



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2018/0194, 30 August 2018

Government response to organised crime and young people's safety

By Jennifer Brown and
Alison Pratt

Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the Government response to organised crime and young people's safety is to take place on Wednesday 5 September at 2.30pm. The Member leading the debate is Lyn Brown MP.

Contents

1.	Background	2
1.1	County lines	2
1.2	Human trafficking and modern slavery	3
1.3	Child exploitation	3
2.	Government response	4
2.1	Policies	4
	Overall approach to serious and organised crime	4
	County Lines	4
	Modern slavery	6
	Child sexual exploitation	6
2.2	Reaction	7
3.	News and blogs	8
3.1	Press articles	8
4.	Parliamentary material	10
4.1	Debates	10
4.2	Parliamentary Questions	10
5.	Further reading	17

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

This debate pack deals with the Government's response to organised crime where this impacts on young people and children.

The National Crime Agency defines organised crime as:

serious crime planned, coordinated and conducted by people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is often, but not always, financial gain.¹

Youth gangs and serious violence involving young people will therefore not be the focus of this paper.² The Home Office has collated policy information relating to [knife, gun and gang crime](#) on the GOV.UK website.

Organised crime groups are involved in many types of crime including drugs, human trafficking and modern slavery as well as fraud and cybercrime. Organised crime can involve criminals working across national borders in different countries.

The National Crime Agency have said that the threat from serious and organised crime is "increasing in both volume and complexity and will continue to do so in the short to medium term."³

Young people and children are victims of organised crime and (often through exploitation) can take part in organised criminal activity.

1.1 County lines

"County lines" is the term used to describe the situation where a group supplies drugs from an urban hub to a county location (typically a market or coastal town) within a different police force boundary. Young and vulnerable people are often exploited by the group to carry and sell the drugs, or for their homes to be used as a base for drug dealing activity.

In their report [County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply 2017](#) the National Crime Agency noted that there is an evidence gap in understanding the scales of child exploitation by "county lines" groups:

Although the exploitation of children continues to be reported, the true scale of abuse remains an intelligence gap in many parts of the country. It is often difficult to assess accurately, requiring focused and systematic data capture, as well as multi-sector collaboration to develop and maintain reliable data. A clear national picture cannot be determined currently.

However, they did note that most children being recruited by 'county line' groups are between the age of 15-17 and are male. They state that many of the children:()have also been identified as having broader mental health issues, coming from broken homes,

¹ National Crime Agency, [Crime threats: organised crime groups](#)

² There is some background on youth violence in Commons Library Debate Pack 2018/0124 [Serious Violence Strategy](#), 22 May 2018

³ National Crime Agency, [National Strategic Assessment of serious and organised crime 2018](#), p8

experienced chaotic/traumatic lives, or have been reported as missing. They may also be drug users.⁴

1.2 Human trafficking and modern slavery

The Government has described modern slavery as:

...a serious crime. It encompasses slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking. Modern slavery victims can often face more than one type of abuse and slavery, for example if they are sold to another trafficker and then forced into another form of exploitation.

A person is trafficked if they are brought to (or moved around) a country by others who threaten, frighten, hurt and force them to do work or other things they don't want to do.⁵

Many of the victims of human trafficking and modern slavery are children and young people. In 2017, 44% of the potential victims of human trafficking or modern slavery referred to the National Crime Agency, through the [National Referral Mechanism](#), were children. In 2017, the number of potential child victims rose by 66% compared to year prior. The National Crime Agency note that this increase is due, in part, to an increase in referrals related to County Lines gang exploitation.⁶

1.3 Child exploitation

Organised criminals are involved in producing and distributing sexually exploitative images of children and grooming children for abuse.

