

Recommended Minimum Dataset and Data Analysis

This document is intended to act as an introduction and accompaniment to the Recommended Minimum Dataset created by Traverse as part of the ongoing evaluation of the County Lines Pathfinder. Traverse was asked to develop the Recommended Minimum Dataset with a view to standardising County Lines data collection practices and facilitating multi-agency working across the four Pathfinder localities, so that practitioners might more effectively assess and disrupt County Lines activity in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex.

The Recommended Minimum Dataset is intended to represent a “gold standard” in County Lines data collection and as such may include indicators that are not yet available for collection across all four localities. However, each suggested indicator has been reviewed by the relevant stakeholders across the Pathfinder localities and has been deemed both advantageous in identifying and disrupting County Lines activity and achievable in either the short- or long-term. We do not anticipate that this Dataset will be immediately implemented in full; we recognise that progress is likely to be incremental and that the speed of implementation will vary across the Pathfinder localities.

This document also makes suggestions as to how Pathfinder stakeholders might combine the proposed indicators and triangulate data between the relevant partner agencies in order to develop a more coherent picture of County Lines activity in the four localities. These suggestions are not exhaustive, nor are they intended to be prescriptive. Ultimately, it will be up to the relevant Heads of Service to consider the dataset in the context of their specific needs and to make informed decisions about how best to implement our recommendations.

1. Why a minimum dataset

Across the Pathfinder, data is one of the biggest challenges when working with Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), County Lines victims and extra-familial harm. County Lines is an extremely complex and concerning issue. Identifying lines, those involved and those at risk is a constantly evolving process. Currently, there is no system in place which accurately identifies individuals involved in all levels of County Lines activity and which is accessible to the different agencies involved in disrupting CCE and supporting the young people affected. As a result, the current picture of County Lines activity across the Pathfinder and within each of the four areas is incomplete.

Due to the complexities of County Lines, recording and sharing data across local authorities and forces in each area varies greatly. Different agencies have different information available to help them respond to CCE and County Lines, but not the full picture: stakeholders and practitioners are not currently able to consistently access and share data and develop shared strategies.



However, consistent, shared data can provide opportunities for tackling County Lines and CCE. Local area data can:

- Identify hotspots of activity and perpetrators exploiting young people;
- Identify gaps in referrals and those in need who aren't being supported; and
- Inform strategic planning and decision making such as directing responses, standardising practice and where to invest resources

The purpose of this Recommended Minimum Dataset is to overcome these barriers and gain valuable insight that can help inform policy and practice. Without standardised data that is accessible to all agencies involved, services that aim to prevent and disrupt the exploitation of young people cannot sufficiently develop and improve.

2. Recommended Minimum Dataset explained

The Recommended Minimum Dataset includes a series of indicators that can be used to identify, disrupt and support young people involved in County Lines and CCE. This section will outline the process through which the Dataset was developed and, where appropriate, will provide supporting evidence for the shortlisted indicators found in the accompanying spreadsheet.

2.1. Selection process

In the early stages of the evaluation, the Pathfinder Leads for Cambridgeshire and Suffolk submitted a "wishlist" of data, which, if collected consistently, would support more efficient identification and disruption of County Lines activity across the region. The list of indicators proposed by the Pathfinder Leads served as the starting point for the development of the Recommended Minimum Dataset. These proposals were supplemented by further suggestions from attendees of Traverse's virtual "Mapping County Lines" workshop in June 2020 as well as those practitioners who completed the accompanying online survey. Traverse also reviewed the Childhood Local Data on Risks and Needs (CHLDRN) dataset and the Department for Communities and Local Government's Troubled Families programme to identify any indicators relevant to the County Lines Pathfinder.

These proposed indicators were reviewed against the report on County Lines data collection practices compiled for the Pathfinder in September 2020 by Leanne Baker, to ascertain which indicators were already being collected by one or more police forces across the Pathfinder localities. This provided a longlist of 100 indicators that were either currently collected or could potentially be collected to aid identification and disruption of County Lines activity. Traverse then worked with its Subject Matter Expert, the National Programme Manager at The Children's Society, to create a shortlist of 50 indicators. This shortlist was reviewed against the Review of Policy and Best Practice submitted to the Pathfinder by Traverse in June 2020, as well as additional documents supplied by the Pathfinder Programme Manager, to ensure that supporting evidence could be found for all proposed indicators.



The shortlist of proposed indicators was submitted to the Pathfinder Leads for the four localities, as well as the Pathfinder Analyst and the Pathfinder Programme Manager. Based on their feedback, the proposed indicators were grouped into the following categories:

- Achievable and advantageous;
- Achievable but not advantageous;
- Not achievable but advantageous; and
- Not achievable and not advantageous.

