

# Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation

**Our aim:** To reduce the harm caused by organised crime activity in the city in relation to drug dealing, drug use and exploitation

## What we want to achieve

- Preventing vulnerable people from becoming involved with organised crime networks
- Safeguard vulnerable people who are being exploited
- Provide a safe, supportive pathway to enable vulnerable people to exit involvement with organised crime networks
- A decrease in drug gang related activity in the city

### Why this is a priority

Increasingly crime is being committed in private spaces rather than the public domain and this type of crime often involves the criminal exploitation of children and adults on a physical, sexual or financial basis. In Brighton and Hove and many other parts of the country this is becoming a major concern as gang activity based around county lines (where drug dealers from London and elsewhere set up in areas like Brighton and Hove) is leading to anti-social behaviour, violence and safeguarding concerns.

### Key facts

Although there are established local drug dealing networks in the city dealing cannabis and class A drugs there is increasing evidence of County lines activity, primarily focussed around dealing class A drugs but also dealing cannabis to draw young people in. County lines is the police term used to describe urban gangs supplying drugs to market and coastal towns across the country using dedicated mobile phone lines. County lines is a major cross cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal child exploitation, modern slavery and missing persons.

County lines gangs have a proven ability to adapt their operations quickly to evade detection and enforcement. High levels of violence are reported, including the prevalent use of weapons to intimidate and control members and associated victims.

Locally we have seen an increasing number of properties that have been cuckooed (this is where the property of a vulnerable person is taken over by drug dealers). In the majority of these cases there was evidence of cuckooing. In several cases offenders and victims were traced to another address nearby or elsewhere in the city.

### Who's affected

Gangs often use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money between metropolitan areas and towns and rural areas. Gangs establish a base, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults (who are often drugs users) by force or coercion in a practice referred to as cuckooing. We have seen evidence of this in Brighton and Hove. They then use the premises to deal drugs from and recruit local vulnerable (mainly young) people as drugs runners.

### Our plans

Working together as a community safety partnership we will develop and refine a strategy that will have the ability to flex to address what are often rapidly changing circumstances in relation to tackling organised crime groups sometimes operating along county lines and often centred around the exploitation of vulnerable people, principally children and young people but vulnerable adults as well.

## **Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation**

Our strategy will have a number of strands capturing existing work, identifying gaps in our existing provision and taking new initiatives as necessary to address violence, vulnerability and exploitation.

We will seek to prevent vulnerable people being drawn in to drugs misuse and dealing, child criminal exploitation and county lines.

Working with local community service providers and youth service providers we will take steps to intervene and provide safe exit strategies and pathways for vulnerable people who are being exploited.

With the police we will take enforcement action to disrupt county lines, drug dealing and child criminal exploitation bringing offenders to justice where possible.

Our strategy will be underpinned by a communications plan that will ensure victims, potential victims, communities, statutory and third sector agencies all understand risks posed and can recognise signs of exploitation.

The work will be informed by data analysis and a locality review facilitated by the Home Office which will enable evidence to be gathered from front line professionals on the extent of violence, vulnerability and exploitation in the city.