The National Crime Agency say that the "true scale" of child sexual exploitation "remains hidden".⁷ A disproportionate number of victims of child sexual exploitation are looked after children. Impoverished families are targeted by offenders who use family members to act as facilitators.⁸

The National Crime Agency say that:

Offending by under 18s forms a rising proportion of reported child sexual exploitation and abuse. Reports of sexual offences on school premises have also increased.⁹

⁴ Ibid, p16

⁵ Home Office, [Guidance: How to report modern slavery](#), December 2016

⁶ National Crime Agency, [National Referral Mechanism Statistics – End of Year Summary 2017](#), March 2018

⁷ National Crime Agency, [National Strategic Assessment of serious and organised crime 2018](#), p26

⁸ Ibid, p27

⁹ Ibid

2. Government response

2.1 Policies

Overall approach to serious and organised crime

The Coalition Government published a [Serious and organised crime strategy](#) in October 2013. This coincided with the launch of the National Crime Agency.¹⁰ The strategy aims to reduce the threat of organised crime by ‘**pursuing**’ organised criminals and ‘**preventing**’ people from engaging in organised crime. It also seeks to reduce the nation’s vulnerability to organised crime by ‘**protecting**’ against organised crime, for example protecting the border, and ‘**preparing**’ for major organised crime incidents.¹¹

The strategy noted the link between youth street gangs and organised crime groups. It states that:

Preventing young people from becoming involved in street gangs will reduce the risk that they become involved in organised crime.¹²

In March 2018 the Government published a [National Security Capability Review](#) which included commitments to:

- Publish a new ‘Serious and organised crime strategy’ in 2018.
- Establish a new intelligence framework for all partners to share information.
- Create a national economic crime centre in partnership with the private sector.
- Reform the ‘Suspicious Activity Reports’ system.
- Continue to deliver a target response overseas.¹³

County Lines

Tackling ‘county lines’ is one of the four main themes of the Government’s [Serious Violence Strategy](#) (April 2018). This built on policies outlined in previous documents: [Ending gang violence and exploitation](#) (January 2016) and the [2017 Drug Strategy](#) (July 2017).

The Serious Violence Strategy promised to:

- Deliver a second phase of activity under our County Lines Action Plan to tackle county lines, to consolidate and build on the work undertaken to date and address new and specific threats and challenges.
- Provide £3.6m funding to support the development of the new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre (NCLCC). • Continue to work with the CPS and NPCC lead on the prosecution of county lines encouraging the use of Modern Slavery Act offences where appropriate.

¹⁰ HM Government, [Serious and Organised Crime Strategy](#), October 2013, p7

¹¹ Ibid, p8

¹² Ibid, p50

¹³ Ibid, p23 -24

- Continue to raise awareness of county lines related exploitation amongst practitioners and update our guidance where relevant.
- Update the Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance to reflect the risks to children of serious violence including the serious risk of harm associated with county lines. • Undertake nationwide awareness-raising communication activity about the threat of county lines targeted to young and vulnerable people and how to avoid becoming involved and exploited by gangs.
- Provide additional support for young people at risk including £175,000 of funding to build upon Mentor UK's 'Unplugged' feasibility study to deliver support to children in schools as well as excluded children in pupil referral units.
- Provide £500,000 of funding over two years to support delivery of a new round of Heroin and Crack Action Areas. • Continue to work with the NPCC lead for Drugs to support and encourage the use of drug testing on arrest.
- Support the role of the Recovery Champion in providing leadership and advice on standards of provision for drug treatment.¹⁴

The Government has also passed new legislation to tackle 'county lines': [The Drug Dealing Telecommunications Restriction Orders Regulations 2017, SI 2017/1240](#), which came into force in December 2017. This allows the Police or the National Crime Agency to apply directly to the civil courts for an order which compels the relevant communications provider to close down phone lines used in connection with drug dealing offences.¹⁵

Children excluded from school

The number of excluded children has risen since 2014.¹⁶ Evidence suggests that being excluded from school heightens a child's risk of being exploited for such offences as drug market-related violence.