The final list of indicators that were felt to be both achievable and advantageous was reviewed by police experts from the National County Lines Coordination Centre and the relevant Heads of Service and business information teams from the four Pathfinder localities. Upon completion of this process, Traverse was left with an agreed shortlist of 43 indicators that it was felt could reasonably be collected in either the short- or long-term by all four Pathfinder localities.

2.2. Navigating the Recommended Minimum Dataset

This section briefly explains how to navigate the Recommended Minimum Dataset spreadsheet. For ease of reference, the indicators are grouped by theme (Category, Column A). These themes and the relevant indicators (Indicator, Column B) are discussed in more detail in Section 1.2.3 of this document.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Category	Indicator	Granularity	Source	Data type	Purpose	Caveats	Combinations
1	Arrests/detentions	No. of drug-related violent crimes	Serious violent crimes only (SVC) or above, where one or more party is suspected/accused of PWTTS.	Police	Number	Drug violence as high-level indicator of potential CL activity - use in conjunction with more granular data.	Subject to consistency of markers used across police forces.
2	Arrests/detentions	No. of YP detained by British Transport Police (BTP)	Detentions of YP under 18 y/o for PWTTS or on suspicion of trafficking, in or from Pathfinder areas only i.e. YP resident in Pathfinder areas arrested in area of residence or out of area, YP not resident in Pathfinder areas and arrested within them.	British Transport Police	Number	Assess potential levels of CCE/CL activity - use in conjunction with BTP safeguarding referrals. Require home location and location stopped.	All figures recorded nationally, so would require a manual trawl to break down data by LA areas. Duncan Evans may be able to provide more info on this.
3	Arrests/detentions	No. of SVV-related arrests (inc. possession of weapon)	Arrests within Pathfinder county on suspicion of serious violent crimes (with/without weapon) where victim is under 18 y/o.	Police	Number	Use in conjunction w. other arrest statistics to identify potential levels of CCE. There is a crossover with serious youth violence and SVV arrests indicate a significant risk of involvement in CL activity/CCE. The NCLCC have found a direct correlation between SVV and CL.	
4	Arrests/detentions	No. of vehicle stops leading to drug/cash arrests w/ weapon seizures	Arrests following vehicle stops in Pathfinder county where one or more arrestee is under 18 y/o. (Counting arrests for PWTTS or possession of weapon, or where cash seized under Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.)	Police	Number	Assess local levels of drug-related crimes (SVV as potential indicators of CCE/CL activity) - use in conjunction w. other arrest statistics.	Reliant on access to disruption logs (Camba have access).
5	Arrests/detentions	No. of arrests of YP on drug-related charges	No. of YP under 18 y/o arrested for PWTTS in Pathfinder county within last 12 months, suspected to be linked to County Lines activity.	Police	Number	Assess local levels of drug-related violence (as potential indicator of CL activity).	Info shared would be on those that are suspected to be linked to County Lines activity, won't be a definitive number.
6	Arrests/detentions	No. of arrests of YP on drug-related charges (by area)	No. of YP under 18 y/o arrested for PWTTS in Pathfinder county within last 12 months, broken down by district/ward (as appropriate).	Police	Number	Identify areas with higher levels of drug-related criminal activity/potential for CCE.	Info shared would be on those that are suspected to be linked to County Lines activity, won't be a definitive number.
7	Arrests/detentions	Demographic info of YP arrested on drug-related charges (age, sex, ethnicity)	No. of YP under 18 y/o of given age/gender/nationality arrested for PWTTS in Pathfinder county within last 12 months.	Police	Number	Identify potential socioeconomic drivers of drug violence.	
8	Arrests/detentions	No. of out-of-area arrests on SVV/drug-related charges	No. of YP under 18 y/o from Pathfinder county arrested in another force on suspicion of SVV/PWTTS. No. of YP under 18 y/o from out of area arrested within Pathfinder county.	Police	Number	Assess potential levels of CL activity.	Long-term goal - part of a wider long-term update on the Police National Database.
9	Education	No. of YP with learning difficulties/autism	No. of YP under 18 y/o in Pathfinder county with SEN.	Local authority	Number	Identify YP vulnerable to coercion into CL activity, used in conjunction with other education/familial context indicators.	
10	Education	Educational settings of YP at risk of CCE	No. of YP at risk of CCE in mainstream/alternative education, broken down by education (mainstream or RPL) provider.	Local authority	Number	Assess correlation b/w education and CCE/CL.	Level of detail available/shared may vary.
11	Education	No. of households with YP outside mainstream education	No. of YP under 18 y/o in Pathfinder county who are NEET in alternative education/home-schooled.	Local authority	Number	YP not accessing mainstream education as increased risk of CCE/CL.	
12	Familial context	No. of YP living with domestic abuse in family	No. of YP under 18 y/o living in households where one or more current resident is suspected of domestic abuse by Police/Children's Services.	Local authority	Number	Strong link between domestic violence and CCE. Identify YP prone to gang involvement due to desire for 'familial' connection + desensitisation to violence.	
13	Familial context	Most deprived areas within county	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rank by local authority district code.	Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019	Number (IMD rank from 1-32,844)	Identify areas where YP most at risk of CCE - check against missing episodes/outgoing data.	
14	Housing/accommodation	No. of homeless YP w/ those with at risk of homelessness	No. of YP under 18 y/o in Pathfinder county currently homeless/recently homeless/at risk of becoming homeless.	Local authority	Number	YP experiencing homelessness or insecure accommodation as vulnerable to CCE.	
15	Housing/accommodation	No. of cuckooed addresses	Number of addresses within Pathfinder county known to have been cuckooed within last 5 years. Number of addresses by ward.	Police	Number	Identify areas/types of accommodation most prone to cuckooing - check against area deprivation statistics?	Subject to consistency of markers used across police forces, could be time consuming.
16	Missing episodes	No. of YP missing from home found outside LA boundaries	Number of missing YP from Pathfinder county found in another LAs jurisdiction per year. (Plus list of most common deprivation LA's.)	Police	Number	Identify YP with potential involvement in CL activity/assess potential local levels of CCE - use in conjunction with collected missing episodes data for better understanding of potential CCE within locality.	Potential issues around accessing missing person data from different areas.
17	Missing episodes	No. of YP with histories of repeated missing episodes	YP under 18 y/o within Pathfinder county with 3+ missing episodes in last 5 years.	Police	Number	Emphasis on repeated missing episodes as more reliable indicator of CCE than individual episodes.	Need to refer to national guidance on missing episodes as perpetrators are getting more sophisticated with shorter missing episodes to avoid suspicion.
18	Missing episodes	No. of missing episodes by area	No. of YP under 18 y/o with missing episodes within last 12 months, broken down by district/ward (as appropriate).	Police	Number	Identify areas with higher levels of potential for CCE.	
19	Missing episodes	No. of missing YP w. CCE/gang-related marker on file	No. of active MIA's under 18 y/o with known CCE association.	Police	Number	Identify YP at risk of CCE/assess potential local levels of CCE.	
20	Missing episodes						

