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Report Title: County Lines in B&NES	Agenda Item: 15
Date of Meeting: 11 th Sep 2018	Author: Sgt 3798 Sarah Dinnis (Police) / Roanne Wooten (Julian House)
Recommendation/Decision required/ from LSAB To note for information.	
Background: Board to be briefed on 'County Lines' phenomena.	
Key issues for discussion: <u>What is County Lines?</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'County Lines' is the police term for urban Organised Crime Groups (OCG's) supplying mainly Class A drugs (primarily crack cocaine and heroin) into rural towns or county locations. Groups develop networks across geographical boundaries to access and exploit existing drugs markets. They use dedicated mobile phone lines (pay as you go untraceable lines) to advertise the availability of drugs to the customer base. Orders are placed back to this line in response. Hence the terms 'County Lines'. 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. • Tensions between local drug dealers and out of town 'County Lines' dealers can lead to violence. • OCG 'Enforcers' will often establish premises for their couriers to use which are lived in by vulnerable people (invariably drug users who become indebted to the OCG) which the OCG exploits. This is known as 'Cuckooing'. 	

National Overview

- There are approximately 720 County Lines across England and Wales (2017 figures) of which 283 originate from London, with new hubs starting in Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. The government have announced that they will be setting up a National County Lines Co-ordination Centre as part of the new Serious Violence Strategy which identifies that “the changing drugs market” is a “key driver harming our communities”. The strategy stresses the importance of early intervention whilst the coordination centre will help police arrest perpetrators as well as increase protection for vulnerable people drawn into the networks, provide intelligence and support police in shutting down mobile phone numbers.
- The response to tackle ‘County Lines’ needs to be multi-agency and involve the police, the National Crime Agency, local government agencies and voluntary/community sector organisations.

What is the threat to the communities of BaNES ?

- County Lines OCG’s pose a significant threat to young and adult vulnerable persons living in our communities, whether used for storage or supply of drugs, the movement of cash, or to secure the use of dwellings held by vulnerable people by force or coercion (cuckooing).
- Victims are exposed to exploitation including physical, mental and sexual harm. Groups use high levels of violence and intimidation, including the use of knives, corrosives and other weapons and target those with mental and physical health problems, drug users and those less likely to contact the police.
- Children as young as 12 years old are used to courier drugs with 15 – 16 years being the most common age range. Young people are placed into debt for drugs by these groups and are becoming more ruthless and desperate in attempts to pay off these debts. Violence is being normalised where carrying knives and dealing drugs is viewed as normal activity.
- BaNES does not have the same level of County Lines activity that other areas have but it is not immune from this national trend. This year in Bath City Centre there have been a number of violent assaults and public order offences involving persons who are connected to County Lines activity. In the last month alone (August 2018), a number of persons who have links to London County Lines have been located and arrested at addresses of vulnerable persons across Bath and on one occasion, a juvenile was located at an address who had been trafficked across the country and used to deal drugs in the City Centre. ‘County Lines’ activity and associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Safeguarding considerations

- The Home Office has published guidance for frontline professionals who deal with children, young people and vulnerable adults involved 'County Lines' activity which can end in gang violence and exploitation. In summary they recommend:
 - Looking out for the signs of being involved in 'County Lines' activity. Indicators of involvement of children include going persistently missing from school or home; unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones; excessive phone calls/texts; relationships with controlling older individuals; carrying weapons; OCG associations. Indicators of involvement for adults include withdrawal of engagement with support services; relationships with controlling individuals; more people visiting the address; suspicious smells coming from an address; unfamiliar vehicles outside an address.
 - Use designated safeguarding leads for reporting concerns or local public protection professionals if the person is at immediate risk.
 - First responders should refer potential victims to the National Referral Mechanism (national process for identifying and providing support for potential victims of modern slavery)
- 'County Lines' requires a multi-agency response with organisation's sharing a collective responsibility to deal with the community impact whilst protecting the safety of victims.

Action taken and successes

- Op TARAK is the South West region's response to tackling 'County Lines' criminality. The campaign aims to protect the most vulnerable, adults and children and works closely with partner agencies to identify those at risk, identify the perpetrators and disrupt the groups.
- Avon and Somerset Constabulary are committed to making our area a hostile place for dealers and to identify and dismantle drug supply operations. Over the last few years, there have been several organised crackdowns on drug dealing, including targeting county lines dealers. Operation HYDRA was the crack down that took place in Bath in 2016, resulting in 30 dealers being sentenced at court for selling Class A drugs.
- Locally, Bath Neighbourhood City Centre Police Team now have a dedicated section consisting of 1 Sgt and 5 PCs who focus much of their time and resources on tackling County Lines groups in BaNES. Locally, five 'County Lines' OCG's are believed to be active across BaNES. The section's work has included patrols of areas known to be active at any given time, known individuals targeted and stopped/searched and the execution of Misuse of Drugs warrants in

line with intelligence received. In 2018 so far, one County Lines OCG has been moved out of Bath due to enforcement activity and individuals from a further two lines have had their activities disrupted significantly.

- In some areas within Bath City Centre, where a higher proportion of vulnerable people live, a poster campaign has been initiated and a leaflet drop started, asking for assistance in reporting dealing or spotting exploitation of vulnerable persons as well as offering support and advice. It is hoped to extend this campaign over the coming months to other areas.

Proposed future action and joint working

- Bath Neighbourhood Team are currently developing a system where persons vulnerable to being 'cuckooed' are identified through intelligence/information sharing and local Beat Managers will visit these individuals on a regular basis to offer support and advice.
- There are currently 9 persons listed on this system and it provides an opportunity for multi-agency support around identifying those that are vulnerable. For example, there is a plan for the new Homeless Prevention Worker at Julian House to assist in identifying those vulnerable to 'cuckooing', particularly those living on the streets but who have tenancies, and sharing that information with the police with a view to arranging visits (joint or otherwise). It is hoped that this identification, information sharing and visit activity could be extended to include other organisations and turn reactive work into prevention work, making it harder for the dealers to find locations in BaNES to set up a base.

Good practice from around England to tackling County Lines

- Some examples for consideration of what other organisations/agencies have successfully set up to tackle County Lines activity:
 - A weeks focussed multi agency activity to tackle impact of gangs in the local area (Southend-on-Sea).
 - Housing tenancy enforcement using civil tools and powers (Kensington and Chelsea).
 - Joint working between police and housing around 'cuckooing' (Plymouth).
 - Engagement with families putting across the message that crime and OCG membership is not acceptable and helping parents be more assertive with their children (Kensington and Chelsea).
 - Raising awareness amongst staff working at, or in venues with vulnerable people who are targeted by OCG's. This delivers both

protective and intelligence benefits (Flintshire).

- Joint work to tackle 'cuckooing' by SNT, NACRO and others. Visits, posters, enforcement and support all co-ordinated through local neighbourhood policing team (Rhyl and Colwyn Bay).

Conclusion

- The 'County Lines' phenomena of recent years is a destructive method used by OCG's to exploit the vulnerable in our communities.
- The circumstances of individuals involved in 'County Lines' are often complex and involve a whole host of safeguarding, health, social and wellbeing issues.
- Only through effective partnership working will agencies be able to effectively tackle this issue by preventing, disrupting and detecting offences, safeguard individuals at risk, and protect our communities.

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