



**CHILDREN AFFECTED BY GANG ACTIVITY**

**AND YOUTH VIOLENCE**

**December 2021**

# **Children affected by gang activity and youth violence**

## **Contents**

<b>1. Definition</b>	<b>p 2</b>
<b>2. Risks</b>	<b>p 9</b>
<b>3. Warning indicators</b>	<b>p 13</b>
<b>4. Contextual Safeguarding</b>	<b>p 16</b>
<b>5. Building trusted relationships</b>	<b>p 17</b>
<b>6. Secondary victimisation</b>	<b>p 22</b>
<b>7. Protection and Safeguarding</b>	<b>p 22</b>
<b>8. Threat to Life Notices</b>	<b>p 27</b>
<b>9. Cross Border issues</b>	<b>p 27</b>
<b>10. Key Legislation</b>	<b>p 28</b>
<b>11. Useful tools and powers</b>	<b>p 30</b>
<b>12. Further Information</b>	<b>p 33</b>

## **Acknowledgement**

This document was originally adapted by Knowsley Safeguarding Children's Partnership in 2019 using a publication already in place called, Children affected by gang activity and youth violence by West Midlands Safeguarding Children Group. Special thanks and acknowledgment to West Midlands for their permission for Knowsley to develop this literature.

# 1 Definition

1.1 This guide is intended to assist professionals to recognise the risk factors and issues presented to children who are affected by gang activity and youth violence. It highlights how children may become the victims of child criminal exploitation (CCE), with a focus on the widespread problem of criminal exploitation of children by county lines gangs. It is important to understand the definitions of:

- Child Criminal Exploitation
- Urban Street Gangs
- Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)
- County Lines
- Cuckooing

1.2 This will enable you to be aware of the safeguarding complexities surrounding criminal exploitation, gang affiliation and organised criminality affecting children (0 to 18 year olds) and vulnerable adults (over 18 year olds).

## 1.3 Child Criminal Exploitation

1.3.1 Child Criminal Exploitation has been defined within the Home Office Serious Violence Crime Strategy (2018) where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

1.3.2 Modern Day Slavery Act 2015 & Amendment Act 2021 places a duty on local authorities, including services that are commissioned to give due regard to support people who are drawn into modern slavery in which people are

exploited for criminal gain. The Modern Slavery (Amendment) Bill 2021 included the following changes:

- To make it a criminal offence to supply a false modern slavery and human trafficking statement.
- To make it a criminal offence for companies to continue to use supply chains which fail to demonstrate minimum standards of transparency.
- To improve standards of transparency in supply chains in relation to modern slavery and human trafficking.

1.3.3 Practitioners need to be mindful that children who are criminally exploited should be seen as victims and not treated as criminals. They should also be treated through the lens of modern slavery and child safeguarding legislation and practice.

1.3.4 It is important to remember that children, or adults being criminally exploited may be trafficked, especially if they are having their travel arranged or facilitated for the purpose of them being exploited.

1.3.5 It is helpful to draw on the definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to understand this:

- A person commits an offence if the person arranges or facilitates the travel of another person (“V”) with a view to V being exploited.
- It is irrelevant whether V consents to the travel (whether V is an adult or a child).
- A person may in particular arrange or facilitate V’s travel by recruiting V, transporting or transferring V, harbouring or receiving V, or transferring or exchanging control over V.
- A person arranges or facilitates V’s travel with a view to V being exploited only if the person intends to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel, or the person knows or ought to know that another person is likely to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel.

- “Travel” means - arriving in, or entering, any country, departing from any country, or travelling within any country.

1.3.6 In cases of criminal exploitation and gang affiliation we know that powerful, adult gang members recruit and arrange or facilitate the travel of children (and vulnerable adults) for the purpose of them selling drugs, firearms or sex on their behalf. This is exploitation and can fall under the Modern Slavery Act’s definitions of exploitation as:

- Sexual exploitation
- Securing services etc. by force, threats or deception
- Securing services etc. from children and vulnerable persons

1.3.7 It is important to note that perpetrators of criminal exploitation may themselves be children, or vulnerable adults who are criminally exploited and the victims of criminal exploitation may also be at risk of becoming perpetrators.

1.3.8 When examining the definitions of gangs in this context it should be noted that children and adults, can be coerced, controlled, manipulated or deceived into any criminal activity.

#### 1.4 Types of Groups & Gangs

There are various definitions of gangs in various literature reviews but for the purposes of this document it will use three types of groups: peer groups, urban street gangs and organised crime groups:

##### 1.4.1 Peer Groups

It is common for groups of children to gather together in public places to socialise. Crime and violence is not intrinsic to the identity or practice of peer groups. Although some peer group gatherings can lead to increased anti-social behaviour and youth offending, these activities should not be confused with the serious violence or criminal activity (such as drug dealing) of a street gang, or criminal activities of an organised crime group.

#### 1.4.2 Urban Street Gangs

A street gang can be described as a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of children who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity. A street gang will engage in criminal activity and violence and may lay claim over territory (not necessarily geographical but it can include an illegal economy territory), where they are in conflict with other similar gangs. These gangs have some form of identifying structure featuring a hierarchy usually based on age, physical strength, and propensity to violence or older sibling rank. Street gangs are loosely organised and may be affiliated to older criminals who are members of organised crime groups. Criminal exploitation and gang affiliation is likely to occur in street gangs. To become a gang member there may be certain rites a person will have to complete in order to become accepted as part of the gang. This may involve anti-social or criminal behaviour, substance misuse, sexual abuse/exploitation and/or violence.