One of the Serious Violence Strategy's key themes is early intervention, where it says:

Our work on early intervention and prevention is focused on steering young people away from crime and putting in place measures to tackle the root causes. [...] The Home Office will work with the Department for Education and Ofsted to explore what more can be done to support schools in England to respond to potential crime risks and to provide additional support to excluded children.¹⁷

One of the Strategy's proposals is to:

Provide additional support for young people at risk including £175,000 of funding to build upon Mentor UK's 'Unplugged' feasibility study to deliver support to children in schools as well as excluded children in pupil referral units.¹⁸

The Department for Education (DfE) has published [statutory guidance](#) which sets out that schools should consider intervening to avoid the need to exclude a child from the school – especially vulnerable pupils.¹⁹

¹⁴ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, p52

¹⁵ [Explanatory memorandum to the Drug Dealing Telecommunications Restriction Orders Regulations 2017, SI 2017/1240, 2017 No.1240](#)

¹⁶ Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), page 29, April 2018

¹⁷ HM Government, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018, pp9-10

¹⁸ Ibid, page 54

¹⁹ Department for Education, [Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England](#), September 2017

The DfE has also commissioned a [review of school exclusions](#) which will explore how exclusion is used and with a particular focus on which groups of children are most likely to be excluded. The review aims to report by the end of 2018.²⁰

Modern slavery

The Government set up a [Modern Slavery Taskforce](#) in September 2016 to help co-ordinate policy and operational responses in this area. On 17 October 2017, the taskforce announced [three new measures](#):

- The National Referral Mechanism will be reformed to try and improve decision-making and support, including a new digital system;
- A new unit in the Home Office will handle all potential modern slavery cases: and
- an independent panel of experts will review all negative decisions.

Child sexual exploitation

The Coalition Government published a policy paper [Dealing with child sexual exploitation](#) in March 2015. In February 2017 the Government published [Tackling child sexual exploitation: progress report](#) which “gives an update on action the government is taking to deal with child sexual exploitation.”

The Government’s state that 90% of the commitments in the *Dealing with child sexual exploitation* paper had been achieved. They state that they:

have tackled the culture of denial within professions about the scale and nature of this crime...

...have increased accountability by strengthening statutory guidance to reduce the risk of children falling through the gaps between services, and reforming local accountability by introducing stronger statutory requirements on police, children’s social care and health, so local leaders are more consistently held to account for performance...

...have increased the support available to victims and survivors of sexual abuse, providing local commissioners with the funding they need to support the particular needs of survivors in their area, as well as holding a central fund so that organisations working nationally with survivors are supported...

... have sharpened the law enforcement response and brought more offenders to justice, including offenders who have been exploiting new methods and technologies to abuse children. In the year to December 2015, 5,879 offenders were convicted of child sexual abuse offences (including image offences). This was over 1,000 more offenders convicted than in 2014. 51% of those convicted in 2015 were sentenced to immediate custody.²¹

In the progress report the Government also set out the their ‘next steps’ to tackle child sexual exploitation:

Over the next three years, we will concentrate our efforts on working hard before abuse takes place to deter potential offenders, as well as improving resilience in children and young people.²²

²⁰ Department for Education, [School exclusions review: call for evidence](#), 16 March 2018

²¹ HM Government, [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: Progress report](#), February 2017, p3

²² Ibid, p6

2.2 Reaction

Responding to the Government's [Serious violence strategy](#) many stakeholders praised the government for emphasising early intervention. However, there were concerns that there would not be enough funding.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said:

Prevention and early action is key, this must involve co-ordination of a wide range of services, including those to support families and young people, but also stimulating housing, employment opportunities and community facilities. The strategy emphasises the importance of local communities and partnerships yet provides little for local authorities to develop local responses.²³

