

Record year for gang busts and knife seizures

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New figures show a record year for County Lines enforcement, with more gang leaders charged and knives seized than ever before, backed by £34m in new funding.

More drug lines have been closed, gang leaders arrested and dangerous weapons seized than ever before due to County Lines operations.

New data released today shows that 2,740 County Lines have been closed, 1,657 gang leaders charged and 961 knives were seized in 2025. Since the election, these operations have resulted in 3,785 line closures, 2,175 gang leaders charged and 1,229 knives taken off the streets.

County Lines are a method of drug dealing by gangs, running drugs from metropolitan cities to smaller towns - leaving a trail of exploited children and violence across the country.

The Government funds police operations under the County Lines Programme to dismantle criminal gangs that use violence and exploit children to transport drugs and knives.

The funding supports police operations which include intelligence gathering on gangs, targeted house raids and drug seizures across the transport network, putting gang leaders behind bars and ensuring the phones lines used for drug deals cannot be brought back into use.

County Lines Programme has led to a 25% reduction in hospital admissions for stabbings in key areas, preventing more than 800 stabbings a year.

The figures come as next Tuesday, the Government will launch its plan to halve knife crime within a decade. Titled "Protecting Lives, Building Hope", it will save lives, transform the futures of young people and protect communities across the country.

To tackle knife crime, the Government will support young people so they get the best start in life, stop those at risk from turning to knife crime and police our streets to catch and punish perpetrators.

Crime and Policing Minister Sarah Jones said:

"We are shutting down more criminal lines, busting more gang leaders and seizing more dangerous knives off our streets than ever before.

"I will not rest in the relentless pursuit of these horrific criminals that leave a trail of violence and exploitation in their wake.

"The Government will halve knife crime within a decade, saving lives and protecting communities."

Building on these results, the Government will invest more than £34 million in the County Lines Programme this year, ensuring the national fight continues against the violent gangs who exploit children and fuel serious violence.

The new funding includes more than £28 million for policing, as confirmed through the Police Funding Settlement, ensuring forces have the resources they need to disrupt organised drug networks, close down active lines and safeguard those at risk of exploitation.

Naomi Hulston, Chief Executive Officer, Catch22 said:

“Catch22 is proud to deliver the national County Lines Support Service, working alongside Government and police to safeguard thousands of child victims through trauma-informed support and achieve the incredible impact of the County Lines Programme.

“No child should become a victim of violence, County Lines, or exploitation. Across our services we have seen a worrying trend of younger victims and an increasing impact on girls and young women, so collaborative approaches are even more vital.

“As a member of the Government’s Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime, Catch22 is committed to working together to draw a line under violence and exploitation for good.”

These new Programme results follow the most successful County Lines Intensification Week from 2-8 March, involving forces across England, Wales and Scotland taking targeted action against County Lines gangs. In the space of a week, police closed 355 lines, resulting in 2,180 arrests and 1,348 people safeguarded.

Detective Superintendent Dan Mitchell, Head of the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC), said:

“As the results from our latest intensification week demonstrate, tackling County Lines remains a top priority for policing.

“Since the Home Office-funded County Lines Programme was established, we are now closing more lines, charging more violent offenders, and protecting more children and adults at risk of exploitation and other harms than ever before.

“As County Lines gangs’ methods evolve, our policing approach - led by the NCLCC - does too. We remain committed to pursuing high-harm County Lines and those controlled by violent drug dealers, so that we can prevent harm, protect children and vulnerable adults, and disrupt criminal activity.”

Tackling County Lines is central to the mission to halve knife crime. By relentlessly disrupting the drug networks that fuel serious violence and exploit young people, the County Lines Programme is helping to drive lasting reductions in harm. It has led to a 25% fall in hospital admissions for stabbings across key County Lines exporter areas, preventing more than 800 stabbings each year.

The ongoing funding will help the police across the UK to continue to work together effectively to tackle County Lines drug supply, violence and exploitation. It will also support work with local partners to protect young people who are at risk, deal with the causes of knife crime and help keep communities safe.

This includes doing more to stop children being exploited by criminals. The Government is bringing in a new child criminal exploitation offence through the Crime and Policing Bill to prosecute adults criminally exploiting children. It will also introduce new court orders to stop this exploitation before it happens or stop it from happening again.

These changes will help target the gangs who groom and pressure young people into violence and criminal activity.

The Bill also creates new offences to tackle practices used by County Lines gangs, including taking over someone’s home to deal drugs (known as cuckooing) and forcing people to conceal drugs inside their bodies (internal concealment).

Together, these measures will give the police stronger powers to break up organised crime gangs, go after those who exploit others, and better protect children and vulnerable people.

Kathy Betteridge, Director of Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery for The Salvation Army, said:

“We welcome the Government’s action to tackle County Lines and the violence and devastation of lives that goes with it. We recognise the vital focus on prevention, the continued investment, and the clear results it is bringing.

“Through our work supporting survivors and in the heart of communities across the country, we see first-hand the devastating impact of County Lines exploitation, where young and vulnerable people are groomed, coerced and drawn into violence by criminal gangs.

“For future investment to succeed, it must continue to prioritise early intervention, trusted relationships and long-term support to protect people from harm and help them build safer futures.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-year-for-gang-busts-and-knife-seizures>