



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019-20

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CRIME AND DISORDER

16th MARCH 2020

COUNTY LINES AND PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update Elected Members on the current issues faced with County Lines and the protection of vulnerable people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise the content of the report and express their views on the proposals to effectively tackle County Lines activity and protect vulnerable people from harm.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The demand for illegal drugs is driving serious violence and exploitation in Wales. Nationally, organised gangs operate to a business model that is responding to an expanding drug market by supplying drugs via a workforce of vulnerable children and adults. This is known as County Lines. This form of serious crime involves criminal exploitation where offenders (usually men) exploit vulnerable children and adults physically, sexually and financially.

Detective Inspector Meirion Collings will attend on the night of the committee meeting and provide a general overview of County Lines.



4. CURRENT INTERVENTIONS

- 4.1 Despite County Lines and serious violence in RCT being low, these areas are a priority for the Cwm Taf Community Safety Partnership Board. Both issues are the main focus of our Serious and Organised Crime Partnership Board and we have made great strides with regards to information sharing and intelligence gathering.
- 4.2 Training is ongoing and all Headteachers and Safeguarding Leads within schools have received the County Lines training delivered by South Wales Police. There has been a more focussed training session for the staff of the Pupil Referral Units where they have received whole school training. Training has also been delivered to Social Services staff and other departments where staff are engaged with vulnerable people.
- 4.3 With regards to young people, we have linked in with the “Fearless” project who are run by Crimestoppers and commissioned to deliver this type of training. The “Fearless” project have delivered sessions to a number of our youth clubs and are scheduled to visit all of our secondary schools. This is being co-ordinated by our Youth Service.
- 4.4 Safeguarding days are taking place within our secondary schools and sessions being delivered to Year 9 pupils. During these days the pupils will receive inputs on County Lines, knife crime, child sexual exploitation, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour.
- 4.5 During Safeguarding week in November, we held County Lines training for multi- agency staff. These sessions were advertised and co-ordinated by our Safeguarding Business Support team.
- 4.6 During the same week, we hosted a special session on County Lines for the 100 most vulnerable of our young people. These young people were identified by our schools and the Youth Service/Youth Offending Service. The session was delivered by Junior Smart of St Giles Trust. Junior is an ex-gang member who has extensive lived experiences of being exploited.
- 4.7 In relation to knife crime specifically, we have a task group looking at this. The figures in RCT are mainly around domestic abuse and our focus is around prevention i.e. education and awareness. There is also a targeted approach with businesses, both awareness raising and age related test purchase operations. There is also an increased focus on Police using their stop search powers more effectively.

5. PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

- 5.1 A paper has recently been taken to the Public Service Board for discussion around how all organisations will respond in Cwm Taf, and therefore challenge the way we are all working together to protect the most vulnerable individuals from exploitation. The paper is attached as appendix (i).



6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 We are committed to strengthening our improving partnership responses to the safeguarding and well-being of vulnerable people and to the underlying issue of substance misuse which is a common factor behind many of the challenges our communities and services are facing. These factors leave individuals vulnerable to criminal exploitation and any improvement in our multi-agency response to vulnerability will strengthen our resilience to threats such as County Lines.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CRIME AND DISORDER

16th MARCH 2020

REPORT OF DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

County Lines and Protection of Vulnerable People

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CWM TAF PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

25th February 2020

SERIOUS VIOLENCE AND VULNERABILITY

REPORT OF THE CWM TAF COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The demand for illegal drugs is driving serious violence and exploitation in Wales. Nationally, organised gangs operate to a business model that is responding to an expanding drug market by supplying drugs via a workforce of vulnerable children and adults. This is known as County Lines. This form of serious crime involves criminal exploitation where offenders (usually men) exploit vulnerable children and adults physically, sexually and financially.
- 1.2 The All Wales Serious Violence & Vulnerability Strategic Review¹, commissioned by the All Wales Serious Violence Working Group, has developed a framework consisting of eight key principles to enable a national, regional and local response around understanding the issue, leadership, safeguarding, enforcement and communication. The Public Services Board (PSB) needs to consider its response to the eight principles and twenty-three associated recommendations to enable a coherent, strategic and effective response to the threat of County Lines and serious violence in Cwm Taf.
- 1.3 Although not affected by County Lines to the same extent as other areas in Wales, there has locally been evidence of increased activity with potential County Lines links to Liverpool and the West Midlands identified. There have been incidents where local drug dealers have adopted a County Lines method. Schools are increasingly identifying substance misuse as a problem; both drug dealing and misuse. Increased demand on homelessness services, particularly from young people and families, some with complex needs, including co-occurring mental health and substance misuse have been reported. In addition, school exclusion rates have increased.
- 1.4 In 2018, the rate of drug misuse deaths in Cwm Taf was 10 per 100,000 population, higher than the Welsh average. Both Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf had a higher rate of death than the national average and were in the top five highest rates in Wales². These factors mean that the circumstances where vulnerable people may be subject to exploitation exist in Cwm Taf and all agencies need to consider what evidence-based interventions can be taken to prevent County Lines and the exploitation of vulnerable people in our communities. There is a gap in agency support for adult victims of Cuckooing, specifically around individual support and emergency accommodation.

