

# 'COUNTY LINES'

Are vulnerable young people being used to sell drugs in your local area?

Has your rented property been taken over to deal drugs?

## **'County lines' - what does it mean?**

County lines, or 'going country', is the term used for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban, market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines". Groups or gangs use young people or vulnerable adults to carry and sell drugs. It is a tactic used by groups or gangs to sell drugs in an area outside of where they live, reducing their risk of being known by the police.

A group or gang may also target a vulnerable person living in the area they're operating by using force or coercion to take over their home and use it as a base to sell drugs from – this is called cuckooing.

Gangs may move young vulnerable people from their home town to stay at houses in the area. Rented properties are used as bases to distribute the drugs. This is sometimes known as a 'trap house'.

Children as young as 12 can find themselves enslaved in 'trap houses', preparing and selling drugs 24/7, in disgusting conditions, unable to wash, sleep or eat properly, under the constant threat of violence, with dangerous people coming and going. They earn little money and lose all ties with their friends and families. Gangs often use intimidation, violence and threatening behaviour to prevent them from leaving.

## What is the impact on the victim?

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation have a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Children and young people criminally exploited in this way are also often victims of sexual exploitation, violence, neglect and modern slavery. Young people will often go missing for days at a time, as they are trafficked around the country by the groups or gangs. They are affected in many ways including: physical harm, child sexual exploitation, rape, neglect or psychological trauma.

Victims may be fearful of repercussions if they report the groups or gangs to the authorities. They might be frightened about what will happen to them, their friends or their family if they leave.

The young people can be drawn in by money, kinship and status, and do not recognise they are being groomed (often by other young people) or recognise their exploitation by others. The glamour and excitement soon turns to isolation and fear.

Victims may require support for the abuse and trauma they have suffered, help with their addiction and mental health.

## Signs to look out for

- Usually takes place in multi-occupancy or social housing property.
- An increase in the number of people visiting the property, particularly unfamiliar faces.
- Offenders will often have new vehicles outside the property or hire cars.
- Suspicious smells may come from the property.
- The tenant offers to pay rent for a long period (e.g. six months) upfront in cash.
- Tenant may appear affluent but want to rent an inexpensive property.
- Tenant may be unable to provide landlord or employment references.
- Tenant may prefer to pay rent in cash without good justification.
- Frequent changes in tenants (possibly with a different accent compared to local accent).
- A possible increase in anti-social behaviour in and around the property.
- An increase in litter outside the property.
- Evidence of drug use at the property may include deal bags, weighing scales, petroleum jelly and cling film.

## Important information for landlords

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, landlords or property managers can receive up to 14 years' imprisonment or a substantial fine for having drug dealers residing at their property.

The property may be seized or forfeited as well as the landlord prosecuted for money laundering.

The property could be subject to a closure notice and respective closure order if police and local authorities believe that the use or supply of drugs has been taking place, that it has been connected to disorder or serious nuisance, and that without issuing a closure order, there is likely to be further nuisance or disorder. (Anti-social behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014)

A closure notice prohibits access to the premises for a period specified in the notice and may prohibit access by all persons except those specified, at all times and in all circumstances. A closure order can be for up to three months and may be extended (if necessary).

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## What to do if you suspect a property is being used as a 'trap house'

If you want to report anonymously you can via Crimestoppers, online **crimestoppers-uk.org** or by calling the hotline: **0800 555 111**.

Alternatively, you can call Hertfordshire Police on the non-emergency number, **101**. If you think someone is at immediate risk of harm, always call **999** in an emergency.

If you would like more information or have any concerns please call Hertsmere Community Safety Partnership, **020 8207 7801** or email **partnership.support@hertsmere.gov.uk**

## Useful contacts

**CGL** - drug and alcohol support service for children and young people, call 01707 256532 or email [herts@cgl.org.uk](mailto:herts@cgl.org.uk)

**Hertfordshire Adult Social Services** - report a concern about an adult being mistreated, call 0300 123 4042 or visit [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk)

**Hertfordshire Children Social Services** - report a concern about a child being mistreated, call 0300 123 4043 or visit [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk)

**Hertfordshire Wellbeing Service** - for support with mental health and wellbeing, call 0300 777 0707 or visit [www.hpft.nhs.uk](http://www.hpft.nhs.uk)

**The Living Room Hertfordshire** - addiction therapy and support for individuals and families, call 0300 365 0304 or visit [www.livingroomherts.co.uk](http://www.livingroomherts.co.uk)