#### 1.4.3 Organised Crime Group (OCG)

An OCG is a group of individuals normally led by adults. Many of these groups are often loose networks of criminals that come together for a specific criminal activity, acting in different roles depending on their skills and expertise. This involves serious and organised criminality, where organised crime can be defined as serious crime planned, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain. OCG structures vary. Successful OCGs often consist of a durable core of key individuals. Around them is a cluster of subordinates, specialists, and other more transient members, plus an extended network of associates. Many groups are often loose networks of criminals. Collaboration is often reinforced by shared experiences (such as prison), or recommendation from trusted individuals. Others are bonded by family or cultural ties – some 'crime families' are precisely that.

1.4.4 Street gangs and OCGs are a socially and intentionally constructed group of individuals with attitudes, thinking and behaviours geared towards criminality.

They will use violence and intimidation, social media and weapons as 'tools of power' to violate, challenge and disrespect other gangs. They will also use this level of violence and intimidation against a child that refuses to do particular criminal activities. This may result in threats being made against a child's family, including threats towards siblings and wider family members, to coerce them into criminal activity.

## 1.5 County Lines

- 1.5.1 Both street gangs and OCGs criminally exploit children and vulnerable adults to carry out illegal activity on their behalf. Gangs dealing drugs is not a new issue but the extent to which criminal exploitation (often organised) of children and vulnerable adults, as well as the increasing use of violence, has become an inherent part of 'County Lines'.
- 1.5.2 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 form 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, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.
- 1.5.3 Police Forces across England and Wales have reported a significant increase in violent crime connected to County Lines. The violence includes; murder, rape, stabbings and kidnapping. It is also likely that the violence is underreported.
- 1.5.4 Violence and the threat of violence is a way for gang members to gain recognition and respect by asserting their power and authority. Knives, baseball bats, ammonia / corrosives and other weapons are used to enforce threats. There is also notable evidence of firearms being seen or used to threaten in connection to county lines activity. Social media is also increasingly being used as a tool to encourage and threaten violence.

1.5.5 Children and vulnerable adults can be exploited to be both consumer and runner. They may begin to consume the drugs they are asked to run or begin running in order to maintain their drug usage or those of their peers. This places them 'in debt' to the gang and so they are expected to either pay back by 'working' or else accumulate debt. There are occasions where gangs stage a robbery on one of their 'runners', where they lose the drugs and become indebted to the gang. The more debt they owe the more control the gang has. If the child or vulnerable adult appears to be 'going ops' (going oppositional to the gang) then they are made to evidence that they will correct their behaviour quickly e.g. spend more time with the gang or not attend school, college or work. If the gang become concerned that the child or vulnerable adult appears to be 'going ops' then there is an explicit threat of being 'banged'. This can vary from threats, to being beaten or in more extreme cases stabbed. There can also be indirect threats to harm family members too.

1.5.6 Knife wounds to the buttocks and 'accidental' puncture wounds with screwdrivers 'DIY Injuries' are becoming recognisable signs of drug debt enforcer retribution. An example of this is called Bagging where victims are stabbed from behind to cause injury to the intestines which can result in them requiring a colostomy bag. This is a recognised sign of retribution within the community. These incidents are more likely to be reported to A&E but not to police due to intimidation and fear.

## 1.6 Cuckooing

1.6.1 Gangs will establish a base when they are involved in County Lines in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as "cuckooing". Some of the cuckooing signs to look out for include but are not limited to the following:

- It usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or social housing property
- There may be an increase in the number of comings and goings, including people you haven't seen before, throughout the day and night, often visiting for only short periods of time

- There might be new vehicles outside the property, including taxis or hire cars
- There may be bags of clothing or bedding around the property
- There may be a possible increase in crime and anti-social behaviour in and around the property reported to services, including the accumulation and storage of stolen pedal cycles
- There may be evidence of drug use such as deal bags, discarded syringes, weighing scales, foil and cling film, in and around the property.

1.6.2 It is important to be aware that victims of cuckooing may disengage with support services and be unwilling to discuss what is happening at their property when the subject is raised with them. There is also the risk that babies and very young children may be living in properties that are being used by gangs which presents significant safeguarding risks.

## **2.0 Risks**

2.1 The most effective method to prevent children and vulnerable adults becoming involved in gangs and criminal exploitation is early intervention and identification. This will enable preventative services to be implemented at an early stage to support those affected, including relevant family members to make positive life choices and distance themselves from gang related activity.

2.2 All front line practitioners should be aware of particular risks in relation to all forms of criminal exploitation and gang affiliation.

2.3 Any child or adult is susceptible to criminal exploitation and gang affiliation. This can be demonstrated by the number of “clean skins”, where they are not known to services. These children and adults do not have an existing criminal record or have not attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies. Gangs exploit many of these people at a time when they are most vulnerable due to recent bereavement, family separation, divorce, domestic discord or some other traumatic event in their life.

2.4 Gangs actively recruit “clean skins” since they are more likely to evade detection or draw attention to themselves from law enforcement agencies.

- To transport and sell drugs
- To launder money through personal bank accounts
- To be trafficked for sexual exploitation
- To store weapons and money

2.5 Children and adults may often be at the periphery of involvement for some time before they become active gang members. Children may also follow older siblings into gang involvement. This may provide opportunities for preventative work to be undertaken with children.

2.6 Criminal exploitation includes a combination of:

- **Pull factors:** performing tasks for others resulting in them gaining accommodation, food, gifts, status or a sense of safety and belonging, money or drugs; often the hook is through the perpetrator supplying Class B drugs such as cannabis to the child.
- **Push factors:** children escaping from situations where their needs are neglected and there is exposure to unsafe individuals, where there is high family conflict or the absence of a primary attachment figure.
- **Control:** Brain washing, coercive persuasion, violence and threats of violence by those exploiting the child. Particularly when the child is identified by the police, they are expected to take full responsibility for the offences for which they are charged – i.e. possession and supply of Class A Drugs, especially the possession and supply of Heroin and Crack Cocaine. Crack cocaine markets have strong links to serious violence and evidence suggests crack use is rising in England and Wales due to a mix of supply and demand factors.