Figure 1: Columns A (Category) and B (Indicator) of the Recommended Minimum Dataset

Columns C to E of the spreadsheet provide more detail about how each indicator would be collected. Given that some of the indicators are fairly broad and could be open to interpretation, the spreadsheet sets out the level of detail that would be required for each indicator (Granularity, Column C) and provides parameters for collection, such as location and date. It also stipulates which agencies would be expected to collect the requested data (Source, Column D) and the form that such data would be expected to take (Data Type, Column E).



Table with 8 columns: Category, Indicator, Granularity, Source, Data Type, Purpose, Caveats, and Combinations. It lists 20 indicators related to arrests, education, housing, and missing episodes.

Figure 2: Columns C (Granularity), D (Source) and E (Data Type) of the Recommended Minimum Dataset

The spreadsheet provides readers with a brief explanation of the rationale behind each indicator (Purpose, Column F), while also highlighting any other factors that might hinder the collection of the requested data (Caveats, Column G). Finally, the last column of the spreadsheet shows how the proposed indicators could be triangulated to provide new insights in County Lines activity in the Pathfinder localities (Combinations, Column H). This aspect of the Dataset is discussed in more detail in Section 1.3 of this document.

Table with 8 columns: Category, Indicator, Granularity, Source, Data Type, Purpose, Caveats, and Combinations. It continues the list of indicators from Figure 2, focusing on Purpose, Caveats, and Combinations.

Figure 3: Columns F (Purpose), G (Caveats) and H (Combinations) of the Recommended Minimum Dataset

2.3. Shortlisted indicators

This section discusses the reasoning behind the shortlisted indicators included in the final Recommended Minimum Dataset. As with the accompanying spreadsheet, the indicators are grouped thematically for ease of reference.

When reviewing the Dataset, practitioners should consider whether information regarding a given indicator will need to be anonymised if it to be shared with other agencies. The use of anonymous data is not necessarily a barrier, as such information will facilitate analysis of system-level patterns of, and responses to, County Lines activity. Non-anonymised information, on the



other hand, will be useful for further analysis at the case level. Much of this non-anonymised data is likely to be captured in the Vulnerability Assessment Tool, which will be rolled out across Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Essex over the coming year.

It should be noted at this point that, in the interest of feasibility, the majority of indicators within the Dataset are concerned with under-18s data only. As it is well documented that vulnerable adults may also fall victim to County Lines exploitation, practitioners may wish to explore options for expanding their data collection practices accordingly. While such an expansion falls outside the remit of this Dataset, it would allow practitioners to develop a more comprehensive picture of County Lines activity across the four Pathfinder localities.