The Early Intervention Foundation said it was "delighted" that early intervention had been placed at the heart of the Strategy, describing it as a "critical part of the solution". However, it said the Government's stated commitment to early intervention was not matched by what was set out in the Strategy, and it called on the Home Office to be "more ambitious" about early intervention.²⁴

Charities working with young people affected by violence were positive about the focus on early intervention but advocated the government take a holistic approach and work across departments.²⁵

Dianne Abbott MP (shadow Home Secretary), speaking at a general debate regarding the Serious violence strategy said:

We welcome the broad themes in the serious violence strategy— tackling county lines; early intervention and prevention; supporting communities and local partnership; and law enforcement and the criminal justice response.²⁶

However, she was critical of resourcing levels for local police forces.

²³ ADCS, [Response to the government's Serious Violence Strategy](#), 9 April 2018

²⁴ Early Intervention Foundation, [Serious Violence Strategy: Government needs to start engaging with the evidence base](#), 10 April 2018

²⁵ See: Redthread, [Redthread's response to the Serious Violence Strategy](#), 10 April 2018, St Giles Trust, [Home Office Serious Violence Strategy – St Giles Trust's Response](#), undated

²⁶ [HCDeb Serious Violence Strategy, 22 May 2018](#), Volume 641, Column 738-810

3. News and blogs

Gov.uk

[Solicitor General visits knife crime charity](#)

21 June 2018

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

[Gang matrix a human rights violation: new report](#)

9 May 2018

The Police Foundation

[Have police cuts contributed to the increase in violent crime?](#)

11 April 2018

Home Office

[Home Office announces package of measures to tackle violent crime](#)

14 October 2017

3.1 Press articles

BBC News Scotland

[Organised crime less about guns and more about 'preying on the vulnerable'](#)

4 June 2018

Independent

[Government doubles funding for youth crime prevention as violence soars](#)

30 July 2018

Guardian

[‘Sleepwalking into a nightmare’: surge in crime paints a bleak picture](#)

19 July 2018

Guardian

[Drugs gangs recruiting children from small towns, research reveals](#)

26 April 2018

Telegraph

['My son was groomed into drug dealing by gangs on Snapchat'](#)

14 April 2018

Telegraph

[School expulsions fuel rise in youth crime, say experts](#)

10 April 2018

4. Parliamentary material

4.1 Debates

[Offensive Weapons Bill](#)

HC Deb 27 June 2018 cc916-2000

[Serious Violence Strategy](#)

HL Deb 11 June 2018 cc1509-1547

[County Lines Exploitation: London](#)

HC Deb 17 January 2018 cc328-350WH

[Knife Crime](#)

HC Deb 6 September 2017 cc276-284

4.2 Parliamentary Questions

[Pupil Exclusions](#)

Asked by: Lord Ouseley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to prevent children being groomed for criminal gang activities when they have been excluded from school and left unsupervised.

Answering member: Lord Agnew of Oulton | Department: Department for Education

The government supports schools in using exclusion where it is warranted, underpinned by statutory guidance issued by the department. Following an exclusion, pupils are not unsupervised. There are clear duties in place to ensure that full time education must be put in place for any pupil from the fifth day of an exclusion.

In the first five school days of an exclusion (or until the start date of any alternative provision or the end of the exclusion where this is earlier), the attached statutory guidance requires a head teacher to notify the pupil's parents of the days on which they must ensure that the pupil is not present in a public place at any time during school hours. Any parent who fails to comply with this duty without reasonable justification commits an offence and may be given a fixed penalty notice or be prosecuted. The head teacher must notify the parents of the days on which their duty applies without delay and, at the latest, by the end of the afternoon session.

On the 9 April, The Home Office (HO) published the Serious Violence Strategy. This sets out the government response to tackling county lines and establishes a new balance between prevention and rigorous law enforcement activity.

The strategy set out the government's response to serious violence and outlines an ambitious programme involving 61 commitments and actions including a new £11 million Early Intervention Youth Fund to support communities for early intervention and prevention with young people for financial years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 and a new National County Lines

Co-ordination Centre to tackle violent and exploitative criminal activity associated with county lines.

