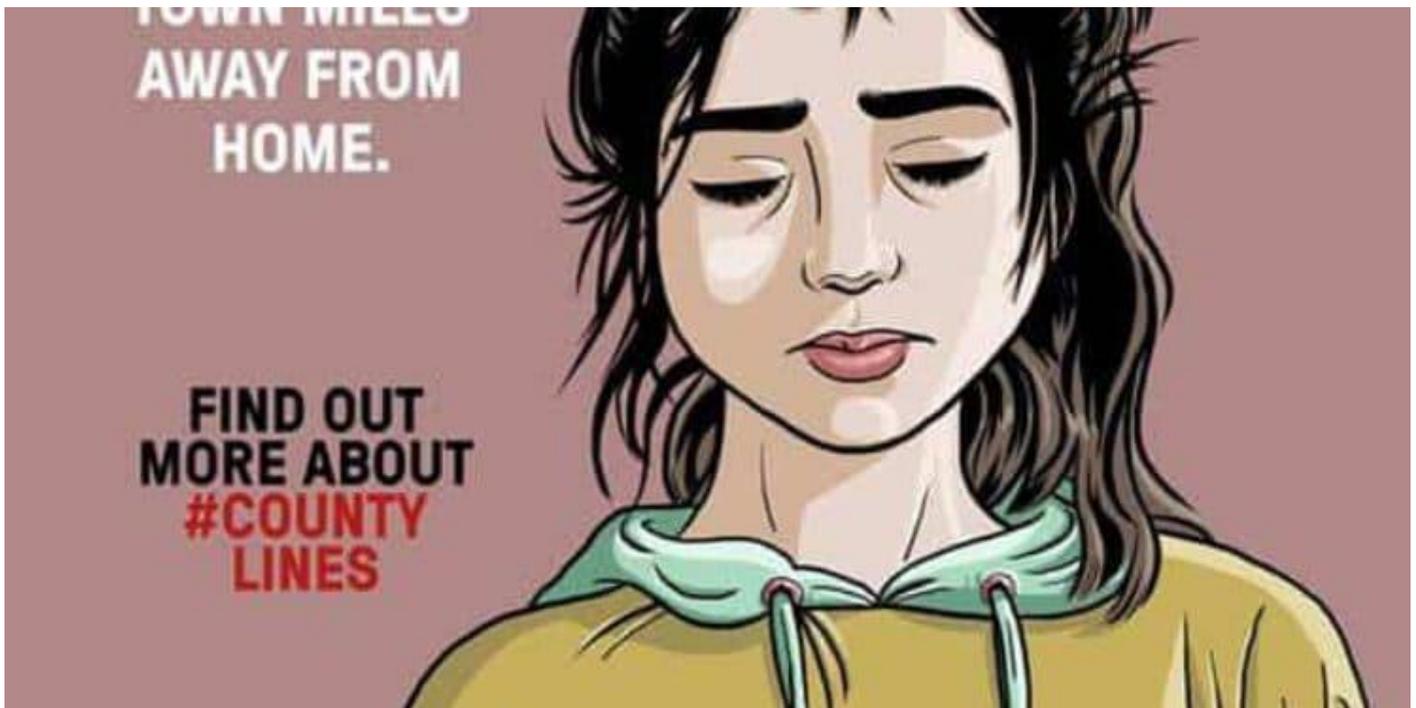


County Lines week of action leads to 16 arrests in Avon and Somerset



We took part in a national, co-ordinated week of action last week to tackle County Lines drug dealing and the associated exploitation of vulnerable people. Led by the National County Line Co-Ordination Centre (NCLCC), we partnered with local authorities, key service providers and other police forces to ensure a joined up approach to sharing information and resources to dismantle county lines networks which cross police force borders.

Last week's operation saw 16 people arrested for a range of offences including drugs supply, possession of weapons and theft. Officers seized weapons including knives, a machete, a hammer and an axe, a large amount of suspected class A drugs, and approximately £10,000 in cash, as well as 14 mobile phones, and a vehicle.

Officers visited over 100 hotels and B&Bs, to offer information and support to local businesses while gathering intelligence about County Lines activity. A hotel check in Weston-Super-Mare resulted in the disruption of a new line in the area, and the arrest of two individuals in connection with county lines activity. Those arrested have both been charged and remanded in custody.

In partnership with housing providers and support workers, officers visited over 70 addresses thought to have been previously been cuckooed or at risk of being cuckooed in the future. Officers spoke to more than 40 adults considered at risk of being exploited by dealers to offer support and signpost them to relevant support services.

Officers also used the week as an opportunity to engage with communities and young people about the issue, visiting more than 20 schools to provide help, information and guidance about gangs, grooming and exploitation. An initiative also saw officers deliver educational sessions to parents and youths in East Bristol, to educate about the signs and symptoms of county lines activity.

Avon and Somerset Police's TOPAZ Child Exploitation team engaged with over 150 people in Yeovil, including community members and businesses such as pharmacies, pubs and shops. During the week TOPAZ also delivered online training sessions to schools, professionals working in education, social care, charities and foster carers in BANES and Somerset.

Other activity also included the creation of a forcewide ANPR hotlist, which was monitored by intelligence teams and provided opportunities for Roads Policing to tackle vehicles involved in county lines criminality on key routes into the South West such as the M5/M4.

Detective Chief Inspector Kerry Paterson comments: "County Lines knows no borders and taking a joint-up approach with other police forces to tackle the issue is essential. The results achieved from this week of action shows how much can be achieved by taking a partnership approach not just with other police forces, but also with local authorities, schools, communities, and industries and professions who have interest in keeping vulnerable people safe.

"These drug dealers are ruthless individuals who are causing harm to our communities. They will target young vulnerable children and adults and make them false promises of wealth and safety in exchange for dealing illegal substances. These victims are often made to live in fear; constantly subjected to exploitation, threats, violence, and will be made to live in filthy conditions. Children are forced to travel thousands of miles away from their homes to transport and sell Class A substances. Our intelligence gathering and operational tactics are getting better every day and the national co-ordination helps us to focus resources where they are most needed."

Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mountstevens added: "Country Lines exploits some of the most vulnerable in our communities. As demonstrated by the week of enforcement, we need a multi-force and multi-agency approach to disrupt this horrendous crime and keep vulnerable people safe. We need to continue to ensure that everyone in our communities recognises the signs of drug activity and the exploitation of vulnerable people to help stop this crime destroying more people's lives."

'County Lines' is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs out of bigger cities into one or more smaller towns in 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 and weapons. Dealers will often use intimidation, exploitation and violence to take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use it as a base for drug dealing. This is something referred to as 'cuckooing'.

A round-up of the national results of the week of action is available [HERE](#).