

BTP County Lines Taskforce – It's role, results and efforts to tackle gangs

September 15, 2020



British Transport Police has been carrying out County Lines operations across England, Wales and Scotland since it secured Home Office funding for a Taskforce in December 2019.

The main aims of the Taskforce are to tackle drugs on the railway network, and to protect children and vulnerable adults who are often exploited by gangs into selling or moving drugs.

Efforts are made to safeguard any vulnerable or exploited person arrested as part of County Lines, referring them to services built to encourage and support the person away from dangerous criminal activity.

Thirty-four vulnerable people have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism for safeguarding to date.

There have also been nearly 640 arrests, 329 seizures of drugs, 110 weapons seized and £241,000 in cash seized.

BTP has partnered with The Children's Society and their #LookCloser awareness campaign to encourage professionals and the public to 'Look Closer' for signs that a child may be at risk of criminal exploitation.

It is aimed at anyone who may encounter children in their daily lives, including service sector employees and transport workers, as public spaces are often where exploited children are most visible. Key signs of exploitation include children travelling alone, particularly during school hours, late at night or on a regular basis. They may also look lost or in unfamiliar surroundings and may be carrying large amounts of money.

Taskforce lead, Detective Superintendent Gareth Williams said: "Our Taskforce is in a unique position, we operate nationally and target County Lines activity across the railway network.

"Our experience has proven that gangs who use the railway network rely on younger people to move drugs. These individuals are victims, forced through exploitation or intimidation into desperate situations, and it's always our priority to make support available that can get them out of harm and away from crime.

"Since December, we've been carrying out operations daily, always based on developing intelligence that shows where gangs are operating. We get part of our information through working in partnership with other law enforcement agencies, but also importantly through the support of the rail industry who train their staff to spot signs of exploitation.

"These efforts to raise awareness of signs of exploitation have been greatly helped by the work of The Children's Society who's #LookCloser campaign aims to encourage everyone to spot key signs.

"Key indicators include a teenager travelling long distances, alone with a large amount of cash, or avoiding any sort of authority at stations. These indicators are small but invaluable and help inform where we target next. We have a rapidly evolving understanding of County Lines offending and we are prepared to tackle it, wherever the intelligence leads us."

Photo credit: British Transport Police

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