceived as a failure to communicate strategic decisions about, and knowledge of, County Lines down to frontline staff. In turn, this led to inconsistencies in practitioners’ understanding of the roles and remits of the various services involved in tackling County Lines and a lack of confidence in providing support for children exploited through County Lines activity.

A common frustration among respondents was the lack of multi-agency working at strategic level, meaning that responses to County Lines were often covered by multiple separate boards. This was widely perceived to hinder the flow of information from strategic level to operational managers and practitioners. Several respondents also reported that differences in the geographical jurisdiction of the various services involved in tackling County Lines constrained effective multi-agency working.

Common enablers and barriers to effective local practice were highlighted:

## ENABLERS

1	SPECIALIST TEAMS	The creation of local teams with a specific CCE / county lines remit helps to raise awareness of the issue and to formalise standard practice across all agencies involved.
2	TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACHES	Adopting trauma informed attachment approaches to respond to children at risk of child criminal exploitation demonstrates positive results, particularly with multiple/high risk cases.
3	FORMALISED REFERRAL MECHANISMS	Formalised referral mechanisms are deemed important in identifying and supporting those at risk of child criminal exploitation.
4	MULTIAGENCY WORKING	Multiagency working facilitates information-sharing across organisational and geographical boundaries, thus improving local responses to CCE and/or county lines.

## BARRIERS

1	EARLY IDENTIFICATION	Due to the changing and complex model of recruitment, early identification of children at risk of criminal exploitation can be difficult. In many cases, this means practitioners are unable to engage until they are already exploited.
2	VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT	It can be difficult to engage at-risk children in preventative and diversionary activity. This could be because they don't recognise the exploitation, are fearful of consequences, or because practitioners are unable to offer an attractive alternative to what is offered by county lines. This could also be due to a lack of resources within services.
3	CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING	Stakeholders feel contextual safeguarding has not been formally embedded in all CCE/county lines practice and practitioners tend to fall back on traditional safeguarding models that emphasise the role of the family.
4	LEGISLATION, POLICY & GUIDANCE	Solutions to county lines require whole-systems working together, supported by systemic guidance. The current lack of a national holistic approach to legislation, policy and guidance inhibits effective practice at local level.
5	FUNDING AND RESOURCES	Similarly, there are concerns a lack of funding and resource allocation, particularly at national government level, impedes effective practice.





## County Lines during Covid-19

Whilst over half of stakeholders agreed that covid-19 had initially impacted county lines in their area, 'normal service' was said to have resumed after a few weeks.

In initial impact, some stakeholders noted an increase in violence as county lines operations struggled to move and supply drugs resulting in less availability, less purity and higher prices.

As lockdown restrictions meant that those travelling on public transport were more likely to be apprehended and questioned, in order to avoid detection the region saw an increase in the use of hire cars to transport drugs. There was suggestion that some were also using 'delivery uniforms' such as those used by food delivery companies, and fake NHS badges to support travel.

Intelligence suggests that more activity was taking place indoors, particularly in cuckooed addresses. We also saw an increase in the use of hotels and air B&B premises to sell drugs.

Respondents also commented on the increased vulnerability of children to criminal exploitation due to covid. Causes include potential increased poverty due to loss of household income; increased time out of education with more free time and less oversight; and potential rise in the risk of online grooming due to more unmonitored time spent on social media platforms.

# Data



## Baseline Mapping

All four pathfinder counties supplied data (mainly Youth Justice Service and Police data) to enable us to baseline the extent and effect of county lines activity in the summer of 2020. With the data available to us some commonalities were identified in the cohort of children identified as at risk of criminal exploitation:

- 1) There are consistent or growing numbers of children identified as at risk of criminal exploitation
- 2) Key ages for those identified as at risk are 15-17 (up to 19 is common), although children as young as 10 were identified at risk
- 3) Females represent only around 10%, but we recognise this is likely to be an under-representation as females are perhaps less likely to arouse suspicion and therefore less likely to be detected
- 4) Males from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are over-represented

Class A trafficking arrest data (not provided from all four counties) suggests a higher numbers of juveniles arrested reside out of county.