An additional challenge for this Dataset is that data collection is necessarily limited to those people who are already known to police and/or statutory services. Practitioners should therefore be wary of using this information to make assumptions about the scale of CCE and/or County Lines activity within a given locality.

2.3.1. Young people known to services

Data collection practices regarding young people identified as being at-risk of CCE vary widely between agencies both within and across localities. This lack of consistency represents a significant barrier to effective partnership working and so there is a clear need to ensure that specific information is collected by all relevant agencies across the Pathfinder localities. These agencies should maintain an accurate record of both the number of young people within their locality identified as being at-risk and the number of young people assigned each level of risk (i.e. emerging, moderate, significant) following assessment by children's services. Furthermore, consistent collection of these young people's demographic information may provide insights into the characteristics of those targeted for CCE and allow practitioners to target interventions appropriately. Agencies engaged in identifying and disrupting County Lines activity in the Pathfinder area should also monitor the number of at-risk young people who are also in care, given that this represents an additional risk factor for CCE.^{1,2}

2.3.2. Police operations

A consistent approach to gathering and disseminating information from all law enforcement partners is central to an effective local response to County Lines activity.^{3,4} Local, regional and national police agencies should ensure that investigations with a potential County Lines element are consistently tagged as such, and that information regarding active investigations is shared with local authorities and other relevant partners. County Lines tags should also be used for investigations into lines that do not cross county boundaries, in order to develop a comprehensive picture of County Lines activity across the Pathfinder localities.

Police agencies should also provide local authorities and statutory services with information on the number of nominals in a given locality known to be involved in County Lines activity. Given that police may have access to soft intelligence on the scale of youth involvement in County Lines, more effective information sharing can enable earlier interventions with young people at-

¹ *It was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020

² *Counting Lives: Responding to Children who are Criminally Exploited*, Children's Society, 2019

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Intelligence Assessment: County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm*, National Crime Agency, 2018



risk of criminal exploitation.⁵ Law enforcement partners should also explore options for differentiating between county residents and out-of-county individuals when gathering such data, as this may help practitioners to formulate more appropriate intervention strategies.

2.3.3. Arrests/detentions

A number of indicators proposed by the Recommended Minimum Dataset pertain to young people arrested or detained by law enforcement agencies. Evidence suggests that more robust data collection in this area may serve to offset a lack of County Lines-specific intelligence.

In the absence of specific data on County Lines arrest rates, the number of young people arrested within the locality on suspicion of possession with intent to supply may serve as a suitable proxy and provide insight into the scale of local County Lines activity.^{6,7} Furthermore, consistent tracking of the demographics of young people arrested on such charges may allow practitioners to identify those demographics most at risk of exploitation by County Lines gangs.

Serious violent crimes involving young people may also serve as a useful indicator of County Lines activity. This is particularly true of cases in which one or more of the young people involved are found to be in possession of a weapon, as this may indicate that the possessor is a victim of CCE, whether County Lines or otherwise.^{8,9,10,11} It may also be beneficial to collect data on the number of serious violent crimes involving young people in which one or more parties is suspected of possession with intent to supply, given the well documented link between drug-related violent crimes and County Lines activity.¹²

Out-of-area arrest statistics may also represent a useful indicator of County Lines activity. Young people arrested on suspicion of possession with intent to supply outside their home area are likely to be victims of County Lines exploitation, and as such it may be useful to collect data on the number of young people from the Pathfinder localities arrested on drug-related charges in other areas, as well as the number of out-of-area young people arrested within the Pathfinder localities for the same reason.^{13,14} Given the centrality of the national rail network and other forms of public transport to County Lines operations, practitioners should also look to obtain data from British Transport Police on the number of young people arrested or detained outside their home area who are suspected to be a victim of trafficking and/or to be in possession of illegal drugs with intent to supply.^{15,16}

⁵ *It was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020

⁶ *Counting Lives: Responding to Children who are Criminally Exploited*, Children's Society, 2019

⁷ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Serious Case Review: Archie*, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2020

¹⁰ *Contextual Safeguarding and 'County Lines'*, Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019

¹¹ *Intelligence Assessment: County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm*, National Crime Agency, 2018

¹² *Review of Drugs: Evidence Relating to Drug Use, Supply and Effects, including Current Trends and Future Risks*, Dame Carol Black, 2020

¹³ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

¹⁴ *Child Criminal Exploitation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery Defences for Children*, Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2018

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Intelligence Assessment: County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm*, National Crime Agency, 2018



2.3.4. Referrals

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is intended to safeguard against inappropriate criminalisation of young people who fall victim to County Lines exploitation. However, while NRM submissions should automatically trigger police investigation of the young person in question as a victim of exploitation, there is some concern that this is not applied consistently.^{17,18} Increased gathering of NRM data, then, may help to drive up investigation standards and prevent the inappropriate criminalisation of exploited young people.^{19,20,21}

Information gathering regarding understanding and usage of referral mechanisms should not be limited to the NRM. More consistent data collection regarding inter-agency referrals for at-risk young people may provide additional insights into the efficacy of local, regional and national responses to County Lines, given that the absence of clear referral mechanisms is known to present a significant barrier to successful identification and disruption of County Lines activity.²² Practitioners may, for instance, wish to investigate the consistency with which young people identified as at-risk by national agencies such as British Transport Police are appropriately referred to local services in order to ascertain whether these agencies provide an effective safeguard against County Lines exploitation.