2.7 Criminal exploitation interlinks with a number of multiple vulnerabilities and offences including the child being exposed to and/or victim of physical and

emotional violence, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation, modern day slavery and human trafficking, domestic abuse and missing episodes.

2.8 According to the Children's Society [1], the risk to a child, their family and friends, as a result of experiencing criminal exploitation can include but is not limited to:

- Physical injuries, including risk of serious violence and death.
- Emotional and psychological trauma.
- Sexual violence, including sexual assault, rape, internally inserting drugs, indecent images being taken and shared as part of initiation, revenge, or punishment.
- Debt bondage, where a child or young person and their families are 'in debt' to the exploiters, which is then used to control the young person.
- Neglect, and the child or young person's basic needs not being met.
- Living in unclean, dangerous and/or unhygienic environments.
- Tiredness and sleep deprivation, where the child or young person is expected to carry out criminal activities over long periods and through the night.
- Poor attendance and/or attainment at school/college/university.

2.9 There is strong evidence that supportive adult–child relationships are essential for child wellbeing [2]. Children who have no access to friends and family are at increased risk of being exploited for criminal or sexual gain. Children who have been placed in local authority care out of their area are particularly vulnerable, especially if there are multiple placements and/or no trusted relationships. For example, relationships between practitioners and vulnerable children are often changing and short-term, which compounds vulnerable children's difficulty in trusting adults [3].

2.10 There are some other factors that can increase the vulnerability that a child will be criminally exploited by others. This can include

- **Child/ Individual:** Looked after, special educational needs and disabilities, substance misuse, mental health problem,

- **Home/family:** Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which can include: sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect/abuse, exposed to violence, younger sibling to a child who has been exploited, alcohol/drug addiction, family member in prison, mental health, and parental separation/divorce. Other factors include poverty, children going missing from home or care, lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult, homeless, insecure accommodation or living in semi-independent placements.
- **Peers:** Exposed to other young people known to be exploited, exposed to or experienced peer on peer abuse,
- **Schools:** Exclusion from school and not in education/training or employment, experiences of disruption, violence & bullying in school, low aspirations or confidence in their future.
- **Neighbourhoods:** Exposed to violent crime, isolated from community system, urban street gangs and deprivation, gang culture normalised within community.

2.11 These vulnerabilities do not mean that a child will be criminally exploited but are factors that could increase the vulnerability.

2.12 Vulnerable locations that gangs target to groom children for criminal exploitation include pupil referral units, alternative education provisions, special education needs provisions, care homes/placements and homeless hostels. Social media is also used to make initial contact with children.

2.13 It is important to remember that a child might not relate to their experience as being abusive or exploitative. The child may feel a sense of “loyalty” and “brotherhood” to the exploiters, they may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven’t experienced from parents, carers or professionals before. The child may feel they have gained “friends” or “family” and that these people care for him or her. The child may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs. The child may feel a sense of “status” and “power” that they haven’t had before. The child may see themselves as an autonomous drug dealer rather than a victim of exploitation at the bottom of a large, organised crime structure.

- 2.14 Violence is a way for gang members to gain recognition and respect by asserting their power and authority in the street and within neighbourhoods, with a large proportion of street crime perpetrated against members of other gangs or the relatives of gang members.
- 2.15 The specific risks for males and females may be quite different. There is a higher risk of sexual abuse for females. Males are more likely to be criminally exploited to carry out illegal activities and acts of violence. However, sometimes the boys are groomed to rape girls and are then criminalised for this so there is peer exploitation associated with gangs which need to be recognised.
- 2.16 There is evidence of a high incidence of rape of girls who are involved with gangs. Some senior gang members pass their girlfriends around to lower ranking members and sometimes to the whole group at the same time. Very few rapes by gang members are reported.
- 2.17 Gang members often groom girls at school using drugs and alcohol, which act as disinhibitors, create dependency, and encourage/coerce girls to recruit other girls through school and other social networks.

[1] [The Children's Society \(March 2018\) - County Lines Toolkit For Professionals | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)

[2] [Lewing, B., Doubell, L., Beevers, T., and Acquah, D. \(2018\) Building Trusted Relationships for Vulnerable Children and Young People with Public Services, Early Intervention Foundation, p.13](#)

[3] [Lewing, B., Doubell, L., Beevers, T., and Acquah, D. \(2018\) Building Trusted Relationships for Vulnerable Children and Young People with Public Services, Early Intervention Foundation, p.14](#)

□

### **3.0 Warning indicators**

- 3.1 There are a number of indicators that could alert someone that a child is being criminally exploited:
- Frequent missing episodes and being found out of area
  - Not reported missing by parents

- Selling items from the family home
- Found with large quantities of drugs or weapons
- Found with drugs inside their mouth, rectum or vagina
- In custody presenting as extremely agitated or aggressive – can be a sign of concealed drugs inside them
- Unexplained amounts of money, mobiles, credit, clothing, jewellery, new hair cut or other items/gifts
- Presenting with no money following period of having new items
- Leaving house at similar times, usually early
- Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or dishevelled
- Change in behaviour; more secretive / withdrawn/isolated from peers or not mixing with usual friends
- Taxis coming to collect them from the property and being dropped off.
- Unexplained absences from, or not engaged in school/ college/ training/ work
- Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school Including use of sexualised language and language in relation to drug dealing and/or violence
- Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens to them
- Increased interest in making money
- Reports being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults
- Increasing use of drugs or alcohol
- Fear of reprisal from "gang" members or violence from young people or adults
- Having multiple mobile phones, sim cards or use of a phone that causes concern - multiple callers or more texts /pings than usual
- Possession of hotel keys/cards or keys to unknown premises
- Disclosure of sexual/ physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation
- Abduction or forced imprisonment
- Entering or leaving vehicles cars with unknown adults
- Receiving rewards of money or goods for introducing peers

- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- Agencies unable to engage
- New peer groups and/or relationships
- Relationships with controlling /older individuals or groups
- Parental concerns
- Repeated STI's and/or pregnancy/miscarriages/termination of pregnancy
- Increase referrals to agencies for other known peers
- Multiple referrals for incidents in the same location

3.2 An important feature of gang involvement is that the more heavily a child or young person is involved with a gang, the less likely they are to talk about it.