National Referral Mechanism Reports are being used effectively to suggest criminal exploitation grounds relating to children and drug investigations. Averagely, 87% of referrals submitted receive a positive initial decision for reasonable grounds, and interestingly all reported NRMs for females were successful at this stage.



## Recommended Minimum Dataset

Responsibility for screening, identification, definition of risk level, and recording of child criminal exploitation and risk differs across the Pathfinder counties so accessing comparator datasets was not possible.

The National County Lines Coordination Centre Vulnerability Assessment Tracker provides a comprehensive mechanism for assessment and monitoring, but this isn't consistently used nationwide. It's fair to say that nationally there's still work to be done to standardise data collection which enables a robust analysis of the county lines landscape.

Traverse have worked with us, and other stakeholders locally and nationally, to develop a Recommended Minimum Dataset which is intended to represent a 'gold standard' in County Lines data collection across the Pathfinder localities. Measures identified within this include datasets from Youth Justice, Police, Education, Community Safety, Housing, Children's Services and Health.

It is recognised that it is not possible to implement this dataset in full immediately, and that implementation is likely to be incremental and vary across counties dependent on the measures already captured. However, commitment has been given to provide the measures possible from this recommended list in October 2021 (covering 6 months of data April - September), and to establish local working groups to further explore and consider the system, practice and recording developments required to implement measures not currently captured.

Further to analysis of the local data submitted in October 2021, the impact of the recommended minimum dataset will be evaluated. The dataset and evaluation will be made widely available as a product of the Pathfinder.

# POLICY REVIEW



There is work to be done on a systemic level to support effective local county lines practice. County lines present a particular challenge for practitioners, given that responsibility for implementing responses is shared between a wide range of bodies. While responses tend to be locally focused, their effectiveness can be enhanced or constrained by national policy directives. To support our understanding of this, Traverse are in the midst of conducting a Policy Review which will be published late in 2021.

This review examines key policy areas in England and Wales relating to county lines activity and exploitation, such as education, criminal justice and children's services, and will identify opportunities to maximise national enablers and expose potential barriers of effective local practice.

Difficulty in implementing whole system responses to county lines is compounded by many factors, including the absence of a universal legal definition of child criminal exploitation (CCE); some discrepancy between risk-focused and welfare-focused approaches to youth violence meaning children who are exploited through county lines may be viewed as perpetrators rather than victims of crime; and inconsistency regarding the collection and sharing of relevant data.

The relevant deliverables for this review were grouped into four categories to allow for consideration of each within the wider national picture of County Lines activity. These categories were: partnership approaches; interventions; staff training; and promising practice in delivery.

There are ten distinct categories covered: 1) safeguarding and child protection; 2) pathways out of county lines; 3) modern slavery; 4) lack of coordination across government; 5) serious youth violence; 6) housing and accommodation; 7) transition between youth and adult sectors; 8) enforcement and disruption of perpetrators; 9) school exclusion, access to education and alternative provision; and 10) serious case reviews.

# Norfolk Deliverables



## REVIEW OF MULTIAGENCY CCE TEAM APPROACH

Norfolk Child Criminal Exploitation Team was a multiagency pilot which ran from August 2018 to September 2020, and was established to support children identified as criminally exploited through the county lines business model. The co-located team comprised staff from the Norfolk Youth Offending Team, Children's Services and Norfolk Constabulary, and their remit included both the delivery of direct case work, and development and delivery of multiagency CCE training across the county, informed by practice experience. They employed contextual safeguarding and provided more robust multiagency support and advocacy for criminally exploited children who were traditionally identified as perpetrators, rather than victims, of crime.

An overview of the background and process, enablers and barriers, and steps to implementation will soon be available on the Youth Justice Resource Hub.

## POLICE CUSTODY PILOT

Whilst there are successful early intervention custody programmes running in metropolitan authorities, Norfolk were keen to explore the potential in a predominately importing area. There was little to compare, hence funding was secured through project ADDER to pilot an approach through Wymondam Police Investigation Centre in Norfolk (the busiest in the county for youth detentions). Progress to date: 1) Scoping exercise completed; 2) Links made with key partners to align service objectives; 3) Project aims and objectives identified; 4) Job descriptions written, posts advertised and two staff recruited; 5) Working processes and operating procedures established; 6) Baseline data to support evaluation collated and analysed; 7) Linked Rescue and Response with all agencies working with/in the custody suite. The service will launch in May 2021, and the role of the staff working under this model will be to engage children at the earliest reachable moment and bridge access to services. This approach will be summarised and made available prior to the end of the Pathfinder.



