

LEICESTERSHIRE SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY BOARD

19th MARCH 2021

LSCSB UPDATE:

LEICESTERSHIRE POLICE – COUNTY LINES

Purpose of report

1. This report is to update the board in relation to the Police and Partnership Response in relation to County Lines due to its continued prevalence as a Serious Organised Crime business model for drugs supply and its evidenced links to exploitation of children and adults.
2. It will provide outline of recent focus of activity across Leicestershire and highlight the developments of the information gained to offer support to those affected, making best use of partnership interventions and using the existing substance treatment services seek to encourage individuals to seek support.
3. It will also recommend further challenges locally and nationally that Community safety Partnerships will be able to consider and action as required to improve information gathering and support disrupting this type of criminality.

Background

4. County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs.

Summary

5. Leicestershire Police continues to work with regional and national law enforcement agencies, including the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre, to gather and share intelligence on County Lines identified affecting our communities.
6. There are currently 18 active County Lines operating across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland with 12 affecting the Leicestershire area due which matches the preference for targeting market towns where existing drugs supply networks may not be as established.

7. The information and intelligence used to successfully identify and then target these County Lines continues to come from local policing teams, local authorities, safeguarding teams, communities and the partnership intelligence portal available to all statutory agencies to use.
8. The County Lines entering Leicestershire remain predominantly linked to larger Metropolitan Forces and co-ordination with these forces in addressing the individuals organising the lines is an essential part of disrupting the County Lines and safeguarding those at risk.

Recent Disruptions across Leicestershire

9. Northwest Leicester continues to see the benefit from joint enforcement in 2020 against an established County Line that has now been successfully disrupted with the joint operation between the Neighbourhood Policing team led by Inspector Rich Jackson, Force Intelligence Unit and other local and regional specialist teams.
10. The intervention work afterwards with the local authority teams from North West District Council has provided long term disruption of the individuals who were storing drugs for the suppliers and offering diversion for victims of exploitation, in this case mainly adults. This has provided longer term disruption as the individuals at risk could easily have been targeted by others trying to replace the disrupted lines.
11. North West Policing and Authority have, through effective intelligence sharing between agencies, identified other county lines and are in the early stages of intervention to prevent them becoming established.
12. In Market Harborough the local team dealt directly with a county line identified from increased reporting of ASB and vulnerable adults having their addresses "cuckooed". Cuckooing is where persons/gangs take over a vulnerable person's property to use as base to deal drugs.
13. By working with the local authority ASB team and housing association closure orders were used to remove the address being used by the supplier, while enforcement was carried out in conjunction with the exporting force. The line was effectively dealt with and is no longer present.
14. Charnwood Local Policing teams remain actively involved in targeting the known County Lines and focused disruption work through Misuse of Drugs Act powers have been deployed by the local policing team and developing significant understanding of where County Lines have been operating from.
15. The numerous individuals arrested have been given strict bail conditions not to enter the area and are shared with the Police Forces they reside in or local Neighbourhood area in Leicester as appropriate.
16. This allows the Neighbourhood Teams and Charnwood Borough Council to engage with the individuals at risk of harm to support them from being exploited or identify consequences of allowing their addresses to be used.

17. These practices, outlined already, have developed since the threats of County Lines were raised locally and nationally. The learning is being sought across other agencies in the country and there have been requests for case studies from Community Safety Partnerships in Leicestershire.
18. Leicestershire Police can now use the information gathered from investigating these County Lines to message those accessing drugs to try and divert them directly into Substance Treatment Services. The removal of the supply line is a clear opportunity to try and divert individuals and seek to support them through the commissioned services available and seek to reduce demand across communities.

Current Priorities

19. Leicestershire Police are conducting policing operations in Melton, Charnwood and North West to provide disruption and information gathering around this crime model.
20. The current tactics being used in these areas show a good range of options including the use of closure orders, safeguarding referrals and other multiagency escalations to deal with existing and emerging supply lines.
21. The Neighbourhood Policing Commanders receive detailed updates in relation to the County Lines identified on them to assist in filling intelligence gaps and implement plans, with support from specialist resources as required, to disrupt the individuals involved and intervene with those at risk of being exploited.
22. The presence of missing people from other counties remains a significant factor in early identification and liaison with other Police Forces and local authority areas, and local teams being aware of the signs of exploitation has been key in identifying key addresses and individuals at risk or causing harm.
23. The County Lines Intensification operations are co-ordinated nationally continue to be supported by Leicestershire Police and prevention remains a key approach. The resources available to the LLR Partnerships from the #knowthesigns and #areyoulistening campaigns remain powerful tools in raising awareness in communities and can be used by Community Safety Partnerships where threats are present or emerge.
24. The Substance Misuse Community Safety Partnership meeting has developed a quarterly updates on the trends, hotspots and drugs types recovered broken down by each local authority area.
25. This improved data sharing needs to be considered alongside other information such as community reporting, needle finds and treatment services information to allow Community Safety Teams to target problem solving and assist in prioritising locations, addresses and individuals that have the greatest impact on others or at greatest risk of harm.

Key issues for partnership working

26. County Lines has been identified in Part 1 of Dame Black's Review of Substance Misuse (published in September 2020) as a continuing threat and growing business model across the country as a whole.
27. It finds that County Lines remain profitable, with potential estimated funds to be over £800k per year from an individual line. It is a very violent business model, both for victims and between groups.
28. The rise in the County Lines business model seems to be a major factor in increased drug-related violence in the UK, alongside the related factors of the growth in the crack cocaine market and the increasing role of young people in drug supply. Potential future saturation of county lines markets raises the threat of violence still further.
29. The government announced £80 million further funds in January 2021. This is identified as new money and is funding for 1 year to enhance drug treatment, focused on reducing drug-related crime and stopping the rise in drug related deaths also present in the report.
30. The NCA Strategy 2020 also highlights County Lines as a continuing issue and identifies the key warning signs for agencies to be aware of and share details of with law enforcement and safeguarding partners
31. Both reports identify links between serious violence, organised criminality, exploitation and County Lines shows the need of a holistic multiagency approach to remove those responsible but also effectively building resilience in those that are using drugs, removing the demand and need for illegal drugs in communities.
32. The progression of the response to County Lines over the last two years by Local Policing Teams, Local Authorities and other Community Safety Partnership Partners has been very positive and shows a clear drive to tackle not just the immediate harm but underlying issues.
33. However, there are no doubt opportunities to develop partnership responses further and using the information shared to further improve the ability to highlight individuals and locations that are repeat victims or enablers to effectively prevent the County Lines establishing in the first place.

Recommendations for the Board

34. The Board is recommended to:
 - (a) To note the continued Partnership activity and development in relation to tackling County Lines across Leicestershire.

- (b) To consider commissioning a review of Leicestershire Community Safety Partnership activity to share learning and develop a best practice guide to disrupting County Lines based on the disruptions outlined accessible across partnerships involved.
- (c) Continue to ratify support from Community Safety Partnerships to utilise the existing awareness campaigns for County Lines to encourage continued reporting of concerns from communities and partnerships.
- (d) To provide a more detailed oversight of the Dame Black report and its opportunities to Community Safety Partnerships for potential development of services and consideration to funding announced for treatment services.

Officer to contact

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