2.3.5. Missing episodes

Persistent missing episodes among young people are widely acknowledged to be a reliable indicator of County Lines exploitation.^{23,24,25,26} Consistent tracking of the number of missing young people with a CCE or gang involvement tag, particularly those with histories of repeat missing episodes, can provide practitioners with insight into the scale of ongoing County Lines exploitation among young people within a given locality.

Similarly, missing young people who are found out-of-area without a reasonable explanation are likely to be victims of County Lines exploitation.²⁷ Agencies involved in identifying and disrupting County Lines activity should therefore monitor the number of missing young people from the Pathfinder counties who are found in another local authority's jurisdiction, as well as the number of out-of-area young people found within the Pathfinder localities, in order to assess the scale of County Lines-related trafficking into and out of the Pathfinder area.

2.3.6. Education

¹⁷ *Sowing the Seeds: Children's Experiences of Domestic Abuse and Criminality*, Victims Commissioner, 2020

¹⁸ *It was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020

¹⁹ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

²⁰ *Child Criminal Exploitation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery Defences for Children*, Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2018

²¹ *Briefing Report on the Roundtable on Children who go Missing and are Criminally Exploited by Gangs*, APPG on Runaway and Missing Adults and Children, 2017

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

²⁴ *Serious Case Review: Archie*, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2020

²⁵ *Hidden in Plain Sight: Gangs and Exploitation – A Youth Work Response to COVID-19*, National Youth Agency, 2020

²⁶ *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance*, Home Office, 2018

²⁷ *Ibid.*



Young people's experiences of mainstream education are known to contribute to the risk of their involvement in County Lines and other forms of CCE. Those who struggle to engage with the school system and who are persistently absent or permanently excluded are at high risk of exploitation by County Lines gangs.^{28,29,30,31,32,33} Similarly, those young people who are home-schooled or in alternative provision are more likely to be targeted for exploitation.^{34,35}

Practitioners should therefore aim to consistently collect information on the number of young people outside mainstream education, as well as the educational settings of young people already known to children's services due to the risk of CCE, in order to more accurately assess the level of risk of County Lines involvement among young people in the locality.

Young people with Special Educational Needs are also known to be at risk of CCE.^{36,37,38} It may therefore be beneficial for practitioners to also gather information on the number of young people within the locality with such needs, and particularly those who are also known to be excluded, whether formally or informally, from mainstream education.

2.3.7. Housing and accommodation

The use of "cuckooed" addresses to harbor trafficked young people is one of the key features of County Lines activity. Practitioners should liaise with police and, where appropriate, housing authorities, to ensure they are aware of the scale of cuckooing within their locality. Furthermore, consistent tracking of the number of cuckooed addresses, broken down by district where possible, would allow practitioners to identify patterns in how victims of County Lines exploitation are housed and as such may prevent inappropriate criminalisation of young people arrested in, or in close proximity to, cuckooed addresses.³⁹

Young people with experience of homelessness, or who are at risk of becoming homeless, may also be targeted for exploitation by County Lines gangs.^{40,41} More consistent data collection regarding the prevalence of homelessness among a locality's under-18 population may therefore provide additional insight into the level of risk of criminal exploitation both for individual young people and for the under-18 population as a whole.

2.3.8. Substance abuse

²⁸ *Counting Lives: Responding to Children who are Criminally Exploited*, Children's Society, 2019

²⁹ *Protecting Children from Criminal Exploitation, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: An Addendum*, Ofsted, 2018

³⁰ *Timpson Review of School Exclusion*, Department for Education, 2019

³¹ *Serious Case Review: Archie*, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2020

³² *Serious Case Review: Child C*, Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board, 2020

³³ *Hidden in Plain Sight: Gangs and Exploitation – A Youth Work Response to COVID-19*, National Youth Agency, 2020

³⁴ *Protecting Children from Criminal Exploitation, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: An Addendum*, Ofsted, 2018

³⁵ *Counting Lives: Responding to Children who are Criminally Exploited*, Children's Society, 2019

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance*, Home Office, 2018

³⁸ *It was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020

³⁹ *Child Criminal Exploitation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery Defences for Children*, Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2018

⁴⁰ *Intelligence Assessment: County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm*, National Crime Agency, 2018

⁴¹ *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance*, Home Office, 2018



Substance abuse among young people is known to be a reliable indicator of vulnerability to CCE, including County Lines.^{42,43,44} As such, consistent collection of data on the number of young people within a given locality who are receiving treatment for drug and/or alcohol abuse, or who have recently received such treatment, may allow practitioners to assess the level of risk of criminal exploitation among the locality's under-18 population, particularly when used in combination with other indicators.