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## EDUCATION

Originally, Norfolk planned to develop and pilot a primary prevention education programme for children to build resilience, raise awareness of Child Criminal Exploitation, and highlight where to seek support. However, in current circumstances education providers have many competing priorities to mitigate the impact of Covid restrictions resulting in reduced capacity to implement a new programme. Instead, Norfolk will work with local education providers, local authority colleagues and third sector partners to develop work which will support schools to consider alternatives to exclusion - something which we recognise contributes to increased vulnerability to child criminal exploitation. A process document detailing this work will be made widely available prior to the end of the Pathfinder programme.



## TIER 1 E-LEARNING

The final deliverable in Norfolk involves working with local and national partners to develop a multiagency tier 1 exploitation e-learning module to provide consistency and standardisation for organisations and agencies working across the system, and enable professionals across the country to have a shared baseline understanding of exploitation.

This e-learning will be available for everyone to access and will provide a basic overview of exploitation. It will be SCORM compliant and transportable, with each area able to add information and processes specific to their local response.

A centralised training package for all professionals across the system reinforces the message that safeguarding against exploitation requires a coordinated multiagency response. Development of this e-learning package is well underway and it will be available in the coming months via the Youth Justice Resource Hub.

# Suffolk Deliverables



## FLATS (FAMILIES LEARNING ABOUT THINKING SKILLS)

Families Learning About Thinking Skills (FLATS) is a groupwork programme developed in Suffolk by a clinical psychologist, informed by an existing evidence base in addition to clinical judgement, knowledge and experience. It was originally developed for use with children and young people at risk of exploitation from local gangs, and has been adapted for use with those identified at risk from child criminal exploitation, including through county lines. It provides an intervention framework and toolbox to support children to more safely navigate their social worlds, relationships, and challenges which may present within these; in addition to supporting their emotional wellbeing, and capacity to tolerate and manage strong and difficult emotions safely.

The programme focus for children is on the development of key skills and learning across three areas: problem solving - managing difficult situations skilfully; relationship skills - improving connection, assertiveness, communication, and safely managing conflict; and identity skills - improving self-esteem, clarifying goals and values and promoting creativity. The programme focus for caregivers is on supporting them to support and contain their child, and apply the skills and learning from FLATS within real-life contexts outside of sessions.

Delivery of an online course piloted with a small peer group believed to be at risk of criminal exploitation has been completed, and despite delivering in this way producing a range of challenges, preliminary feedback and follow-up outcome measures were very positive. Learning from this has been written up and is available [here](#).

The next step is to run another CCE FLATS programme prior to the end of the Pathfinder, so that the adaptations and outcomes can be evaluated under 'normal practice', and a further evaluation made available prior to the end of the Pathfinder programme, alongside access to the programme materials on the agreement and understanding that a set of conditions are met.



## CULTURAL COMPETENCE

There is a vast body of research that explores cultural competence for practitioners working with children and families and increasingly, cultural competence is cited as helpful when working with children who are criminally exploited, however there is limited research regarding what makes a practitioner culturally competent in this field. Drawing from other areas as a starting point, the Pathfinder Lead in Suffolk, alongside colleagues from psychology and social work have undertaken a literature review to explore this. They have also gathered the reflections of professionals to ensure the literature reflects what is happening in the field, and have worked with children and caregivers to explore the skills, knowledge and values they find important in a practitioner.

This learning has been collated into a document which can be used to: support the recruitment process of new practitioners; support the training and development needs of practitioners; and act as a reflective tool for practitioners and teams to consider their own cultural competence in this field. This document will be available on the YJ Resource Hub by November 2021.