### 3.3 Missing Episodes

3.3.1 There are links between gang involvement and children going missing from home or care. It has been shown by The All Party Parliamentary Group on Missing and Runaway Children and Adults that there are important gender differences in the way a child is treated when they go missing which can increase the vulnerabilities of those affected. Girls are more likely to be reported missing than boys. Girls who go missing from home of care are also more likely to get an appropriate response from police forces. According to The Children's Society, boys aged 14 to 17 are mostly targeted for criminal exploitation, where gangs deliberately groom and traffic a child to carry out particular tasks.

3.3.2 The Children's Society has identified differences in patterns of missing episodes can relate to the different forms of exploitation children may experience. For example, they observed that on average, boys went missing for two weeks, whereas girls went missing for two to three days, perhaps corresponding with boys being trafficked around the UK in their potential involvement in County Lines.

3.3.3 Other considerations that should be taken into account is how boys are viewed within the home and wider society, since boys may be viewed as more capable

of looking after themselves and are less likely to be exploited than girls. This may account for some parents/guardians not reporting their son missing for a number of days or not at all. Equally, threats of violence from gang members, including from their child (who they are protecting), may also account for some parents / guardians not reporting their son missing for fear of violent reprisals against themselves and family members.

### 3.4 Radicalisation

3.4.1 In some cases children can be exploited in the form of radicalisation, which is a process by which individuals come to adopt increasingly extreme political, social or religious ideals and beliefs. Children can be targeted and groomed to develop extreme views which are used to carry out particular tasks as part of the radicalisation process. Where there is concern that a child is at risk of radicalisation, professionals have a duty to protect that child from being drawn into terrorism and given appropriate advice and support. Staff must complete the local PREVENT / Vulnerable Person Referral form and send it to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) along with the MARF referral form. The case will be screened which will then decide the correct, if any, intervention and support to be offered to that child. For more information on MASH please refer to Section 7.

## **4.0 Contextual safeguarding**

4.1 'Contextual safeguarding' is a theory developed by Dr Carlene Firmin of the University of Bedfordshire, which supports an approach to understanding and responding to children's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It is recognised that the different relationships children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers can have little influence over these contexts and young people's

experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships and parent/carer capacity to keep them safe.

- 4.2 When children are exposed to harm within their families such as domestic abuse, physical abuse or neglected this can impact their behaviour outside of their home. Children in these situations may spend more time in street or community settings and may experience criminality, violence and exploitation.
- 4.3 Contextual interventions need to enhance 1:1 work with children and work with families, including relational working for young people and strengthening the capacity to safeguard beyond families. Supporting children to socialise in safe and protective schools and community settings will also help them form safe and protective peer relationships.
- 4.4 Knowsley are working with University of Bedfordshire to develop and embed contextual safeguarding across the borough. “A Contextual Safeguarding system supports the development of approaches which disrupt/change harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move families/children away from them. While parents/carers are not in a position to change the nature of extra-familial contexts those who manage or deliver services in these spaces are; and they therefore become critical partners in the safeguarding agenda. This approach will extend the concept of ‘capacity to safeguard’ beyond families to those individuals and sectors who manage extra-familial settings in which children encounter risk”. [4]

[4] ‘Contextual Safeguarding - An overview of the operational, strategic and conceptual framework’, Carlene Firmin, November 2017)

## **5.0 Building trusted relationships**

- 5.1 A trusted relationship is fundamental to the successful delivery of a service which depends on the effective engagement of a vulnerable child. It has been described as being key to achieving a successful outcome for a child, and to ensuring that children are confident about discussing their concerns and disclosing issues or providing a full and accurate account (in the case of the criminal justice system).

- 5.2 The importance of a trusted relationship depends on the level of need and vulnerability of a child. For this reason, the need to build a trusted relationship with children who have been through the care system and previously been let down by adults has been particularly emphasised. In these circumstances, it was said that a trusted relationship can help to reverse the damaging effects of these experiences and to support the emotional development of a child. Without learning how to form a positive relationship there is a danger that a child may reach adulthood unable to trust anybody, which could have a lasting impact on their lives.
- 5.3 Depending on the context in which a trusted relationship is being built, it has recently been suggested that resilience and outcomes can be improved through:
- Encouraging a child to persevere when they are struggling with something
  - Giving them a safe and non-judgmental space in which to challenge and explore things that they may be concerned about or not agree with
  - Exposing them to alternative possibilities and perspectives, which can help to raise their aspirations and broaden their options
  - Enabling a child to realise that the issue they are dealing with is 'not okay', and to raise their awareness about the risks associated with a particular situation or behaviour
  - Helping children to feel less isolated, as they come to understand that they can share a problem or concern and ask other trusted people to help them overcome it [\[5\]](#).
- 5.4 Children who are resorting to violence have often themselves suffered trauma early in life. Many have been victims themselves or witnessed abuse in the home at an early age. They have grown up without the emotional tools that children should develop, like empathy towards others, resilience and self-esteem to believe they can succeed in mainstream society (education, employment).
- 5.5 Children who are at risk of offending need consistent, emotional and practical support from their parents/carers and other professionals. Children in care and

care leavers are particularly vulnerable due to their low self-esteem, low resilience, attachment issues and the fact that they are often isolated from family and friends.

