

LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE - 28 NOVEMBER 2018

PART I – NOT DELEGATED

8 CUCKOOING AND COUNTY LINES

(CED)

1 Summary

- 1.1 To brief Members on the extent of cuckooing and county lines within the District.
- 1.2 To advise Members on the development of County-wide and Three Rivers Community Safety Partnership Strategies in relation to cuckooing and county lines.
- 1.3 To brief Members on the impact of cuckooing and county lines on Council resources and to seek support for the growth bids submitted as part of the Strategic and Financial Service Planning Process for 2019/20.
- 1.4 To affirm the priorities of the Community Safety Team to respond to complaints of cuckooing and county lines.

2 Details

- 2.1 The Home Office “Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance” (July 2017) describes ‘County Lines’ and ‘Cuckooing’ as follows:

2.1.1 *County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”. It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base 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’.*

- 2.2 The guidance further states:

2.2.1 *County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations.*

2.2.2 *County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.*

2.3 How does it affect young people and vulnerable adults?

- 2.3.1 Like other forms of abuse and exploitation, county lines exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years;
- can affect any vulnerable adult over the age of 18 years;
- can still be exploitation even if the activity appears consensual;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence;

- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults; and
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

2.3.2 Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

2.3.3 One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something). Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection). It is important to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a young person or vulnerable adult does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a young person who engages in county lines activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

2.4 Who is vulnerable to county lines exploitation?

2.4.1 The national picture on county lines continues to develop but there are recorded cases of:

2.4.1.1 Children as young as 12 years old being exploited by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area; 15-16 years is the most common age range.

2.4.1.2 Both males and females being exploited.

2.4.1.3 White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection.

2.4.1.4 The use of social media to make initial contact with children and young people.

2.4.1.5 Class A drug users being identified and targeted so that gangs can take over their homes (known as 'cuckooing').

2.4.2 County lines exploitation is widespread, with gangs from big cities including London, Manchester and Liverpool operating throughout England, Wales and Scotland. Gangs are known to target vulnerable children and adults; some of the factors that heighten a person's vulnerability include:

2.4.2.1 Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse;

2.4.2.2 Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example);

2.4.2.3 Social isolation or social difficulties;

2.4.2.4 Economic vulnerability;

2.4.2.5 Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;

- 2.4.2.6 Connections with other people involved in gangs;
- 2.4.2.7 Having a physical or learning disability;
- 2.4.2.8 Having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- 2.4.2.9 Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories).

2.5 **The Local Picture**

- 2.5.1 Within Three Rivers cuckooing and county lines have been visible in the work of the Community Safety Partnership for some time. Cases are discussed at the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group where joint action plans are agreed, involving the Police, Housing Providers, Health and Social Care services and Three Rivers District Council.
- 2.5.2 Under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 both the Council and the Police are able to make use of Closure Notices and Closure Orders. A Closure Notice can close premises for up to 48 hours out of court but cannot stop the owner/housing provider/tenant/s or those who habitually live there accessing the premises. A Closure Order can close premises for up to six months and can restrict all access. Both the Notice and the Order can cover any land or any other place, whether enclosed or not and any outbuildings that are used as part of the premises and can include residential, business, non-business and licensed premises.
- 2.5.3 The test for a Closure Order is that the following has occurred or will occur if the closure power is not used:
 - 2.5.3.1 Disorderly, offensive or criminal behaviour;
 - 2.5.3.2 Serious nuisance to the public; or
 - 2.5.3.3 Disorder near the premises.
- 2.5.4 The Community Safety Partnership has experienced a significant increase in the work associated with Closure Orders over the last 12 months. At the point of writing a total of nine closure orders have been requested in 2018 between the Police and Three Rivers District Council. This compares to a maximum of two per year in previous years. Further closure order applications are currently being considered at the time of writing.
- 2.5.5 Only the Police or the Council can apply for Closure Orders. Locally the Council has focussed on Closure Order applications, with the Police focussing on gathering evidence by collating logs and reports concerning individuals or addresses and executing drug warrants. The police are also involved in enforcement of the Notice and the Closure Order.
- 2.5.6 The Community Safety Intervention Officer has had a role in gathering evidence to support these applications to court. In most cases witnesses are reluctant to give evidence due to fear of repercussions based on intimidation experienced in the local area. The role of the Community Safety Intervention Officer is to seek evidence to support the closure order applications, to act as a professional witness, protecting residents from disclosing their identity through the court process, and provide that evidence to the court both through written statements and testimony to the court.