2.3.9. *Familial context*

Specific aspects of young people's familial contexts can also serve as indicators of their vulnerability to exploitation by County Lines gangs. In particular, those young people with experience of domestic abuse in the home, whether directly or indirectly, are more likely to become involved with organised crime and as such are vulnerable to County Lines-specific exploitation.^{45,46,47} More consistent data collection regarding the number of young people known or suspected to be experiencing domestic abuse may therefore provide practitioners with additional insight into the potential scale of vulnerability to County Lines exploitation, and may help to identify those most at-risk when used in combination with other indicators.

Young people who have experienced poverty are thought to be more at risk of CCE, and as such County Lines gangs may seek to recruit from particularly deprived areas within a given locality.⁴⁸ By monitoring deprivation levels within the locality and maintaining an accurate ranking of deprivation by district, practitioners may be able to identify the areas in which CCE is more likely to occur and target interventions more effectively.

3. Implementing the Recommended Minimum Dataset

This section illustrates how practitioners in the Pathfinder area could use the Recommended Minimum Dataset in practice. It provides suggestions on gaining insight into County Lines activity in the four localities and to develop new initiatives to enable increased partnership working between police, statutory services, and other relevant sectors.

3.1. *Combinations*

The indicators listed in the Recommended Minimum Dataset should not be treated in isolation. Rather, it is Traverse's intention that practitioners look to combine indicators where appropriate in order to triangulate data between multiple sources and develop a comprehensive view of County Lines activity in the Pathfinder area.

In developing this Dataset, we have produced four examples to illustrate how multiple indicators may work together to provide deeper insights into specific aspects of County Lines

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

⁴⁴ *It was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk from Criminal Exploitation*, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020

⁴⁵ *Sowing the Seeds: Children's Experiences of Domestic Abuse and Criminality*, Victims Commissioner, 2020

⁴⁶ *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance*, Home Office, 2018

⁴⁷ *Hidden in Plain Sight: Gangs and Exploitation – A Youth Work Response to COVID-19*, National Youth Agency, 2020

⁴⁸ *Contextual Safeguarding and 'County Lines'*, Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019



activity. These examples are not intended to be prescriptive, but are an illustration of how different indicators might be triangulated. It will be up to practitioners to decide whether to implement any of the examples given here, or to develop new combinations to better suit their needs.

3.1.1. Combination 1: Insights from British Transport Police

Relevant indicators:

- Number of out-of-area arrests on SYV and drug-related charges;
- Number of young people missing from home found outside local authority boundaries;
- Number of young people detained or arrested by British Transport Police; and
- Number of safeguarding referrals made following British Transport Police interventions.

Increased information sharing between local authorities and British Transport Police would provide opportunities to assess the extent to which British Transport Police are able to effectively identify and safeguard young people who are trafficked via the public transport network by County Lines gangs. For instance, practitioners could compare the number of young people from the Pathfinder area who are arrested out-of-area on drug-related or serious youth violence charges and/or are found out-of-area following missing episodes with the number of young people referred to Pathfinder children's services following arrest or detention by British Transport Police. Such a comparison may provide insight into the extent to which British Transport Police offers an additional source of safeguarding to young people trafficked via the public transport network. Similarly, it should allow practitioners to assess the number of young people who are trafficked across county boundaries without detection. This may help to identify the methods and patterns by which young people are trafficked and develop tactics to better disrupt such activity.

3.1.2. Combination 2: Education settings and missing episodes

Relevant indicators:

- Educational settings of young people at risk of CCE;
- Number of (households with) young people outside mainstream education;
- Number of missing young people with CCE/gang-related marker on file; and
- Number of young people with histories of repeated missing episodes.

Combining selected education and missing episode indicators can enable practitioners to better understand the relationship between educational settings and missing episodes. This information can then be used to develop strategies – in collaboration with education providers and charities – that aim to reduce the likelihood of missing episodes. If practitioners are able to identify a correlation between absence from mainstream education and missing episodes, they may be able to develop targeted initiatives to support young people who are at risk of exploitation by County Lines gangs.

While currently there is some variation in the data available on young people not in education or on reduced timetables, the introduction of the Vulnerability Assessment Tracker across Pathfinder localities should help to address any discrepancies. Similarly, if practitioners can



identify those educational establishments with higher rates of missing episodes among their pupils, they could collaborate with those institutions to conduct targeted outreach activities and preventative programmes.

