

# More than 270 arrests since the start of new County Lines Taskforce

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A police Taskforce targeting gangs and their efforts to shift drugs, cash and weapons across the rail network has made more than 270 arrests.

The County Lines Taskforce, set up by British Transport Police in December 2019, carries out operations almost daily and nation-wide.

Each time, officers flood train routes and stations known to be used as key routes by gangs. They are often supported by local police forces who will raid homes used to supply drugs.

To date, the Taskforce has achieved 276 arrests and 55 charges with many investigations ongoing.

More than £60,000 in drugs and £108,000 of illicit cash has been seized, and deadly weapons including a ninja star and a revolver have been removed from the rail network.

A substantial number of those arrested are under the age of 18.

In the first week of the Taskforce, a 16-year-old boy was arrested on a train from Birmingham with two golf ball seized packages of heroin and crack cocaine in his underwear.

However, key aims go beyond seizures and arrests to safeguarding the children and vulnerable adults who are often exploited or intimidated into carrying drugs.

These victims can often be caught in a spiral of working for gangs to pay off never ending debts, or through years of exploitation feel a loyalty to the people pushing them to move drugs and cash around the country.

Safeguarding and referrals to appropriate services can often be their only way out.

These services aim to encourage and support the person to help get them away from dangerous criminal activity.

Eleven people have been referred to the National referral Mechanism for safeguarding since the Taskforce began.

A vulnerable adult was arrested at Paddington station with more than 80 wraps of Class A drugs. The male and his family were safeguarded to protect them from a gang who sought to make threats over the seized drugs.

Operations continue during Covid-19 with officers targeting trains and stations across the network.

Detective Superintendent Gareth Williams, the Taskforce lead, said: "The Taskforce is going from strength to strength, continuing to make significant numbers of arrests and seizures as we target gangs operating across the country, cutting into their profits as we move towards making the movement of drugs on the railway almost untenable.

"Our primary aim will always be the young and the vulnerable who are preyed upon and exploited by these gangs. Every arrest is an opportunity to help pull someone out of a difficult situation, and every time my officers will seek to offer the victim all the support available.

"This year, forces across the country have worked together like never before. While we flood trains and stations, local forces are raiding homes used in the supply of drugs, removing gangs from the area root and stem.

"These efforts are supported by the rail operators, who are providing training to their staff, to spot people potentially involved in county lines. Key indicators include a young child 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."

*Photo credit: British Transport Police*