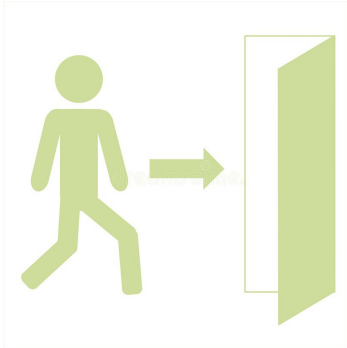
## SAFETY PLANNING

Whilst it is in no way the child's responsibility to keep themselves safe and any safety planning work must be done in conjunction with robust perpetrator disruption and enforcement, we also recognise that there at times practitioners face difficulty in supporting children to safety plan in what is a very alien environment to most.

To support practitioners in this challenging field, the Suffolk Pathfinder Lead, in consultation with other partners, has developed a tool for youth justice leaders and managers to use to provide safety planning consultation to professionals undertaking direct safety planning work with children and their families. The tool will be available from October 2021 dependent on a set of conditions being met.







## SAFE AND EFFECTIVE EXIT

The Suffolk Pathfinder Lead is reviewing the elements of safe and effective exit. This work includes engaging with partners to review current good practice and barriers to safe exit in different settings. To support exit, the effectiveness of restorative practice to restore and heal family relationships will be trialled within the FLATS programme.

## WORKING SAFELY

We recognise the need to emphasise staff safety when working with children at risk of criminal exploitation, and this will be explored via a literature review and stakeholder input to develop a tool youth justice managers can use to ensure practitioners know how to keep themselves and each other safe, and understand the importance of professional boundaries in this field. This tool will be available by October 2021.



## ENFORCEMENT AND DISRUPTION

Enforcement and disruption training was recently delivered across the Suffolk system. The aims of this workstream were to: increase agency and practitioner awareness of the various toolkits available to support enforcement and/or disruption; increase service knowledge and confidence in using a broader range of powers available to them; and promote collaborative local approaches to disrupt county lines activity. Following evaluation of the impact of this training, a briefing paper will be written to reflect on the approach and outcomes. This will be made available via the YJ Resource Hub by December 2021.





## PEER PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP

We recognise that child criminal exploitation can be extremely frightening, disempowering and isolating for those caring for the exploited child. To support parents during this time, the Suffolk Lead is co-producing, alongside local parents with lived experience, a peer parents support group.

This groupwork programme will provide early intervention support to parents whose child(ren) is at risk of criminal exploitation. The groupwork programme will broadly cover: what criminal exploitation is; the business model of county lines drug supply; how to spot the signs of potential criminal exploitation; skills and approaches to manage conflict; keeping safe (child, siblings, home and self); and how to navigate statutory services. A local clinical psychologist will ensure that parents are provided with appropriate support while sharing their stories to help others.

The impact of this approach will be evaluated, with feedback from both caregivers and their child(ren), and a summary report produced. Information from this piece of work will be available on the YJ Resource Hub from February 2022.

# ESSEX DELIVERABLES



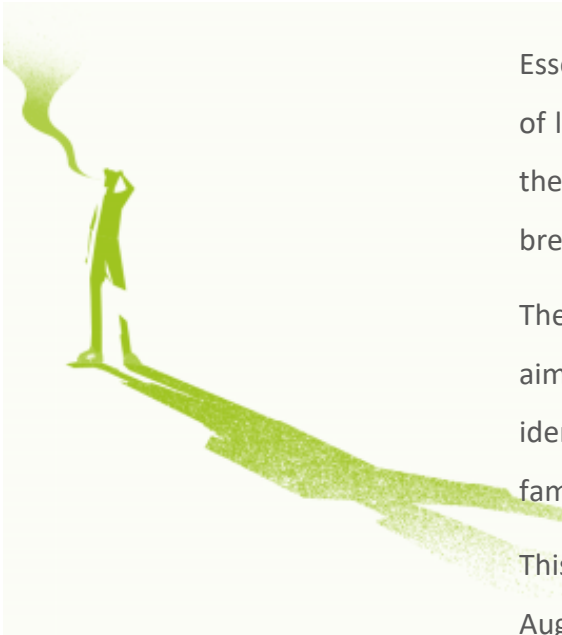
## LIVED EXPERIENCE ANIMATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Essex have created a series of four staff development workshops based on animations which share the lived experience of local criminally exploited children. The animations were created using verbatim transcripts from real interviews, and the learning from these used to develop accompanying workshops to explore exploitation, bereavement, motivation and breaking the cycle. The powerful animations are voiced by an actor but tell the real stories of children's experience.