5.6 Many settings, particularly youth centres, community groups, schools and colleges are recognised as places where early warning signs can be spotted. Such settings are often the first places to identify children may be at risk of exploitation, youth violence or exposure to gangs within their communities. While children generally see educational establishments and youth / community services as safe places, even low levels of youth violence can have a disproportionate impact on any establishment.

5.7 Agencies have a duty and a responsibility to protect and safeguard children. Therefore, it is also important early interventions take place to support children and prevent negative behaviour escalating. Some children will indicate low level risks or concerns and it is important to ensure early help processes and support is delivered at the earliest opportunity. Crucial preventative and early help work can be done at this stage to prevent negative behaviour from escalating and becoming entrenched. Schools, colleges and other universal settings should ensure children have an understanding of being safe from exploitation, substance misuse, knives, gangs and violence. A few useful documents for professionals can be accessed via the following hyperlinks:

[https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20 Toolkit.pdf](https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/418131/Preventing\\_youth\\_violence\\_and\\_gang\\_involvement\\_v3\\_March2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418131/Preventing_youth_violence_and_gang_involvement_v3_March2015.pdf)

[5] Lewing, B., Doubell, L., Beevers, T., and Acquah, D. (2018) Building Trusted Relationships for Vulnerable Children and Young People with Public Services, Early Intervention Foundation, p.16

5.8 For some children who are at risk or experiencing gang violence, intimidation or exploitation, it is difficult to talk to professionals. Often they are reluctant to engage in any conversations and can be very fearful of the repercussions of telling people about the things they are experiencing. Building positive relationships with children can be supported using the following approach:

- Be clear, reliable and consistent
- Be open, honest and up front
- Be non-judgemental
- Be positive and empower young people
- Don't over ask questions
- Use small talk / interests for conversation
- Use language that young people understand
- Be aware of how you present yourself [how you dress / use of notepad or laptop during visit]
- Understand that by the young person talking they may be putting themselves at risk
- Set small goals that they want and work at their pace
- Be interested, friendly and useful
- Respect them and that they can walk away or tell you where to go
- Listen to what they have to say and respect their space
- Take time to build the relationship
- Keep visits and conversations short if you can assess if the child doesn't want to talk and respect this
- Try and do something together so that they can develop the relationship with you
- If motivated to do something then move quickly as professionals to make that happen

5.9 Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership offers an 'Engaging Families Toolkit' which provides guidance to assist effective engagement of families in the offer of support across all levels of intervention from early help and targeted services through to statutory services. The toolkit builds on research and evidence based practice which is known to work in effectively engaging families in offers of support which aims to promote positive and lasting change for all the family. It provides guidance in recognising, understanding and responding to difficult to engage and risky behaviours which may be encountered when working with children and their parents and carers. The toolkit can be found here: <https://www.knowsleyscp.org.uk/themes-and-tools-3/>

## **6.0 Secondary victimisation**

- 6.1 Children are at high risk of undergoing secondary victimisation by being considered perpetrators of crime rather than victims of exploitation. Equally, there is the risk of victims reliving traumatic experiences by being asked to repeat significant events to various professionals.
- 6.2 Practitioners need to be mindful that children who are criminally exploited should be seen as victims and not treated as criminals. They should also be treated through the lens of modern slavery and child safeguarding legislation and practice.
- 6.3 There is evidence that children fear the repercussions of reporting being victims of any criminal activity. Research has found that children identify a range of risks associated with reporting crime including reputational damage, implications for their family and fears of significant physical reprisal.
- 6.4 Children may also blame themselves for victimisation, falsely assuming responsibility for their experiences. Where children feel in any way responsible for their victimisation they are unlikely to report these experiences or seek support [6].
- 6.5 This lack of understanding can have a serious impact on children. Not being equipped with this knowledge means that many have to deal with their experience alone and not seeking necessary support available to them. Not reporting also means that they be unable to make the offending behaviour stop, or to seek justice and redress for their suffering.
- 6.7 To support children to address any issues of self-blame, specific counselling, support and assistance services should be available to provide appropriate support and safeguard those who are most vulnerable.

[6] Victim Support (2018) Children and Young People Affected by Crime, Policy Statement.

□

## **7.0 Protection and Safeguarding**

### **7.1 Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

7.1.1 Any agency or practitioner who has concerns that a child may be at risk of harm as a consequence of gang activity should contact the relevant Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Police Force. Local safeguarding procedures should be followed by professionals during such circumstances. Knowsley MASH provides a 'first point of contact' for Children's Social Care (CSC) (Level 4) and Families First 0 – 18 Service (Level 3) enabling members of the public and professionals to raise concerns about the welfare of children. MASH brings together agencies from services that have contact with children and adults at risk to make the best possible use of their combined knowledge to keep them safe from harm. This may include children identified as potentially being in need of support or at risk of suffering abuse or exploitation.

7.1.3 Agencies requesting a service from the MASH will use the MARF referral form, this can be accessed by using the hyperlink [here](#). The agency requesting the service will clearly show on the form whether or not the issue being raised is in relation to safeguarding (Level 4) or a request for Level 3 service (Multiple and Complex Needs). Any referral highlighting risk of CE (CSE OR CCE) will be screened by MASH and Early Help to address any safeguarding concerns and decide what level of support is required. MASH or Early Help will consult with Shield on whether a Child Exploitation Assessment is required. Refer to Section 7.2 for links to the Knowsley Child Exploitation Policy 2019 and associated referral documentation.

