

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: DISRUPTING COUNTY LINES AND ENDING CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION



 **Digital Conference**

 **Thursday 12th February 2026**

Overview

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) by county lines gangs remains one of the most complex safeguarding challenges across the UK. Children as young as six are being exploited through coercion, grooming, debt bondage and violence, with many young people all too often falling through the cracks in child protection frameworks. While some progress has been made — including a reduction in the number of children recorded in the *County Lines Strategic Risk Assessment* — significant challenges remain. Notably, the county lines model is increasingly shifting from exported, cross-border operations to more localised networks, making victims of this exploitation even more hidden and harder to identify within their own communities.

To tackle this, the Government is investing £43m in the *County Lines Programme*. Over the past year, this has helped to drive record enforcement outcomes, and, as part of its wider strategic response, the Government introduced the *Crime and Policing Bill* in February 2025. This landmark legislation proposes a new standalone offence targeting the criminal exploitation of children by county lines gangs. It also introduces *Child Criminal Exploitation Prevention Orders* aimed at disrupting exploitative behaviours before they escalate and providing a stronger framework to safeguard children and young people at risk. While these legislative reforms mark significant progress, they must be underpinned by robust multi-agency coordination, improved intelligence and data sharing and consistent frontline practice across education, policing, social care, youth justice and health services.

This timely digital conference provides a vital platform for frontline professionals and policymakers to come together to examine the current threat picture and evolving trends in county lines and child criminal exploitation. The event will explore the impact of the *County Lines Programme* and the implications of the *Crime and Policing Bill* for tackling the criminal exploitation of children and young people. The conference will also share innovative best practice on prevention, early intervention, victim support and disruption tactics. Through keynote speeches, expert-led panels and practitioner insights, participants will gain practical tools, strategic knowledge and shared learning to help deliver proactive, joined-up responses that protect vulnerable children from harm and disrupt the gangs and criminal networks that exploit them.

Why Attend?

- Live digital conference featuring high-level presentations and expert panel discussions with leading policymakers, key officials and frontline practitioners
- interactive *Question Time* sessions, with opportunities to engage directly with speakers and shape the conversation
- Gain crucial updates on the current scale and threat of County Lines, including how gang activity is becoming increasingly localised
- Examine the potential implications of the *Crime and Policing Bill*, including the new *Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Offence and CCE Prevention Orders*, and their impact on both victims and perpetrators
- Hear from frontline organisations and sector leaders on innovative practice to protect vulnerable children and pursue high-harm offenders
- Share ideas with a diverse audience of professionals from local authorities, police, education, health, housing, criminal justice, social care, youth offending and the third sector
- Access exclusive post-event resources, including speaker presentations

Who Should Attend?

- Local Authority Officers & Councillors
- Central Government Departments & Agencies
- Directors of Children's Services
- Local Safeguarding Children Boards
- Safeguarding/Child Protection Teams
- Heads of Children's Social Care
- Children & Family Services
- Mental Health Support Teams
- NHS Health Workers
- Family & Parental Support Workers
- Domestic Violence Co-ordinators
- Troubled Families Teams
- Community Safety Teams
- YOS/YOT Managers & Members
- Police Authorities
- Police & Crime Commissioners
- Police Youth Engagement Officers
- Neighbourhood Policing Officers & Practitioners
- Organised Crime Police Teams
- Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)
- Anti-Social Behaviour Coordinators
- Drug & Alcohol Action Teams
- Youth & Community Workers
- Youth Inclusion Officers
- Court Service, Judges & Magistrates
- Pupil Referral Units
- Community Safety Officers & Managers
- Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships
- YOI Governors & Managers
- Probation Officers & Managers
- Offender Managers
- Local Criminal Justice Boards
- Criminal Justice Liaison Teams
- Youth Inclusion & Support Panel Members
- Chairs & Chiefs of Probation Boards
- Social Workers
- Head Teachers, Deputy Heads & Assistant Heads
- Education Welfare Services

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Programme

09:30 AM	Delegate Online Login
10:05 AM	Chair's Welcome and Opening Remarks
10:10 AM	Keynote Address: County Lines and Child Criminal Exploitation – Insights into National Trends and Emerging Threats ➤ Understanding the true nature and scale of county lines and the criminal exploitation of children across the UK ➤ Current challenges and trends — including the shift towards a more localised and less networked county lines model ➤ Analysing the proposals in the <i>Crime and Policing Bill</i> and the impact on disrupting county lines and protecting children and young people from criminal exploitation ➤ Exploring the impact and progress of the <i>County Lines Programme</i>, alongside the key strategic priorities outlined in the <i>County Lines Policing Strategy 2024–2027</i> ➤ Examining the links between CCE and child sexual exploitation (CSE), and the implications for safeguarding policy and practice
10:40 AM	Keynote Address: Questions and Discussion
11:00 AM	Comfort Break
11:15 AM	Panel Session One: Proactive Safeguarding – Identifying Risk and Intervening Early to Counter Grooming and Exploitation ➤ Spotting the signs — Raising awareness of the key indicators of exploitation in children and young people ➤ Enhancing responses to children who go missing or are at heightened risk of serious harm linked to county lines activity, specifically those who are excluded, in PRUs or are in care settings ➤ Strengthening integrated safeguarding approaches across education, social care, health and the police ➤ Targeting extra-familial harm in 'hot-spot' areas through a contextual safeguarding approach including at rail hubs or interchanges ➤ Utilising diversionary pathways and trauma-informed interventions to steer vulnerable young people away from harm
12:05 PM	Panel Session One: Questions and Discussion
12:30 PM	Comfort Break

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1:20 PM	Programme Cont'd Panel Session Two: From Insight to Action – Local Intelligence and Multi-Agency Strategies to Break Exploitation Pathways ➤ Developing effective disruption strategies through joined-up working between the police, local authorities, social care, education, health, housing and third sector partners ➤ Tackling barriers to intelligence and data sharing to build a clearer local picture of exploitation and improve safeguarding decisions ➤ Embedding consistent use of shared tools and frameworks — including the <i>Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT)</i> and the <i>County Lines Vulnerability Tracker (CLVT)</i> — to assess and respond to the exploitation of children and vulnerable adults ➤ Strengthening collaboration across law enforcement agencies to address the cross-border nature of county lines activity ➤ Delivering child-centred, trauma-informed responses through close partnership with specialist support organisations
2:10 PM	Panel Session Two: Questions and Discussion
2:30 PM	Comfort Break
2:45 PM	Panel Session Three: Disruption and Justice – Targeting Offenders and Supporting Victims ➤ Strengthening perpetrator-focused investigations by targeting high-harm offenders and line-holders to disrupt exploitation networks ➤ Using legal mechanisms effectively, including the <i>National Referral Mechanism (NRM)</i> to protect victims ➤ Examining the proposed criminal exploitation of children offence in the <i>Crime and Policing Bill</i> and its implications for frontline practice ➤ Delivering consistent support for victims throughout the criminal justice process to improve engagement and reduce the risk of re-exploitation ➤ Tackling debt bondage by identifying and protecting victims coerced through drug debts and financial control
3:30 PM	Panel Session Three: Questions and Discussion
3:50 PM	Final Questions and Chair's Summary & Closing Comments
4:00 PM	End of Digital Conference

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DELEGATE REGISTRATION FORM

DELEGATE FEES [price per place]					
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