The practitioner workshops, facilitated by local practitioners with experience of supporting criminally exploited children, aim to raise awareness of children's experience of exploitation and reduce professional anxiety by exploring how to identify children and young people at risk and build professional skills and confidence to support children and their families. These workshops were piloted with a multi-agency cohort of staff across the Pathfinder counties.

This piece of work has been summarised in a short film which will be made widely available via the YJ Resource Hub from August 2021. In addition, a 'Top Tips' document has been written to support others who may wish to develop a similar project highlighting the lived experience of their local children and young people.

The impact of the practitioner workshops will be evaluated, and made available via the Hub from November 2021.



# Cambridgeshire Deliverables



## COUNTY-WIDE CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION DELIVERY PLAN

Cambridgeshire is a complex two tier local authority with five district-level Community Safety Partnerships and a countywide Community Safety Board. They have developed a countywide Criminal Exploitation Delivery Plan, and are supporting development of a local area response to county lines demonstrating a whole system response.

Cambridgeshire aims to marry safeguarding with disruption and create a system wide understanding and model to contextual safeguarding. This starts with effective implementation of a countywide plan, actioned locally, to ensure a whole system approach by agencies taking an effective practice, collaborative response to County Lines and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) across the county.

This approach will be evaluated and summarised in a report to support other authorities with a similar approach. This summary will be available via the YJ Resource Hub from February 2022.

## SAFE TEAM

Cambridgeshire SAFE Team (Safer Relationships For Exploited Children) offer children and young people who are at significant risk of criminal exploitation, or moderate risk but high need, a trusted and consistent worker to support them, using a trauma-informed model of intervention, to gradually take steps towards positive plans for the future. The team work with children and their families to recognise risk and develop safety plans to minimise the risk of exploitation and serious youth violence. The process, enablers, barriers and evaluation of the SAFE Team approach has been summarised and can be accessed on the YJ Resource Hub [here](#).



# Cambridgeshire Deliverables



## TRANSFORMING LIVES

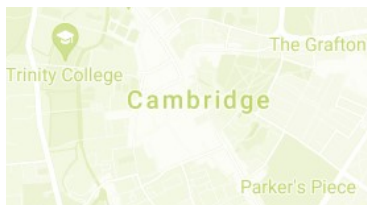
The Transforming Lives groupwork programme supports children identified at emergent risk of child criminal exploitation; these tend to be younger children who may be identified as vulnerable to exploitation for a variety of reasons.

To ensure the group work programme is transferable across the county and potentially wider, whilst retaining fidelity, the Cambridgeshire Lead, working with colleagues, has formalised programme processes, and identified Terms of Reference, governance structure and monitoring and evaluation measures. The programme is currently being delivered in two areas of the county, and this approach will be summarised in a report available on the YJ Resource Hub from February 2022.



## PICTURE OF COUNTY LINES

Cambridgeshire are evaluating the value of resource-intensive zoom mapping of county lines locally. This evaluation, alongside process, enablers and barriers will be summarised and made widely available via the YJ Resource Hub from December 2021.



## TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING

A tested trauma-informed virtual training package was used to develop a much pared down awareness raising package which is being offered to a wide multiagency cohort across the Cambridgeshire system to promote consistent countywide understanding of the trauma-informed approach. The impact of this approach will be evaluated using the ARTIC (Attitudes Related to Trauma Informed Care) impact measurement scale to assess both individual and cultural change and the summary report made available following this will include roll-out, take up and impact. This will be available from January 2022.



# Overarching Deliverables



## CUSTODY COMFORT BOXES

The use of children to distribute drugs in the county lines model is prevalent, and children often take the most risk, therefore sometimes resulting in detention on suspicion of drug trafficking. Figures indicate that 90% of the children linked to county lines drug dealing are at risk of exploitation.

The 'comfort boxes', which have been funded by the Pathfinder, will contain arts supplies, fidget toys, a wobble seat, weighted blanket, mini fleece football, playing cards and a tablet with tough case which is pre-loaded with a short film detailing children's rights in custody. This project will support children who enter the custody arena, through enrichment and engagement so that their experience is a more positive one, and there is opportunity to create a *reachable moment* for intervention. Many of these items contain crimestoppers and/or fearless.org messaging to direct children and young people to additional support. The boxes will be provided to all seventeen custody suites across the Pathfinder counties, and their use and impact will be evaluated in a summary report made available for others who may wish to replicate the approach.