7.1.4 In any referral where there is evidence a child is at significant risk of gang affiliation and / or criminal exploitation it is important to clearly state:

- Child's name
- Date of birth
- Address
- Any known gang associations (name of gang/s)
- Risk factors (refer to the indicators outlined in this document)

MARFs must be sent to the MASH secure email account [knowsley.mash@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:knowsley.mash@knowsley.gov.uk)

7.1.5 The Pan Merseyside Multi-Agency Protocol Safeguarding children & young people from Child Exploitation (CE) details the process of identification, roles of professionals and how through the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings (MACE) we can reduce the harm posed to children from Child Exploitation. The protocol can be accessed via the following hyperlink:

[www.knowsleyscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-Pan-Merseyside-Multi-Agency-Child-Exploitation-Protocol.pdf](http://www.knowsleyscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-Pan-Merseyside-Multi-Agency-Child-Exploitation-Protocol.pdf)

7.1.6 The MASH will manage the initial response to any contact made in respect of CSE and CCE. The MASH and Early Help will consult with the Shield Team when referrals have been received and concerns have been raised in relation to CSE and CCE. MASH and Early Help will process the referral in discussion with the Shield Team & Shield Coordinator. The Shield Team will assist in the collection and analysis of information which leads to the decision making in the MASH.

7.1.7 Subject to the information provided, a Multi-Agency Strategy Discussion / Meeting will take place if there is evidence a child is at significant risk of gang affiliation and / or criminal exploitation. This also applies when a child is at risk of trafficking. The purpose of this multi-agency enquiry is to enable the agencies to decide whether action should be taken to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. Children's Social Care, Police, and Health have statutory roles and responsibilities on what needs to happen in Strategy Discussions/ Meetings and initiating Section 47 Enquiries. This is set out in the government's statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'. It is important that this is reflected in the way Strategy Discussions / Meetings and Section 47 Enquiries are used.

7.1.8 MARF should not be withheld because the current risk seems low or because the child does not yet have a significant offending history. Further information held by other agencies may clarify the need for intervention.

7.1.9 If you suspect or believe that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm or any form of mistreatment or abuse, you should report your concerns immediately. If this happens outside normal office hours then call the Emergency Duty Team.

7.1.10 It is important to note that gaining consent of the data subject is not necessary to facilitate the sharing of information where there is risk or a safeguarding issue as the legal gateways and conditions provide ample legal basis for sharing personal data. Obtaining consent remains a matter of good practice where it is appropriate.

## 7.2 Knowsley Shield Team & Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE)

7.2.1 If a child is presenting with signs of being exploited then a Multi-Agency Referral Form must be completed on line <https://marf.knowsley.gov.uk/Home> to be sent into Knowsley Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which is then screened in MASH who will liaise with the Shield Team.

7.2.2 If there are no immediate safeguarding concerns and a child is already involved with Knowsley Social Care, Early Help Services or the Youth Offending Service then the lead practitioner/social worker completes a Child Exploitation Assessment and sends it directly to the Shield Team. Please refer to the PAN Merseyside CE Policy 2020 above

7.2.5 All children assessed as may be or being exploited will remain on a CE database and will be reviewed on average every three months unless MACE overrides this time period. When the MACE meeting agrees the risk level has reduced to no exploitation and the investigation has ceased then the child is closed at MACE and Shield will remove the CE flags.

## 7.3 Reporting an Incident of Modern Slavery

7.3.1 Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a child to be a victim of Modern Slavery and Trafficking offences there is an additional stage to the CE Pathway. This involves multi-agency information gathering and intelligence to inform the completion of a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) form for

Potential Child Victims of Modern Slavery (England and Wales). This is will be completed by the lead agency but all other relevant agencies will contribute to the information and evidence contained within the referral. Completed NRM forms should be sent to the Home Office via email to: [nationalreferralmechanism@homeoffice.gov.uk.cjism.net](mailto:nationalreferralmechanism@homeoffice.gov.uk.cjism.net)

7.3.2 The Home office will assess the NRM and a decision will be made as to whether there are positive or negative reasonable grounds that the child is a victim of modern slavery. Further information regarding this process can be found in the Pan Merseyside Multi-Agency CE Protocol 2018 accessed via the following hyperlink:

[https://knowsleyscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/pan\\_merseyside\\_cse.pdf](https://knowsleyscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/pan_merseyside_cse.pdf)

7.3.3 However, specified public authorities are required to notify the Home Office about any potential victims of modern slavery they encounter in England and Wales. Completing this NRM form is sufficient to satisfy this duty to notify as long as all of the sections marked with a † are completed and sent to [dutytonotify@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dutytonotify@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

All children are referred via the NRM form, associated guidance is available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/duty-to-notify-the-home-office-of-potentialvictims-of-modern-slavery](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/duty-to-notify-the-home-office-of-potentialvictims-of-modern-slavery).

7.3.4 If you suspect or believe that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm in the form of child criminal exploitation and gang affiliation, you should report your concerns immediately. If this happens outside normal office hours then call the Emergency Duty Team.

7.3.5 Under Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act The Secretary of State must make such arrangements as to enable persons (“independent child trafficking advocates”) to be available to represent and support children who there are reasonable grounds to believe may be victims of human trafficking. The Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) Service offers advice, guidance and support for children (aged under 18) who have been exploited through trafficking and Modern Slavery. The ICTG service work collaboratively

with partner agencies to ensure that young people who are victims of trafficking and Modern Slavery receive support in line with their needs.

The service operates on a 24/7 basis. Further information and referral forms are available at:

[Interim guidance for Independent Child Trafficking Guardians - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-guidance-for-independent-child-trafficking-guardians)  
[ICTG service referral form | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/child-protection/child-trafficking/ictg-service-referral-form)

#### 7.4 Professional disagreement and escalation

7.4.1 Knowsley promotes a culture of partnership working, whereby all agencies working with children and families feel confident, able and supported to address concerns where there are differences in professional judgements. Effective working together depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies, and a belief in a genuine partnership to safeguard children. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional cooperation and joint working but occasionally situations arise where professional disagreements occur.

