

County Lines



October 2023

Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer,

You may have seen in the news, or on social media, that Wiltshire Police have recently finished a week of targeted activity focussing on County Lines. We have been working hard proactively targeting those individuals and groups that seek to cause harm, whilst providing reassurance and support to our communities across Wiltshire. This letter is intended to give you some information about what County Lines are and how we deal with these issues.

What are County Lines?

The National Crime Agency defines County Lines as “County Lines are 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. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) may report increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes because of this trend.”

What are the risks?

There are potential risks linked to county lines involvement, the below are some examples.

Drug usage - Perpetrators will try and entice some young people into trying drugs and alcohol, initially providing them for free. Once there is a habit, they will continue to provide them but demand payment, which can force drug debts onto young people. To find the funds to pay their debts, they are pushed into running county line drug supply. This is known as “debt bondage”.

Weapons - The Home Office has stated there is a strong link between county lines and the use of serious violence, sometimes involving knife and guns, with substances such as acid also being used. Thankfully such incidents are rare within Wiltshire, but we are committed to tackling these matters.

Exploitation – There is also a link with young people being potentially sexually abused and exploited, this can affect any gender and the National Crime outlines how in the following ways.

Young people being forced into sexual activity with gang members or for the gang's financial gain.

Vulnerable children being made to work off drug debts through sexual exploitation as ‘payment’ (this might happen after the child has been coerced into becoming dependent on drugs by the gang)

Children being groomed into what they believe is a romantic relationship with a gang member which then leads to subsequent exploitation.

Proactive work

From Monday 9th October – Sunday 15th October Wiltshire Police conducted 7 warrants, made 19 arrests, and safeguarded 9 adults and children linked to County Lines. Regionally in the South West there were 94 arrests, more than £73,000 cash seized, 5 dealer lines were disrupted, Class A drugs valued over £90,000 and Class B drugs valued over £155,000 were seized. For a more in depth write up please follow this link: [Regional drugs operation | Wiltshire Police](#).

Possible signs to look for

- An increase in visitors and cars to a particular house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g. different accents compared to local accent)
- Change in the resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g., clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries

Who do I speak to?

We will always encourage you to speak to Wiltshire Police if you have concerns about your young person however we know this can be difficult. Should you want to talk to us please phone 101 and raise your concerns. If your young person is at immediate risk call 999. You can also talk to your young person's school, ideally their designated safeguarding lead. Lastly, the NSPCC provide a helpline, their contact details can be found in the signposting section of this letter.

Signposting

NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. [NSPCC | The UK children's charity | NSPCC](#)

Fearless: A dedicated youth website for non-judgemental information and anonymous reporting for 11-17yr olds. [Give information about crime 100% anonymously | Fearless | Crimestoppers \(crimestoppers-uk.org\)](#)

Crimestoppers: The adult version of Fearless for non-judgmental information and anonymous reporting. [Independent UK charity taking crime information anonymously | Crimestoppers \(crimestoppers-uk.org\)](#)

Check It Out: Is a collection of videos and resources for young people from primary to secondary, covering everything from bullying, mental health, county lines and grooming. [Introduction \(wiltshire-pcc.gov.uk\)](#)