

Report of Director of Health, Housing & Adult Social Care

COUNTY LINES DISCUSSION REPORT

Summary

1. The rise of the County Lines drug trade and related crime is being felt across the County and City of York. Although thought of in a regional, national or international context, its impact is felt most by local communities. The public are aware and reporting increased visibility of drug use and concerns about young people being drawn into more serious crime and about the violence linked to dealing drugs.
2. Organised Crime Groups use intimidation tactics, exploitation and corruption for unlawful gain. They are deceitful, unscrupulous and regularly prey on the vulnerable in their pursuit of money, power or personal gratification through the harm of others.
3. This report will show that North Yorkshire Police are already working in partnership to understand the challenge and proactively respond by disrupting trafficking routes and protecting vulnerable people.
4. Serious Organised Crime is a strategic priority in the Safer York Partnership Community Safety Strategy 2017-20 and will also be carried forward into the next draft Strategy. In May 2019, the partnership commissioned the Violence and Vulnerability Unit from the Home Office & Associate of Town Centre Management to carry out a Locality Review on County Lines. The findings of this review were considered by the Partnership on the 2nd October and from that, a plan was developed to implement a joined up multi-agency response to capture the tactical work that is already taking place to address County Lines.

Drug Crime

5. Drug offences have risen steadily over the last three years across North Yorkshire. Nationally there was an 11% increase in 2018-19 and North Yorkshire mirrored this increase. While recorded drug offences equate to 3.6% of total crime in North Yorkshire, the impact on vulnerable people and communities is considerable. Much of the crime still remains hidden.
6. York is one of the hardest hit areas across North Yorkshire Force. Drug offences are also linked to wider organised crime such as modern slavery, human trafficking, fraud, violence, kidnap and serious and violent assault. Over the last year, County Lines has become the predominant form of drug dealing in the city.
7. Whilst the police have a good understanding of the supply and demand through those they interact with, the true picture is still unknown. This unknown demand largely relates to the affluent middle class use of cocaine, which whilst it may be small, will contribute to the demand on County Lines drug dealing within the city and county.

County Lines

8. County Lines is the trafficking and dealing of drugs by organised crime groups across the country and refers to the telephone 'lines' used to facilitate this.
9. York & North Yorkshire are the biggest importer of County Lines in the Yorkshire and Humber region with 20 unique deal line telephone numbers linked to 14 different County Lines. These target places which are well connected by rail and road. York is currently impacted by four of these lines.
10. The main drugs supplied are heroin and crack cocaine. These lines have been linked to child sexual exploitation, firearms, the trafficking of young people both local and from out of area, exploitation of vulnerable adults and to serious violence.
11. Violence tends to appear where rival gangs vie for control of an area or where local dealers try to profit from rival gangs. Repercussions range from violent threat to kidnap and serious assault, often involving knives.

Exploitation and Cuckooing

12. A common feature of County Lines presence is 'cuckooing'. This is when dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person and operate their drug dealing from that address. This has been prevalent in York, particularly within Council owned properties and has impacted on locations and addresses which previously had not been known to the Community Safety team.
13. County Lines relies heavily on the exploitation of young people and vulnerable adults to traffic and supply drugs between areas. This results in complex safeguarding issues. The police need to arrest to preserve evidence but 'catching' the individual makes them vulnerable to reprisals. The individual is then returned to their home location, identified to social services and their local police. Considerable work is then required to ascertain whether they are suspect or a victim.

A Multi-agency response to County Lines

14. North Yorkshire Police's response to County Lines is led strategically by a Serious Organised Crime Board, chaired by the Deputy PCC, with a prevention sub-board chaired by North Yorkshire County Council's Community Safety Lead. Operationally, Silver Command group oversees the co-ordination of intelligence and tactical operations. The Partnership's Disruption panel and Organised Crime Mapping meeting co-ordinate tactical work across partners for the combined city and county.
15. At a local (York) level. Serious Organised Crime is a priority for the Community Safety Partnership, Safer York Partnership. In May 2019, the partnership commissioned the Home Office Violence and Vulnerability Unit to carry out a Locality Review to determine how well partners are working to tackle the issue, identify any gaps and share good practice. (Annex 1) The recommendations from that review are as follows:
 - a. Consider production of an informed needs assessment
 - b. Produce local criminal exploitation delivery plan
 - c. Clear local and county governance group
 - d. If there is evidence of young people locally being recruited/groomed by gangs, consider introducing contextual safeguarding as a shared approach

- e. Consider the importance of shared language and learning
- f. A programme of multi-agency training in the area of County Lines and the associated vulnerability subjects would be useful and desirable.

Response to the recommendations to date

- 16. Since the publication of that review much has been done to address those recommendations. Safer York Partnership have approved the establishment of a York Joint Co-ordinating Group to pull together the local multi-agency tactical delivery, produce a clear action plan and drive the implementation of that plan to improve the local response to county lines.
- 17. A draft action plan was also considered by Safer York Partnership a starting point for that group. This has been based on the problem profiles, problem solving plans and national framework. These documents are not attached due to the operational sensitivity of the content.
- 18. Training and awareness events have taken place with key services within City of York Council and with the Safeguarding Boards and Community Safety Partnership. County Lines is one of the topics to be covered at a Voluntary Sector Assembly Day on 31st October.
- 19. Governance structures are already established with links to the North York & York Board and sub groups.
- 20. A Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meeting (MACEM) has been established by Childrens Social Care, City of York Council jointly with North Yorkshire Police.
- 21. Weekly intelligence sharing meetings take place between the Community Safety team and North Yorkshire Police involving only those staff who are police vetted. Membership has recently been extended to include representation from Children's social care and it is planned to extend further to include adult social care. This meeting has been pivotal to the increase in speed at which the community safety team are able to take enforcement action in order to disrupt local county lines activity.

Council Plan

- 22. The Community Safety Strategy links to the following priorities within the Council Plan 2015-19:

- **A focus on frontline services** – to ensure all residents, particularly the least advantaged, can access reliable services and community facilities
- **A council that listens to residents** – to ensure it delivers the services they want and works in partnership with local communities

Implications

23. In producing this report the following implications have been considered:
- **Financial** – none identified
 - **Human Resources (HR)** – none identified
 - **Equalities** – none identified
 - **Legal** Safer York Partnership is a statutory partnership identified within the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
 - **Crime and Disorder** - Safer York Partnership supports the Council's discharge of its crime and disorder duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
 - **Information Technology (IT)** - none identified
 - **Property** – none identified
 - **Other**
- No other implications identified

Risk Management

24. There are no identified risks relevant to this report.

Conclusions

25. The report provides an overview of County Lines and how it impacts within the City of York. It also outlines how the problem has been identified and is being addressed through a multi-agency approach and demonstrates the progress that has been made to date in developing a local partnership response.

Recommendation

26. Members are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report in order to determine further work that can enhance the contribution of cross Board activity at a local level to support a multi-agency approach to tackling County Lines in the city.

Reason

27. To ensure that all opportunities for multi-agency engagement on County Lines are being fully exploited.

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Report Approved Date

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex 1: Locality Review Report

Background Papers

Community Safety Strategy 2017-20

Abbreviations

MACEM- Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meeting
PCC – Police and Crime Commissioner