Disagreements can be healthy and foster creative ways of working with children and their families. However, disagreements can also impact negatively on positive working relationships and consequently on the ability to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

7.4.2 The Escalation Policy developed by Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership aims to ensure that all agencies working within Knowsley (including Health, Education, Housing, Children's Social Care, Adult Services, Probation, Police and third sector organisations), have access to a straightforward multiagency policy to quickly resolve and where necessary escalate professional differences where there are concerns that the welfare and safety of children and young people are at risk of being compromised. The Escalation Policy can be accessed via the Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership website.

## **8.0 Threat to Life Notice**

- 8.1 Sometimes, if there is a possible 'threat to life', it may result in the Police issuing a Threat to Life Notice (previously known as an Osman Warning) to a person whose life is identified as being threatened. The notice is issued when there is a real and immediate threat to someone's life.
- 8.2 If there is an immediate threat to life of a child, young person or their family members with whom they live or spend time, an automatic referral by the Police to MASH should take place. This should initiate a Strategy Discussion/ Meeting and consideration of the need for immediate safeguarding action, unless to do so would place the child and family members living with the child at greater risk.

## **9.0 Cross-border issues**

- 9.1 The threat of organised criminality is not confined to geographical boundaries. Pathways into criminality are diverse and differ between crime types. Individuals can be coerced, corrupted, debt-bound, groomed and exploited, or even offend unwittingly. Forged identity documents (particularly European Economic Area (EEA) identity documents) and fraudulently obtained genuine documents remain a key enabler of criminal activities. Many OCGs are highly flexible and display great adaptability in the speed with which they adjust their '*modus operandi*' or whole business models to changes in the environment.
- 9.2 People involved in gangs and OCGs exploit organisational and geographical vulnerabilities since they know there are weaknesses in the way different organisations operate both internally and externally.
- 9.3 The National Crime Agency [7] highlights there are a number of factors that help determine why groups might embark on county lines activity. These include the perception of 'space' in drug markets outside of urban areas and the anticipation of increased profits because of less capable competition. Operating outside of their own areas, where they are 'known' and subject to law enforcement targeting, often gives groups the perception of increased anonymity. It is important these risks and associated threats are reduced by working effectively to share intelligence in a timely manner.

- 9.4 The National Crime Agency [8] highlights that child exploitation is a key element of the county lines offending model. It's believed that NRM data underestimates the number of victims of exploitation in county lines cases. It is important that local professionals are aware of the key indicators and risk to identify risks of exploitation at the earliest opportunity.
- 9.5 There may be occasions where a child may want to live with each parent/carer (if they are not living together) during the week, especially if the child feels threatened or intimidated by others where they normally reside. This may increase the child's vulnerabilities since relevant safeguarding parties may not be aware of the family circumstances if child is living in different parts of Merseyside or in other parts of the UK. Similarly, there may be occasions where a child is educated outside their Local Authority area. This may also increase the child's vulnerabilities since relevant safeguarding parties may not be aware of all of the family circumstances to take appropriate safeguarding actions to reduce the risks associated to gang affiliation or criminal exploitation.
- 9.6 It is vital that information is shared to address any cross border concerns. Relevant front line and back office staff need to keep abreast of any changes in family circumstances and emerging threats to support any intervention, prevention and enforcement work.

[7] National Crime Agency (2015) Intelligence Assessment – County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding, p.2

[8] National crime Agency (2018) Intelligence Assessment 0 county Lines drug Supply, vulnerability and Harm/

## 10.0 Key legislation

- **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** - listed Responsible and Co-operating Authorities have a statutory responsibility to do all that they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in their area and share information to protect communities from serious and organised crime. Publicly commissioned private and voluntary sector providers must also contribute to prevention efforts

through due diligence and information sharing to protect communities from serious and organised crime.

- **Children Act (1989 & 2004)** - outlined the statutory requirements each agency working with Children and Families must adhere to, to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to safeguarding.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014** – outlines new to respond to instances of anti-social behaviour, giving Police, Local Authorities, and social landlords ability to respond to behaviours that cause harm with a greater the impact on victims.
- **Modern Slavery Act 2015** - provides the legislative framework to equip law enforcement agencies and local partners to effectively prosecute and convict the perpetrators of modern slavery. The Act consolidated and simplified previous slavery and human trafficking legislation in England and Wales into a single statute and introduced provisions to strengthen law enforcement and afford better protection to victims.
- **Serious Crime Act 2015** - improved the legislative powers available to local partners to tackle serious and organised crime. This Act gave effect to a number of proposals and commitments made in the Government's Serious and Organised Crime Strategy (2013) and updated existing law dealing with the cyber-crime, serious crime prevention orders, gang injunctions, child cruelty, female genital mutilation (FGM) and the commission of certain terrorism offences abroad. When this Act was introduced it included a new offence of participating in the activities of an organised crime group and a strengthened preventative capability through Serious Crime Protection Orders. Councils should work alongside law enforcement agencies, sharing relevant intelligence, to make the best use of these new powers to disrupt and halt such crime.