## EXCLUSIONS RESEARCH

We have commissioned a small-scale piece of research to explore the impact of a lack of access to mainstream education on children's vulnerability to child criminal exploitation. Listen Up have been commissioned to examine this and will analyse quantitative Pathfinder exclusion data, and undertake qualitative research, using an intersectional lens to summarise key findings in a short report which will be widely available from November 2021.

# Communication & Dissemination



We have committed to sharing the work of the County Lines Pathfinder via the Youth Justice Resource Hub. To support us with consistency in this, we have created a proforma for dissemination of learning in a clear and concise way covering the following:

<b>Summary</b>	A brief background and approach to the piece of work
<b>Purpose</b>	The gap or need addressed by this particular approach or piece of work
<b>Readiness</b>	What needs to be in place, or completed first, to support successful implementation
<b>Implementation</b>	The steps required for successful implementation
<b>Process/Delivery</b>	To process undertaken to deliver effectively (considerations given to staff training, caseload etc.)
<b>Enablers</b>	Enabling factors are split into a) CORE COMPONENTS (what needs to be in place for success); and b) GOOD PRACTICE (additional factors)
<b>Barriers</b>	Factors which could impede successful implementation or practice, with potential solutions where possible
<b>Evaluation</b>	A summary of key findings from the work/approach
<b>Feedback</b>	Highlighting third party feedback in direct quotes
<b>Further Info</b>	Links to additional reading or further documentation will be embedded here, alongside contact details in the local authority for further

The Youth Justice Board have adopted this approach to dissemination for other Pathfinders.

# Communication & Dissemination



We have created a dissemination plan which includes dates for wide dissemination of learning in the final year of the Pathfinder from April 2021 until February 2022. We will continue to disseminate learning as it becomes available via the YJ Resource Hub platform. These resources can be found by searching for 'county lines pathfinder'.

We delivered a successful online event during YJB Live in November 2020, to which over 200 participants registered interest in attending. This event was recorded and is available to view [here](#). We have committed to providing a further online event in May 2021 to update on the work of the Pathfinder.

Much of the focus of our work in January and February 2022 will be on wide promotion and dissemination of our learning, once the majority of the work has concluded. In addition to traditional methods, we are exploring options to communicate messages using industry podcasts and online blogs and vlogs.

We recognise that Covid restrictions mean we are all now more accustomed to online events and virtual learning, and we will make the most of this opportunity to reach a wide geographical and professional audience. That said, we hope to be able to hold at least one in-person conference, if restrictions allow, and this is likely to take place in early February 2022.





The total grant allocated for delivery of the County Lines Pathfinder is £1,300,000, with £500,000 allocated to delivery of the programme 2020 - 2021. Please see below an expenditure summary.



31 March 2021  
 Participating Youth Offending Teams -  
 Norfolk (Lead)  
 Essex  
 Cambridge  
 Suffolk

## Expenditure Summary

Youth Justice Board Reducing Serious Youth Violence: County Lines in the East of England  
 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

	£
2020-2021 Grant Allocation	-£500,000
Final Outturn	£500,000

Delivery Of Service	<u>New Initiatives / Local projects</u>
Project:	Core Delivery BAME Children – Listen Up Research Custody Intervention Project Norfolk Police CCE data analyst
Cambridge:	SAFE Team -Trauma Informed Practice
Norfolk:	Tier 1 e-Learning Resource Consultancy - Tier 1 e-Learning Resource
Suffolk:	Y2 Psychological Support Families Learning About Thinking Skills (FLATS) Online Safety Planning Project Outcomes: Cultural Competency and Safety Planning
Essex:	

<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>£0</b>
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# Challenges & Recommendations



## COVID-19

The biggest challenge to delivery of the objectives outlined in the Pathfinder proposal was, and remains, Covid-19. The unprecedented worldwide pandemic and the resulting chaos, health and mortality effects, and ensuing restrictions meant that the challenge of working as an already dispersed team was solidified by the need to very quickly establish new ways to collaborate, co-produce and share practice.