¹ All Wales Serious Violence and Vulnerability Strategic Review 2018/19

² Harm Reduction Database Wales; Drug Related Mortality Annual Report 2018-19

- 1.5 There is a Serious and Organised Crime Partnership (SOCPB) Board in Cwm Taf that sits within the Community Safety Partnership Board governance arrangements. Although this group is making progress, it acknowledges that this group's primary focus is on Pursue - putting in place arrangements around potential perpetrators and criminals, rather than the full strategy of Prevent, Prepare, Protect *and* Pursue. The strategic review has identified that the initial tasks for any work to tackle criminal exploitation and reduce violence should centre on "clear governance, collaboration and an understanding of how conflicts and competition around drug markets are mainly responsible for and driving violence and exploitation".
- 1.6 The response to this issue cannot fall solely to policing and, as this agenda cuts across the work of the Community Safety Partnership, Substance Misuse Area Planning Board, Safeguarding Board, Regional Partnership Board and Public Services Board, there needs to be a multi-agency response. There also needs to be close integration with the work of the recently established Violence Prevention Unit to ensure a coherent and consistent approach.
- 1.7 The North Wales Safer Communities Board commissioned a Multi-Agency County Lines Needs Assessment³, published in September 2019. The key findings are divided into four sections; organisational information, vulnerability, local drug markets and serious violence. In summary, the Needs Assessment made the following recommendations:

Organisational – the need to overcome silo working and inconsistency of approach through better coordination across existing structures. Improving data sharing through a universal shared platform and information sharing protocol. The creation of multi-agency 4 P plans, scrutiny processes and a problem-solving approach.

Vulnerability – a consistent approach to the management of safeguarding across the region, a consistent approach to vulnerability risk assessment, closing gaps in services in relation to young adults transition, a cultural change in attitudes towards people seen as "criminals" or "causing high demand" who are in fact vulnerable or at risk of exploitation, understanding the factors that influence vulnerability and identifying those at risk because of vulnerability to allow early intervention, improving referrals into the national referral mechanism (NRM) for modern slavery and overcoming barriers to reporting from fear of reprisals.

Drug Market – improved strategic understanding and intelligence to identify links between gangs, wider drug usage analysis, understanding why the usage of crack cocaine and heroin increases from age 25, more co-ordinated prevention and education for young people, liaison with phone networks to close communications.

³ North Wales Multi Agency County Lines Needs Assessment (Exploitation & Vulnerability/Serious Violence/Drug Market) September 2019

Serious Violence – encouraging reporting and spot the signs of serious violence, raising awareness of the consequences of serious violence, reducing the incidents of youths carrying knives/weapons.

- 1.8 Applying the findings of the North Wales Safer Communities Needs Assessment to Cwm Taf, partners recognise the need for a multi-agency 4 P planning approach, as actions from other agencies feed into the 4 Ps and the response to Pursue cannot just be from the Police. Quite often, adults are deemed to have capacity to make decisions and vulnerability and safeguarding in these circumstances need better governance. There is still insufficient sharing of vulnerability intelligence between all parties, specifically with Health (for example around non-fatal poisonings), Education and Housing. In creating a hostile environment for gangs, are we making the best use of services available and community support?
- 1.9 In Neath Port Talbot and the City & County of Swansea, the Joint Public Services Boards⁴ established a critical incident group to identify action to address drug related deaths and tackle County Lines. The group identified a number of early actions, further actions over the next six months and longer-term actions to improve/re-commission services, improve information sharing and intelligence. In relation to County Lines specifically, early actions to raise awareness, develop better links between partners and address risks around looked after children were identified. Further actions to review their Serious and Organised Crime Board, improve training, improve links between the Police and A&E amongst others, were also identified.
- 1.10 Not all the measures identified above will be relevant to Cwm Taf. Many partnership arrangements already work at a regional level to ensure consistency. Substance misuse services in Cwm Taf were re-commissioned in 2019 to create a single integrated service. However, these two reports identify the need to undertake a local needs assessment to inform our response to serious violence and vulnerability in Cwm Taf and the necessity to ensure that robust governance arrangements are in place to deliver a coherent, proportionate and effective response.
- 1.11 The issues described in this report apply equally to Bridgend. The Cwm Taf PSB may wish to consider taking a joint approach with Bridgend PSB to ensure a consistent response to this issue.

2. CONCLUSIONS

- 2.1 There are growing pressures to strengthen and improve our partnership response to the safeguarding and well-being of vulnerable people and to the underlying issue of substance misuse, which is a common factor behind many of the challenges our communities and services are facing. These factors leave individuals vulnerable to criminal exploitation and any improvement in our multi-

⁴ Joint Public Services Boards of Neath Port Talbot and City & County of Swansea – Substance Misuse – Report of the Critical Incident Group – February 2019

agency response to vulnerability will strengthen our resilience to threats such as County Lines.

- 2.2 Work undertaken elsewhere in Wales has identified a number of actions in response to these issues. Although, not all will be applicable to the circumstances in Cwm Taf, short-term improvements in our level of understanding of the issues, information sharing between partners and multi-agency planning arrangements are clearly necessary.
- 2.3 Given the growing alignment of partnership arrangements across the region and the nature of this issue, which is common to all parts of the region, it makes sense that we approach this as a Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Public Services Board:

- 3.1 Note and consider the implications of the All Wales Serious Violence and Vulnerability Strategic Review, the 8 principles and twenty-three recommendations within the framework.
- 3.2 Commission a Cwm Taf needs assessment to inform our response to the threat of criminal exploitation, vulnerability and serious violence, identifying the resources and contribution from across partners required to undertake this work,
- 3.3 Review the governance arrangements for serious and organised crime in Cwm Taf Morgannwg to ensure they are fit for purpose, and
- 3.4 Consider establishing a task and finish group with relevant representation from across the strategic partnerships in Cwm Taf Morgannwg to oversee and take forward this work, reporting to both PSBs.

