



## Raising awareness and tackling the issue of Exploitation in Bath and North East Somerset

This joint briefing has been prepared by B&NES Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and the Local Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB). These Boards work in partnership with a wide range of organisations including the Police, Education, Probation, Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Health and the Third Sector to coordinate what is being done locally to protect and promote the welfare of all, particularly children & young people and adults with care and support needs (hereafter referred to as adults).

**'Exploitation'** is the action or fact of ill-treating someone in order to gain unfair advantage.

**There are various forms of exploitation, all of which rely on an imbalance of power.**

These include:-

- **County Lines**
- **Cuckooing – place of operation**
- **Criminal Exploitation**
- **Sexual Exploitation**
- **Modern Trafficking and Slavery**

This briefing explains some of these safeguarding issues in a little more detail, describes the risks, tells you what to look for and, critically, advises what to do if you think you see it

**County Lines** is 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 forms of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, extreme violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. This way of dealing drugs has proliferated across the UK in recent years. Groups will often send their own couriers in pairs to the rural marketplace where they will stay for a month or so before being replaced by others, primarily to hinder police detection. It involves extreme violence, intimidation and the offer of money or drugs. The approach used within 'County Lines' is fast moving, with vulnerable young people or those in care being targeted initially, to middle class children who are seen to be less obvious and taking over existing local drug dealing hubs. In addition the groups use their own language in which the vocabulary also rapidly changes.

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

**Cuckooing** is the process whereby criminal gangs target the homes of people with a range of vulnerabilities such as adults with a learning disability or mental health issues, Class A drug users and sex workers to deal drugs from their premises.

They are often approached by dealers offering them free drugs in exchange for use of their home or are sometimes forced by threats and intimidation to deal on their behalf. Some victims are 'asked' to leave the property so it can be taken over by the criminal gangs. The fear of intimidation and violence is such that often these people become street homeless. Cuckooing means the criminals can operate from a property rather than on the street, making them less easy to identify, and often they move between different properties to cover their activities.

County Lines groups also make use of serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks. County Lines groups prefer to pay cash where possible and often use network associates to arrange these facilities, as a means of distancing themselves from the criminality.

### **Criminal Exploitation**

There is currently no legal definition of adult criminal exploitation; however child criminal exploitation is common in County Lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual, including if the young person believes they have made a choice. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. It also includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft

### **Sexual Exploitation**

The term “sexual exploitation” covers a broad range of sexual violence and abuse within both physical and virtual environments. It usually occurs outside the family, and there is an additional context since the young person is used for sexual purposes for the financial and/or non-monetary (e.g. status) gain of another. People in exploitative situations and “relationships” receive gifts, money, affection or status for performing sexual activities or for allowing others to perform sexual activities on them. Those exploited may be tricked into believing they are in a loving, consensual relationship.

### **Modern Slavery & Trafficking**

Modern slavery is a violation of a person’s human rights. It can take the form of human trafficking, forced labour, labour to pay a debt, forced or servile marriage, descent-based slavery and domestic slavery. A person is considered to be in modern slavery if they are:-

- Forced to work through mental or physical threat
- Owned or controlled by an “employer”, usually through mental or physical abuse
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or sold or bought as “property”
- Physically constrained or has restrictions placed on their freedom of movement

People are being exploited using the County Lines model to transport and sell more than drugs. Weapons, sex and money are also being traded in this way.

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### **Exploitation can:**

- Involve force or entice people with gifts, drugs etc and is often accompanied by extreme violence or threats of violence
- Be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females and young people or adults and is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation
- Affect anyone
- Still be exploitation even if the activity appears consensual

### **Who is at risk of exploitation?**

Although anyone can be affected, those considered to be at greater risk include:-

- School aged children from primary school upwards
- Young people from middle class background who are less likely to be seen as suspicious
- Those attending alternative education provision, elective home education, Looked after Children, and Care Leavers and people with SEND
- Socially isolated or lonely people
- Those with gambling behaviours
- Those with addictive/substance abuse issues
- Those with debt issues

### **Some potential signs /indicators you should be looking out for:**

- persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area;
- unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets
- relationships with controlling / older or unfamiliar individuals or groups
- leaving home / care without explanation
- suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- parental concerns
- carrying weapons
- significant decline in school results / performance
- gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- a breakdown in relationships with family and friends?
- more people calling at an address? Sometimes at unsociable hours?
- a neighbour has not been seen for a while?
- suspicious or unfamiliar vehicles outside the address?

B&NES is generally a safe place to live and work but it is not immune to County Lines and Cuckooing. By acting together we can keep it this way.

### **What should I do if I am concerned?**

- **If you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of harm call 999**
- If you are worried about a **Child contact** B&NES Children and Families Assessment and Intervention Team on 01225 396312 or 01225 396313. Or Emergency Duty Team (EDT for out of hours/weekend calls) on 01454 615165.
- If you are a young person you could speak to a **trusted adult in school** or **Childline 0800 1111**
- If you are worried about *an Adult contact* the Virgin Care Adult Safeguarding Team on 0300 247 0201. Or 01454 615165 - Emergency Duty Team (EDT) for out of hours/weekend calls