3.1.3. Combination 3: Mapping areas at most risk of County Lines

Relevant indicators:

- ERSOU County Lines data by district (arrests, threat level, longevity, import/export areas);
- County Lines Intelligence Collection Matrix (CLICM) data by area (lines in/out);
- Number of arrests of young people on drug-related charges (by area)
- Number of missing episodes by area;
- Crime levels by area (share of county-wide crime); and
- Most deprived areas within county.

The Recommended Minimum Dataset suggests that information regarding a number of known risk factors of County Lines exploitation should be broken down by area (i.e. by district, ward or similar). Taken together, an analysis of these risk factors and the areas in which they are most prevalent may allow practitioners to map the areas of a given locality that are thought to be most at-risk of County Lines activity.

Comparison of this mapping data to the area-specific information provided by CLICM and ERSOU would serve one of two functions:

- If data from CLICM and ERSOU bears out expectations about which areas are most at risk of County Lines, this demonstrates that the chosen risk factors can be used as suitable proxies for County Lines activity in the absence of specific information.
- On the other hand, should the risk factor-based mapping exercise identify areas that are not known sites of County Lines activity, this would suggest that these areas are vulnerable to infiltration by County Lines gangs and would benefit from targeted interventions to build the resilience of the community and its residents.

3.1.4. Combination 4: Establishing efficacy of NRM usage

Relevant indicators:

- Number of SYV-related arrests (including possession of a weapon);
- Number of arrests of young people on drug-related charges;
- Number of NRM criminal exploitation investigations (with/without referral); and
- Number of successful criminal exploitation NRM referrals (and outcomes).

While the NRM is intended to act as a safeguard against inappropriate criminalisation of young people, concerns about its implementation are widespread. Comparison of youth arrest rates for serious youth violence and drug-related crimes with the number of NRM investigations should illustrate the frequency with which the NRM is invoked in response to cases of potential CCE. Comparing such arrest rates with the number of successful NRM referrals should demonstrate the degree to which these indicators can serve as suitable proxies of CCE in the absence of specific data, provided the NRM is used consistently. Furthermore, further analysis of



the success rates of NRM referrals in the Pathfinder area should provide insight into the appropriateness of NRM usage, as a high success rate would suggest that the mechanism is routinely being used as intended.

3.2. Using the dataset to encourage system-wide collaboration

Much of the available literature regarding the efficacy of local and national responses to County Lines highlights the lack of formalised partnership working between agencies responsible for identifying and disrupting County Lines activity.^{49,50} This is identified as a significant barrier to successful practice, and so practitioners are widely encouraged to embed partnership working through formal multi-agency arrangements in order to more effectively identify young people at risk of County Lines exploitation and target interventions accordingly.^{51,52,53} These arrangements should seek to engage partners from a broad range of services and sectors in collective decision making processes, to generate buy-in from all partners and ensure that data collection is tailored to the strategic needs of practitioners.^{54,55}

The development of the Recommended Minimum Dataset has highlighted a number of potential areas of collaboration between police, statutory services, and other services and sectors that may provide additional insights into County Lines activity in the Pathfinder area. The three sectors that would add most value through inclusion in formalised partnership working (education, housing, and healthcare) are discussed in turn below. While this document outlines the reasons for increased engagement with these sectors, and suggest ways in which collaboration may be formalised and incentivised, it will be up to practitioners to decide whether and how to implement these proposals within their local contexts. Successful engagement with these sectors would also facilitate consistent collection of the indicators proposed in the Dataset, as actors within these sectors will have access to information that is not readily accessible by police or statutory services.

3.2.1. Education

As outlined in Section 2.3.6 of this document, young people with negative experiences of mainstream education are more likely to be targeted for exploitation by County Lines gangs.^{56,57,58} Practitioners should therefore explore options for formally embedding educational establishments into the wider early help through system, to enable earlier identification of, and intervention with, young people at risk of criminal exploitation.⁵⁹ Furthermore, closer collaboration between police, statutory services and the education sector would facilitate consistent data collection on the educational settings of young people known to be at risk of

⁴⁹ *Child Criminal Exploitation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery Defences for Children*, Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2018

⁵⁰ *Counting Lives: Responding to Children who are Criminally Exploited*, Children's Society, 2019

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Contextual Safeguarding and 'County Lines'*, Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019

⁵³ *Gang-involved Young People: Custody and Beyond*, Beyond Youth Custody, 2015

⁵⁴ *Serious Youth Violence Strategy*, Home Office, 2018

⁵⁵ *Data for Intelligence*, Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme, 2020

⁵⁶ *Timpson Review of School Exclusion*, Department for Education, 2019

⁵⁷ *Contextual Safeguarding and 'County Lines'*, Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2019

⁵⁸ *Protecting Children from Criminal Exploitation, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: An Addendum*, Ofsted, 2018

⁵⁹ *Intervening Early to Prevent Gang and Youth Violence: The Role of Primary Schools*, Early Intervention Foundation, 2018



CCE. In turn, this would allow practitioners to identify those institutions with the highest rate of County Lines involvement and to conduct targeted outreach with both staff and pupils. In the case of the former, staff should be made aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and should have a clear understanding of the referral mechanisms available to them, while pupils should be educated on the risks of criminal exploitation and encouraged to report any concerns to an appropriate adult.⁶⁰ Increased partnership working between law enforcement and educational institutions may also assist police in identifying patterns of recruitment into County Lines activity and may facilitate more effective identification and prosecution of individual perpetrators.