- 2.5.7 Recent experience has demonstrated an increase in County lines by which drug dealers from London and other areas such as Luton are ‘cuckooing’ local properties, in order to provide a base for the local dealing of drugs. Perpetrators identified by the Police have been associated with an increased risk of firearms incidents and knife crime. Whilst closure orders have been secured, drug dealers have not always been charged or convicted, leaving them in the local area to target other properties. In addition in some cases of cuckooing in Three Rivers it is local people who are cuckooing other local vulnerable people – identifying them through drug and alcohol services, mental health services or through off-licences.
- 2.5.8 These closure order cases represent a significant risk of harm to residents in surrounding properties, many of whom are children or adults at risk (due to age, disability or other health or social care needs). Partnership working is required with the Police and housing providers in order to identify suitable accommodation for those seeking support from the Council’s Housing Services, whether that is for temporary accommodation or for permanent accommodation. There is also a risk of actual harm to residents surrounding these cases, with increased evidence of physical violence, and weapons being used.
- 2.5.9 The Community Partnership Unit has therefore afforded these cases priority resulting in less capacity to respond to other anti-social behaviour complaints. The service has introduced a triage system to risk assess and prioritise cases in order to manage team resources and customer expectations. However the workload from low-medium risk cases continues to come in.
- 2.5.10 In order to address this workload a temporary Anti-Social Behaviour Officer (part-time) has been recruited to increase the resources of the team and to prioritise the time of the Community Safety Intervention Officer to high risk cases. A growth bid has also been submitted to make this resource permanent from April 2019 onwards.

2.6 County-wide and Three Rivers Community Safety Partnership Strategy Development

- 2.6.1 At a county level a Violent Crime Strategy has been developed, following a strategic needs assessment. This has encompassed work in relation to County Lines and Cuckooing. The strategy has been developed under the joint leadership of six County-wide Strategic Boards:
- 2.6.1.1 Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board
 - 2.6.1.2 Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board
 - 2.6.1.3 Police and Crime Commissioner’s Community Safety Board
 - 2.6.1.4 Hertfordshire Domestic Violence Strategic Board
 - 2.6.1.5 Hertfordshire Drug and Alcohol Strategic Board
 - 2.6.1.6 Hertfordshire Integrated Offender Management Board
- 2.6.2 The Strategy has identified actions under four key areas:
- 2.6.2.1 Prevention
 - 2.6.2.2 Early Intervention

2.6.2.3 Reactive Intervention

2.6.2.4 Enforcement

2.6.3 At a local level the Three Rivers Community Safety Partnership has recognised that most of its work has been in relation to 'Reactive Intervention' and 'Enforcement'. As the workload increases the Community Safety Board has agreed to develop a 'Cuckooing and County Lines Strategy' so that local partners can identify their commitments to tackling this threat to the local community. It is also an opportunity to reflect on our reactive work and identify more pro-active actions to prevent and engage people in early intervention. The strategy will be developed by the Community Safety Partnership and then brought back to Committee for approval of the Council's commitments.

2.6.4 The Community Safety Partnership is also collaborating with Watford Community Safety Partnership and Hertsmere Community Safety Partnership to develop a tri-CSP project for youth violent crime. This recognises the movement of pupils across the three areas and the cross boundary structures of many support services. As part of this the Community Safety Co-ordinator has developed funding bids to access additional resources to support the project.

2.6.5 An additional growth bid has been written to increase the resources of the Community Safety Co-ordinator to recognise the increased workload from bid-writing and project performance management, and to provide additional capacity for campaign development work. It is envisaged that this will support work in relation to Cuckooing and County lines by developing a Communications Strategy to increase public and professionals awareness of the indicators of cuckooing, county lines, and child criminal exploitation.