- **Criminal Finances Act 2017** - introduced new powers to help law enforcement agencies tackle money laundering, corruption, terrorist finance and recover the proceeds of crime.
- **Children and Social Work Act 2017** – identified safeguarding partners are required to make arrangements to work together and with relevant agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the area.
- **Offensive Weapons Act 2019** and **Governments Serious Violence Strategy**, bring new measures to strengthen law enforcement responses to violent crime, including knife crime prevention orders to introduce Knife Crime Prevention Orders

#### □ 11.0 Useful tools and powers

There are a range of disruption tools available, in addition to the Modern Day Slavery National Referral Mechanism (NRM), including:

- **Criminal Behaviour Orders:** A Criminal Behavioural Order (CBO) can prohibit an individual from doing anything described in the order, such as travelling to certain places. The Metropolitan Police have used these to stop young people leaving the M25, making them less 'attractive' to potential exploiters.
- **Civil Injunctions:** A court may grant the injunction against anyone who is 10 years of age or over. Applications against individuals who are 18 years of age or over must be made in the county court or High Court, and applications against individuals who are under 18 must be made in the youth court. The Civil Injunction can also be used to tackle gang related activity, either directly on gang members or on those being exploited by gangs in order to disrupt their operations. This can be particularly useful in cases of 'county lines' where urban gangs exploit children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money to suburban areas and market and coastal towns. In such cases, the conditions of the injunction can include prohibitions on

entering certain areas or affiliating with certain individuals. They could also include positive requirements such as engaging in drug treatment if the reason they became involved with, and remain indebted to, the gang is because of a drug dependency.

- **Child Criminal Exploitation Warning Notices** can be issued when an adult is arrested in company with child. A DCI will need to authorise, and this will remain in force for six months. The purpose of it is to formally advise the adult that Merseyside Police have identified them as involved in the exploitation of children. It will notify the adult that they will be subject to additional police attention, and this will be used in evidence in any future investigations.
- **Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNS):** can be issued against individuals who are suspected of grooming children and young people and should be viewed as a safeguarding measure for the child – they state that they have no permission to associate with the named child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if in the care of the local authority under S. 31 Children Act) and that if issued properly, these Notices can provide evidence to support the prosecution of other criminal offences and/or to support civil proceedings such as ASBOs, evictions or injunctions. They have largely been used when CSE is suspected, however, their use is not limited to CSE cases and they can be used to disrupt grooming for criminality as well as supporting missing persons enquiries. CAWNS can only be applied to 16 & 17 year olds when in the full care of the local authority, meaning that many vulnerable older teenagers remain exposed to harm from adults in their lives. Further advice can be sought from MASH teams.
- **Drug Dealing Telecommunications Restrictions Orders:** The Digital Economy Act 2017 enabled the Home Secretary to make regulations which will allow the police to disable telephones or telephone lines they suspect are being used in relation to drug dealing.

- **Gang Injunctions:** This is a Civil Order introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and Serious Crime Act 2015, aimed at preventing gang-related violence and criminal activity. Terms imposed can (for example) prevent or restrict association with other gang members, prohibit travel to certain areas, prevent the congregation of people in groups of three or more restrict individuals from possessing more than one mobile telephone. It can also prevent the promotion of gang related activity on social networking sites. This can be considered at any time during an investigation. In order to make a gang injunction the court must be satisfied that the respondent has engaged in, encouraged or assisted gang-related violence or drug-dealing activity. In addition, the court must then be satisfied that:
  - the gang injunction is necessary to prevent the respondent from engaging in, encouraging or assisting gang-related violence or drug dealing activity, and/or
  - the gang injunction is necessary to protect the respondent from gang related violence or drug taking activity.
  - Gang injunctions offer a way to intervene and engage a young person aged 14-17 with positive activities, with the aim of preventing further involvement in gangs, violence and/or gang-related drug dealing activity.
  
- Further information about other disruption tools and powers can be found in the '[Disrupting Serious and Organised Criminals - Menu of Tactics](#)' which has been produced by The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction, which is part of the College of Policing. The document is a tool designed to assist anyone involved in tackling organised crime by identifying a range of tactical options to disrupt those criminals. The Menu is a collation of a range of existing tactics and powers which are available to law enforcement and partner agencies. It is aimed at prompting a creative, problem-solving approach to disrupting criminal activity.

## 12.0 Further information

- Home Office (April 2018) Serious Violence Strategy, which is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>
- Youth Justice Legal Centre (2018) Child criminal exploitation and gang affiliation: County Lines Gangs, Child Trafficking & Modern Slavery Defences for Children
- The Children's Society (December 2017) Toolkit for Working with Children and Young People Trafficked for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation in Relation to 'County Lines'
- All Party Parliamentary Group (March 2017) APPG on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults: Briefing report on the roundtable on children who go missing and are criminally exploited by gangs
- Home Office (2017) Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines
- National Crime Agency (2017) Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply, National Briefing Report
- National Crime Agency (2017) National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime
- Home Office (2016) Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation
- Home Office (2016) Lessons Learned: Troubled Families at Risk of Involvement in Serious and Organised Crime
- National Crime Agency (2016) County Lines Gang Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply, National Briefing Report
- Disley, E. and Liddle, M. (2016) Local Perspectives in Ending Gang and Youth Violence, Home Office
- National Crime Agency (2016) National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime
- Home Office (2015) Individuals at Risk of Being Drawn into Serious and Organised Crime – A Prevent Guide

- Early Intervention Foundation (2015) What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime: A Rapid Review of Interventions delivered in the UK and Aboard
- Appropriate Language – Child Sexual &/or Criminal Exploitation - Guidance for Professionals (The Children’s Society, Victim Support and NPCC)
- Preventing Youth Violence and Gang Involvement - Practical advice for schools and colleges (March 2015)
- Early Intervention Foundation (2015) Preventing Gang and Youth Violence: A Review of Risk and Protective Factors
- National Crime Agency (2015) NCA National Intelligence Assessment, County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding
- EUROPOL (2014) Child Trafficking for Exploitation in Forced Criminal Activities
- Home Office (2013) Serious and Organised Crime Strategy

This guide was produced through a partnership review task and finish group with support from Knowsley Youth Offending Service, MASH, Shield, Education, Crime & Communities Team, Children’s Social Care and Targeted Services and Merseyside Police, before it was approved and ratified by the KSCP Policy & Performance Group in January 2022.

Original Version	September 2019
V2 Review	December 2021
Review Approval	January 2022
Next Review date	December 2023