The attached HO guide for frontline practitioners on child criminal exploitation was launched in July 2017 and supports this work. The HO are also undertaking nationwide awareness-raising communication activity about the threat of county lines targeted to young and vulnerable people and how to avoid becoming involved and exploited by gangs.

HL Deb 25 Jul 2018 | HL9562W

Attachment: [HL9562_Exclusions_guidance](#);
[HL9562_HO_Child_exploitation_guidance](#);
[HL9562_Serious_Violence_Strategy](#)

[Knives: Crime](#)

Asked by: Lord Bird

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the finding in the Youth Violence Commission's Interim Report, published in July, that current approaches to reducing knife crime are ineffective and the focus should be to tackle the root causes of serious violence.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | Department: Home Office

The Government has noted the findings of the Youth Violence Commission's Interim Report published on 18 July.

On 9 April 2018, the Government published the Serious Violence Strategy to set out the action it is taking to address serious violence, and in particular, the recent increases in knife crime, gun crime and homicide.

The strategy represents a step change in the way we think and respond to serious violence. Our approach is not solely focused on law enforcement, very important as that is, but depends also on multi-partnership working and a 'public health' approach across a number of sectors such as education, health, social services, housing, youth services, victim services and others.

In particular, the strategy stresses the importance of early intervention to tackle the root causes of serious violence and provide young people with the skills and resilience to lead productive lives free from violence.

HL Deb 06 Aug 2018 | HL9766W

[Knife Crime](#)

Oral questions

Asked by: Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)

Knife crime is often associated with county lines. I asked the Security Minister at a recent Home Office questions how the national county lines co-ordination centre was to be funded, and was told that it would be through the police transformation fund. I then received a letter saying that "it does not come from the Police Transformation Fund...and I apologise if this is the impression given."

But the same letter says that

“projects and programmes funded through the PTF will support the strategy’s aims.”

So how are the Government funding their anti-county lines programme? Is it all from new resources or not?

Answering member: Sajid Javid | Department: Home Department

First, I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises the importance of dealing with the whole issue of county lines and welcomes the new co-ordination centre. It will be funded through the commitment of £40 million into the serious violence strategy, and the centre’s funding specifically will be £3.6 million over the next two years.

HC Deb 16 Jul 2018 | 645 c6

[Gangs: Crimes of Violence](#)

Asked by: Vera Hobhouse

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department plans to take to proactively tackle the socio-economic root causes of gang violence in communities.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | Department: Home Office

The Serious Violence Strategy represents a step change in the way we think and respond to violence, including gangs. The strategy sets out the key risk factors which may mean a young person may have a greater propensity to get involved in crime than would otherwise be the case such as school absence and peer pressure.

The strategy also outlines the importance of early intervention to tackle criminal involvement by young people and the importance of providing positive activities to help them lead productive lives free from crime. We are also supporting work to build local resilience and awareness by match funding local area reviews, which help local areas to respond to gang-related threats.

02 Jul 2018 | 157840W

[Crimes of Violence: Gangs](#)

Asked by: Leo Docherty

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress is being made in tackling county lines criminal activity; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | Department: Home Office

We are absolutely committed to tackling county lines. The action we are taking is set out in the Serious Violence Strategy published on 9 April. We are delivering a cross-Government and agency programme of work to tackle county lines through the County Lines Action Plan (which is published as an Annex to the Serious Violence Strategy). Last December we

introduced the Drug Dealing Telecommunications Restriction Orders to enable police to shut down phone lines used to facilitate drug deals, and we have announced funding of £3.6million to establish a new National County Lines Co-Ordination Centre. Raising awareness of county lines and the appropriate safeguarding response is also very important. In July last year we published guidance on county lines for frontline practitioners to help them identify and respond to county lines exploitation and we are currently delivering a nationwide awareness-raising communications campaign.