2.6.6 Over the last two years the part-time Community Safety Co-ordinator has secured £184,978 of Police and Crime Commissioner's and other Community Safety Partnership organisations' funding for local projects. This is significantly higher than the £21,554 that was previously received by the Community Safety Partnership each year. It is expected that the additional resource will maintain income for projects where relevant and generate a further £165,000 income over the next two year.

2.7 **Safeguarding**

2.7.1 Local cases of cuckooing have involved both children and vulnerable adults being exploited. This has increased the workload of the Council's Designated Safeguarding Leads, and further training is being planned alongside specific protocols for cases in relation to criminal exploitation.

2.8 **Housing and Homelessness**

2.8.1 Closure Orders provide landlords with mandatory grounds for possession. This process can take some time as housing providers have to wait for County Court time for cases to be heard. In addition further court time is required to obtain an eviction order. In one case alone Thrive Homes has incurred costs of £24,000 to evict one tenant.

2.8.2 Where full Closure Orders are obtained and the resident is not allowed into the property, the Council's Housing team has a duty to provide Housing Advice. If the resident makes a homeless application there is a duty on the Council to assess

them against the relevant legislation. If the resident is eligible for assistance, homeless and has a priority need then they must be offered suitable temporary accommodation whilst further investigations are conducted and assistance is provided to relieve their homelessness. This provides a number of challenges in where to place the adult on a temporary basis, and in trying to find a permanent housing solution to try to relieve homelessness. Further investigations will look into the possibility of the resident being intentionally homeless or if there is a longer-term duty on the Council to house the resident but this would prove particularly challenging as it is unlikely to secure a further tenancy with a social landlord or private landlord. Work is being undertaken at a County level to review the supported accommodation needs of these adults with complex needs.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 For members to recognise the current workload of the Community Safety Partnership and Community Safety Team in relation to cuckooing and county lines.
- 3.2 For members to endorse the prioritisation of high risk ASB casework.
- 3.3 For members to recommend the support of the growth bids in relation to ASB Casework and the Community Safety Partnership.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy. The relevant policy is entitled Three Rivers Community Strategy and the Strategic Plan.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators.

2.3 We want to support the most vulnerable in our District

2.3.1 Reduce anti-social behaviour and crime

2.3.2 Support vulnerable people

2.4 We will provide a safe and healthy environment

2.4.1 Ensure the safety of people in the district

2.5 We will reduce health inequalities, promote healthy lifestyles, support learning and community organisations.

2.5.2 Contribute to partnership working to reduce health inequalities.

- 4.3 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is to support their achievement.
- 4.4 The recommendations in this report are not within the Council's agreed budgets. The growth bids are part of the Strategic and Financial Planning process.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 Two growth bids have been submitted for consideration under the draft service plans section of the agenda.

6 Legal Implications

6.1 Closure Orders require applications to the Magistrates Court. The increase in workload may de-prioritise other casework due to the risk associated with cuckooing.

7 Equal Opportunities Implications

7.1 Relevance Test

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact?	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required?	No

7.2 Impact Assessment

Cuckooing has an adverse impact on children and adults at risk, including those with mental health or learning disabilities, and drug and alcohol dependencies. It also impacts on the vulnerable elderly. The recommendations will seek to address this adverse impact.

8 Staffing Implications

8.1 The workload of the Community Safety Team has increased due to the increase in cuckooing in the District. Temporary staffing has been brought in to manage the increase in ASB casework demand and a growth bid submitted to make this permanent from April 2019.

8.2 The workload of the Community Safety Partnership has increased and a growth bid has been submitted to increase the hours of the Community Safety Co-ordinator to help secure additional funding for the Community Safety Partnership to respond to the threat of cuckooing and other community safety priorities.

9 Environmental Implications

9.1 Cuckooing has a significant impact on the community surrounding areas being used for drug dealing in terms of noise nuisance, detritus, vandalism and vehicle movements.

10 Community Safety Implications

10.1 Addressing cuckooing and county lines is a key priority of the Community Safety Partnership. Protecting children and adults at risk is a statutory safeguarding duty of the Council.

11 Public Health implications

11.1 Drug and alcohol misuse and mental health are key priorities for the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Without further action to improve the local response to the issue of cuckooing the level of need in relation to drugs, alcohol and mental ill-health will get worse. There are long-term adverse implications of the exploitation of children through criminal exploitation.