Furthermore, the development of area practice was affected by an inability to develop professional networks in a personal face to face capacity or travel to see emerging, new and innovative practice in other areas of the country. The dissemination of Pathfinder learning was also affected, albeit to a lesser extent, due to an inability to hold face to face practice sharing events.

That said, the way in which IT has quickly developed and been utilised to mitigate the challenge of Covid-19 is something we have embraced and will retain going forward. Whilst face to face team meetings in a cross-county programme of work are essential, the use of Teams and other online platforms helps to ensure ongoing discussion, collaboration and practice sharing opportunities between team members outside of formalised meetings. Moreover, the functionality of the Teams platform to hold individual area workplans accessible to all team members and wider stakeholders results in easy access to current and developing practice in any Pathfinder county, which has been extremely helpful for monitoring and reporting purposes. As professionals across the country adapt to a new normal of online working and virtual learning, online conferences and events allow us to reach a much wider and geographically more dispersed audience.

# Challenges & Recommendations



## DATA

Working across four local authorities with differing assessment and recording of county lines exploitation means that access to consistent data measures to baseline the extent and effect of county lines has been challenging. Access to data has also been identified as a barrier within the Policy Review completed by Traverse and we recognise this problem is in no way unique to the Pathfinder counties. We are aware that non-standardised data collection and sharing is a significant system blocker which requires a central approach to resolution, and better integration between Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care and Ministry Of Justice. However, we're hopeful that learning from the Pathfinder resulting in the Recommended Minimum Dataset, and introduction of the Statutory Duty for public bodies on information sharing regarding Serious Youth Violence in 2022 may help in some way toward resolving the issue.

The Policy Review suggests that *'the lack of consistency regarding collection and reporting of child criminal exploitation data across police forces and local authorities presents a significant barrier to implementation of standardised responses to CCE'*. Whilst most areas are now able to report on the numbers of children subject to, and at risk of, sexual exploitation, it's important that we now replicate that for those children subject to criminal exploitation.

## LACK OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Through development and delivery of local authority Pathfinder work it quickly became apparent that there is limited research, and examples of effective practice, to draw on within this field. Some deliverables which intended to review existing practice approaches had to be revised to reflect the limited research around. However, we are therefore further assured that the learning from this programme of work will be welcome and of use to others in the field.

# Next Steps & Contact Details



The work of the Pathfinder will be completed by early 2022. We will continue to develop our learning and understanding of the impact of approaches implemented through this work, and all of this learning will be made available via the Youth Justice Resource Hub. By searching 'county lines pathfinder' you will be able to access all programme learning and resources.

We are running two online events in May to share emerging learning with a wide audience, and we are planning for wide dissemination of learning from January 2022 in a range of ways across varied platforms.

Please contact the Pathfinder Programme Manager on: [holly.finlayson@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:holly.finlayson@norfolk.gov.uk) if you would like to be added to a distribution list given advance notification of upcoming Pathfinder learning events.

In the interim, should you wish to contact us please do so using the contact details below:

<b>Pathfinder Programme Manager</b>	Holly Finlayson	<a href="mailto:holly.finlayson@norfolk.gov.uk">holly.finlayson@norfolk.gov.uk</a>
<b>Norfolk Pathfinder Lead</b>	Dan Wilson	<a href="mailto:daniel.wilson@norfolk.gov.uk">daniel.wilson@norfolk.gov.uk</a>
<b>Suffolk Pathfinder Lead</b>	Catherine Bennett	<a href="mailto:Catherine.Bennett@suffolk.gov.uk">Catherine.Bennett@suffolk.gov.uk</a>
<b>Essex Pathfinder Lead</b>	Reece Martin	<a href="mailto:Reece.Martin@essex.gov.uk">Reece.Martin@essex.gov.uk</a>
<b>Cambridgeshire Pathfinder Lead</b>	Clare Cook	<a href="mailto:Clare.Cook@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Clare.Cook@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>
<b>Pathfinder Analyst</b>	Leanne Baker	<a href="mailto:Leanne.BAKER1@norfolk.police.uk">Leanne.BAKER1@norfolk.police.uk</a>