HC Deb 02 Jul 2018 | 143825W

[Gangs: Young People](#)

Asked by: Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to help young people exit gangs.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | Department: Home Office

The Serious Violence Strategy sets out a range of initiatives including the Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (EGVE) programme to support young people to exit gang lifestyles. This includes working with Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on a range of initiatives including sports and arts programmes, and work with the Department for Work and Pensions to continue to support work coaches for gang affected young people.

Through our EGVE Fund we support local initiatives. Last year we supported 16 projects including gang and county lines awareness training for young people, practitioners and foster carers; community sports and arts provisions; mentoring programmes; and young people's safeguarding workshops.

We have also provided funding for Redthread to expand their youth violence intervention scheme outside of London. This initiative involves youth workers being embedded in Accident and Emergency departments to talk to young victims of violence at the critical 'teachable' moment. They offer intervention support to all assault victims aged from 13 to 20 to prevent them from joining a gang or to help established gang members reassess their life choices. In addition, we are funding Young People's Advocates in London, Manchester and Birmingham to enable direct support to young women and girls who have been victims, or are at risk of, sexual violence by gangs, including those involved in county lines.

HL Deb 01 Jun 2018 | HL7977W

[Drugs: Crime](#)

Asked by: Baroness Kennedy of Cradley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of children "going country" to deliver drugs.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | Department: Home Office

The National Crime Agency's 2017 threat assessment of county lines set out the most up to date analysis of the threat posed by county lines and the number of 'deal lines' and children being exploited through this form of drug dealing.

The report is clear that further work is needed to determine the true nature and scale of children and vulnerable adults being exploited through county lines, although it is estimated to be in the thousands. A more detailed intelligence picture will be generated as part of the work of the new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre that was announced in the Serious Violence Strategy and which is expected to be fully operational later this year.

HL Deb 01 Jun 2018 | HL7976W

[Gangs](#)

Asked by: Lord Ouseley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what evidence exists to demonstrate that the Metropolitan Police Service's Gangs Matrix has been successful in tackling serious violent crimes such as knife and gun crimes.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | Department: Home Office

The Government is aware of the Amnesty International's report, *Trapped in the Matrix, Secrecy, stigma and bias in the Met's Gangs Database*. The gang violence matrix is an operational tool used by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the findings and recommendations are directed to the MPS. Any assessment of the effectiveness of the tool would be an operational matter for the police.

This Government is committed to addressing the recent increases in gun crime, knife crime and homicide. We recently published our new Serious Violence Strategy. The strategy sets out the evidence on risk and protective factors for involvement in serious violence and the available evidence on effective interventions. The strategy puts a new emphasis on early intervention with young people at risk of becoming involved in crime and working together with communities to tackle the recent increases in serious violence.

HL Deb 29 May 2018 | HL7848W

[Drugs: Children](#)

Asked by: Vernon Coaker

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will create a formal police referral system across forces to report children found with drugs to the police force and social services where the child is living.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | Department: Home Office

We are supporting the establishment of the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre by providing specific funding of £3.6 million over the next

two years. The Centre is being established by the National Police Chiefs' Council lead and the National Crime Agency and will help bring the law enforcement effort together and build better safeguarding links. The Centre will be fully operational later this year.

HC Deb 02 Jul 2018 | 154595W

[Organised Crime: Drugs](#)

Asked by: Vernon Coaker

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate he has made of the number of children involved in County Lines.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | Department: Home Office

The National Crime Agency's most recent threat assessment of county lines, published in November 2017, sets out the most up to date analysis of the threat posed by county lines. This includes the number of 'deal lines' and children being exploited through this form of drug dealing. The report is clear that an intelligence gap remains and further work is needed to determine the true nature and scale of children and vulnerable adults being exploited through county lines, although it is estimated to be in the thousands.