12 Customer Services Centre Implications

12.1 The CSC continues to be the first point of call for reports of ASB to the Council both through the call centre and Firmstep.

13 Communications and Website Implications

13.1 The Community Safety Team is developing a new webpage on cuckooing and county lines which can then be used to promote access to support through social media campaigns and publicity.

14 Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

14.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

14.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Community Partnerships service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

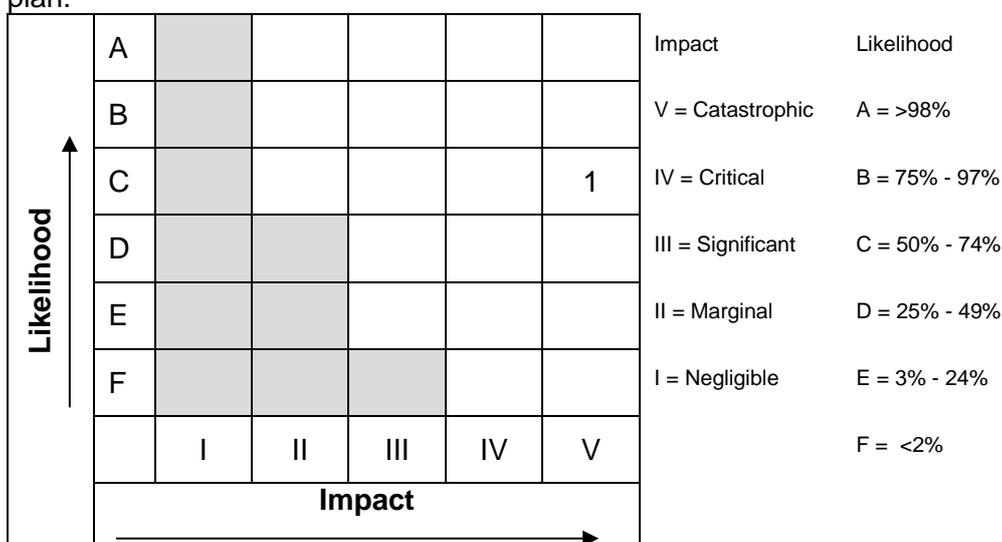
14.3 There are no risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation.

14.4 The following table gives the risks that would exist if the recommendation is rejected, together with a scored assessment of their impact and likelihood:

Description of Risk		Impact	Likelihood
1	There is a fatality as a result of cuckooing/criminal exploitation in the District	V	C

14.5 Of the risks detailed above none is already managed within a service plan.

14.6 The above risks are plotted on the matrix below depending on the scored assessments of impact and likelihood, detailed definitions of which are included in the risk management strategy. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood are plotted in the shaded area of the matrix. The remaining risks require a treatment plan.



- 14.7 In the officers' opinion, the new risk above, were it to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and is therefore a strategic risk. Progress against the treatment plans for strategic risks is reported to the Policy and Resources Committee quarterly. The effectiveness of all treatment plans are reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

Description of Risk		Service Plan
1	There is a fatality in the District due to cuckooing/criminal exploitation	Community Partnerships

15 Recommendation

- 15.1 That Members affirm the Commitment to working through the Community Safety Partnership to develop an improved response to cuckooing and county lines and the development of a Three Rivers Community Safety Partnership Cuckooing Strategy.
- 15.2 That Members recommend the support of the growth bids for ASB and the Community Safety Partnership to Policy and Resources Committee.
- 15.3 That Members endorse the triage process used by the Community Safety Team to prioritise response to high risk ASB and crime issues.
- 15.4 That officers bring back the Community Safety Partnership Cuckooing Strategy for Three Rivers District Council's approval and support.

Report prepared by: Andy Stovold, Head of Community Partnerships

Data Quality

Data sources:

Home Office

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Data checked by:

Shivani Davé, Community Safety Co-ordinator

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	
3	High	X

Background Papers

[Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance. Home Office July 2017](#)

[Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014: Anti-social behaviour powers - Statutory guidance for frontline professionals. Home Office December 2017.](#)