3.2.2. Housing

Closer collaboration with the housing sector may help practitioners to identify and disrupt patterns of County Lines exploitation. Consistent tracking of cuckooing data across the Pathfinder localities would provide insights into the area and types of accommodation most commonly targeted for cuckooing, and may prevent inappropriate criminalisation of young people arrested in or near known cuckooed addresses (see Section 2.3.7).⁶¹ Furthermore, there are opportunities to expand partnership working with the housing sector beyond the proposals laid out in the Recommended Minimum Dataset in order to create additional safeguards against County Lines exploitation. For instance, consistent tracking of rehousing applications may facilitate the earlier identification of at-risk young people by tracking applications for rehousing.^{62,63}

Gaining access to housing data may be a challenge for practitioners, given the involvement of the private sector in housing provision. Local authorities may therefore need to explore options for incentivising housing providers to engage and to disclose information, particularly regarding cuckooing, whether through positive reinforcement (e.g. prioritisation for contracts) or through punitive measures such as financial penalties for non-compliance. That said, some housing providers have already expressed a desire to participate in formalised data-sharing with police and statutory services and so incentives may not always be necessary. As such, decisions regarding incentives would need to be left to the discretion of practitioners within the relevant localities.

3.2.3. Healthcare

Young people engaged in County Lines activity are at increased risk of physical harm, and so increased collaboration with the healthcare sector may provide practitioners with an opportunity to identify victims of County Lines exploitation and intervene accordingly. Closer partnership working with A&Es and sexual health clinics may prove particularly useful, as these are the points where exploited young people are most likely to come into contact with the health system. Engaging these partners within formalized information-sharing structures would facilitate consistent data collection on the number of young people seeking treatment for issues associated with County Lines exploitation.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Child Criminal Exploitation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking and Modern Slavery Defences for Children*, Youth Justice Legal Centre, 2018

⁶² *Serious Case Review: Archie*, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2020

⁶³ *Serious Case Review: Child C*, Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board, 2020



Emergency hospital admissions for drug overdoses among young people, for instance, may act as a useful indicator of County Lines exploitation, particularly if the overdose has occurred as the result of “plugging” – given its widespread use as a method of transporting drugs for the purposes of County Lines activity.⁶⁴ Similarly, consistent data collection on the number of young people admitted to hospital with serious unexplained injuries, particularly those inflicted by a weapon, may provide additional insight into the scale of County Lines activity within a given locality.⁶⁵

Formalised partnership working with sexual health clinics may assist with identification of exploited young people by tracking those seeking treatment for sexual violence and/or unwanted pregnancies, given that sexual violence is frequently used as a coercive tool by gangs involved in CCE.⁶⁶ Privacy concerns, however, could present a barrier to increased collaboration in this area, and so practitioners wishing to implement formal partnership working agreements with the healthcare sector will need to consult with the relevant partners to clearly outline the parameters of any such agreement and the degree to which service users' right to privacy should be balanced against providers' safeguarding obligations.

4. Conclusion

This document has elaborated on the motivation for establishing a Recommended Minimum Dataset as part of Traverse's ongoing evaluation of the County Lines Pathfinder and has provided an overview of the process through which that Dataset was developed. It has also attempted to provide clear justifications for those indicators included in the final Dataset, with reference to supporting literature where appropriate. As has been highlighted above, this Dataset is intended to serve as the “gold standard” for data collection on County Lines activity and it is believed that full implementation of the Dataset is achievable for all four Pathfinder localities in the long term. It will be up to local services and practitioners to determine the speed of implementation, as well as which indicators are prioritised, in accordance with their needs.

In addition to outlining the rationale behind the proposed indicators, this document has proposed a number of ways in which the Recommended Minimum Dataset might be used to develop a more comprehensive picture of County Lines activity through triangulation of data and increased collaboration with relevant sectors and services. These suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive, but serve as examples of how standardised information gathering practices across the four Pathfinder localities might benefit practitioners tasked with identifying and disrupting County Lines activity, and may lead to improved safeguarding of young people against exploitation by County Lines gangs.

⁶⁴ *Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in relation to County Lines: A Toolkit for Professionals*, The Children's Society, 2018

⁶⁵ *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance*, Home Office, 2018

⁶⁶ *Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit: Disruption Tactics*, Home Office, 2019