A more detailed intelligence picture will be generated as part of the work of the new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre, which was announced as part of the Serious Violence Strategy and which is expected to be fully operational later this year.

HC Deb 18 Jun 2018 | 153187W

[Children: Gangs](#)

Asked by: Baroness Kennedy of Cradley (Lab)

My Lords, the Serious Violence Taskforce has had its first meeting, and I am pleased to see that it focused on county lines activity. However, many people are concerned that the strategy section on county lines is quite limited, with few new commitments and very little on safeguarding. As we know, thousands of children, some as young as 12, are trafficked and enslaved by county lines gangs. They need safeguarding; moreover, their evidence is critical in securing convictions. Why does the Serious Violence Taskforce have no representation from the anti-trafficking sector, and why is the Children's Commissioner on the task force but not the Anti-Slavery Commissioner? Can this oversight in membership be corrected, and can the Minister give the House assurances that the new national county lines centre will focus as much on safeguarding as it plans to do on law enforcement?

Answered by: Baroness Williams of Trafford

The noble Baroness asks several questions, but perhaps I can encompass them all into one answer and say that she gets to the nub of the problem: county lines are, as she rightly points out, all about exploiting vulnerability. We are undertaking a national awareness-raising communications exercise

on the threat of county lines targeted at young and vulnerable people, and on how to avoid becoming involved in, and exploited by, gangs. We are also working closely with organisations such as Redthread and St Giles Trust, which work with children at the teachable moment—for example, if they arrive at A&E with violence-related injuries—to provide an alternative route out of a lifestyle of violence. Additionally, we are working across government departments, such as the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, to ensure that key partners in those professions are trained to spot and refer young people involved in county lines. The noble Baroness will appreciate that this is a multi-agency cross-government issue.

HL Deb 10 May 2018 | HL 791 c245

[Children: Exploitation](#)

Asked by: Mr George Howarth

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will (a) make an assessment of the prevalence of child criminal exploitation and (b) bring forward legislative proposals to establish a definition for such exploitation under the Modern Slavery Act 2015; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: Sarah Newton | Department: Home Office

The criminal exploitation of children is one of a number of exploitative practices that forms part of modern slavery. Where children are found to be victims of modern slavery their safety and welfare needs must be addressed as the priority, this includes providing the required tailored support which addresses their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Child criminal exploitation can consist of a range of criminal activities including cannabis cultivation, sham marriage, county lines, forced begging, benefit fraud and theft. The National Crime Agency includes criminal exploitation within the labour exploitation statistics. In the year to June 2017, there were 506 children either confirmed as victims of slavery or pending a decision all citing labour exploitation within the NRM.

The latest published threat assessment of county lines gang violence, exploitation and drug supply prepared by the National Crime Agency in November 2016 identified in excess of 200 young and vulnerable persons as being exploited by gangs for criminal purposes within a six month period. This figure is considered to be a significant under-estimate as exploited individuals are often unwilling to talk to the police.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is a world leading and ground breaking piece of legislation. The Act already makes a number of specific provisions to recognise the unique vulnerabilities of children and we have no current plans to amend it.

HC Deb 16 Oct 2017 | 106883W

5. Further reading

[Serious Violence Strategy](#), Commons Library Paper CDP 2018-0124, 21 May 2018

[County lines exploitation in London](#), Commons Library Paper CDP 2018-0009, 15 January 2018

[The Offensive Weapons Bill 2017-19](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper 08349, 25 June 2018

Home Office, [Serious Violence Strategy](#), April 2018

Home Office, [Ending gang violence and exploitation](#), 13 January 2016

[Commission on Gangs and Violence: Uniting to improve safety](#), November 2017

[Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation](#)

The Police Foundation, [Reducing the impact of organised crime in local communities – final report](#), 4 October 2017

Amnesty International, [Trapped in the Matrix: Secrecy, stigma and bias in the Met's Gangs Database](#)

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).