



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability

Thursday 22 July 2021

11.00 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Hunt of Kings Heath; Baroness Pinnock; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 28

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 231 - 237

Witnesses

I: Detective Chief Inspector Anthony Jones, County Lines and Gangs Specialist, Metropolitan Police; Detective Inspector Chris Rabey, child victim of abuse specialist, Kent Police.

Examination of witnesses

Anthony Jones and Chris Rabey.

Q231 The Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this session of the Public Services Committee in the House of Lords. This morning we are going to be talking to two policemen, both of whom are involved in working with those children and young people who get involved in activities that are then very difficult for them to get out of and that make them even more vulnerable.

I am really pleased to welcome to the committee Detective Chief Inspector Anthony Jones, who is the county lines and gangs specialist for the Metropolitan Police, and Detective Inspector Chris Rabey, a specialist for child victims of abuse in Kent Police. Both are directly involved in working with these issues and the children, and the families of those children, who get involved. Welcome to you.

As ever, I get to ask the first question, as Chair. I am Hilary Armstrong. We are very pleased that you are with us this morning as part of our overall examination of child vulnerability. When I ask the question, if you can just identify yourselves and say a little bit about your role, it will help people put names and faces to that role.

I wanted to start with Detective Chief Inspector Jones and just ask you to explain to the committee what you understand by "county lines". What are county lines? How many children do you think are involved? Why on earth is it continuing to increase?

Anthony Jones: Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for inviting me to your committee. I am the DCI in charge of our county lines task force. For a bit of context, I work in the Met specialist Crime Command and I lead Operation Orochi, the Met county lines task force. It is Home Office-funded and its inception was in October 2019. I focus on the perpetrators—those who are holding the line, orchestrating and undertaking the activity of drugs supply, and exploiting vulnerable people. In the last 18 months alone, working with our partners internally and externally, we have undertaken over 500 separate county lines investigations. I am pleased to say that in the majority of those cases we have charged those principal offenders with a minimum of Concerned in the Supply of Class A drugs.

To your questions, Chair, "county lines" is a name given to drug dealing where criminals use phone lines to move and supply the drugs, usually from cities into towns and rural areas across the country. County lines are managed and operated by independent groups or dealers, who are often members of gangs ranging from urban street gangs to serious organised crime groups. These gangs use their power and position to groom, recruit and exploit children and young people for the purpose of their criminal gain. This often involves a high level of violence, threat and force.

County lines gangs also exploit vulnerable adults by using their home addresses as a base to deal drugs. This is known as “cuckooing”, and the gangs often target people who are lonely, isolated or have addiction issues. They offer them free drugs or to pay their utility bills in exchange for using their address for their drug supply in a locality.

The Met is doing more than ever before to safeguard those exploited by county lines, including increased use of modern slavery legislation to charge those at the top of the county lines chain. In the last 12 months alone, working with our partners in the county forces, we have charged cases involving modern slavery; many vulnerable people have been actively rescued from exploitation; and 21 people have been charged with over 38 modern-day slavery offences. We work with our partners, such as the Children’s Society, to increase focus on safeguarding. We are doing a huge range of training across the Met.

As for your question about how many children are involved in county lines, it is a really difficult number to quantify. The truth is that no agency can really provide an accurate figure. However, if you look across agencies, we can get a good indication of the scale of this. For example, in London alone we know that one in five reported individuals involved in county lines are children. This is corroborated by the national data from the National County Lines Coordination Centre. It reports that 20% of nominals identified overall are children. Tragically, a third of all county lines-related homicides are juvenile victims. The NCA reports that two in three police forces have identified children and young people who are exploited in a county lines context.

If we move to our charity partners that work closely with local and national government, they report numbers in the thousands. For example, Rescue and Response, in its last strategic assessment, detailed over 3,000 young people in London involved in county lines across 41 counties. Those are big numbers. It is disturbing that the youngest are in the front-line roles. They are more susceptible to being involved in that more serious violence that I mentioned. The overwhelming majority are found in that workforce context, dealing the drugs on behalf of the elders.

However, I have to say that that cohort—the numbers I gave there—includes young men of 16 or 17, and sometimes even younger, sadly, who have been involved in gang activity for some years and may now be involved in a management role. In Operation Orochi alone, among the 430-odd line holders we have charged, the average age is 25 and the most frequent age is 21. Sadly, 16% of those are teenagers, so that gives you an appreciation of the numbers involved.

To your final question, Chair, why are the numbers of children in county lines increasing? Are they increasing or are we getting better at understanding the issues and improving our reporting mechanisms? It is probably some of both. Reporting mechanisms have improved in the last few years. The National County Lines Coordination Centre was set up in 2018. We have had direct Home Office funding since the end of 2019. What is really important is that criminal child exploitation is a priority in

law enforcement, certainly in the Met. It is really coming to the fore and is in the consciousness of every officer, as well as child sexual exploitation, for example.

The proliferation of the county lines model and the ease with which drug trafficking can take place have definitely accelerated with the use of technology. County lines is increasingly beyond the boundaries of gangs, as I mentioned. Independent groups of criminals are often very proficient at this. They are able to make existing connections on social media to source supply and build a client base. Essentially, where there is a demand, anyone can set up a county line.

Social media presents a particular challenge. As I am sure you will appreciate, the social media scene is constantly evolving. It is difficult to keep track of what young people are doing online. Associations are harder to identify for law enforcement and the risk assessments are much harder when they are online. There are limited processes for this with parents and professionals. It is a lot harder to safeguard against online grooming.

Finally, we have this new phenomenon where people are reaching out to those exploiters and asking to be part of this. They get drawn in by the perceived glamorous lifestyle, the propaganda around the fast cash and the other benefits extolled by these criminals. Yes, in summary, it is about better mechanisms, better reporting and far more activity, combined with this technology phenomenon that we have.

The Chair: Thank you for that very comprehensive answer. I wondered whether DI Rabey wanted to add anything from his experiences in Kent. I realise you do different jobs, but do you want to comment?

Chris Rabey: No, thank you, Chair. To be honest, I am not sure there is more I can say that DCI Jones has not covered, really. Within Kent we have dedicated county lines and gangs teams. They work very closely with the Met. We have dedicated safeguarding officers looking to protect children who are at risk of exploitation by these gangs. As DCI Jones says, they proactively look to charge people not only for county lines activity but using modern slavery legislation for their abuses of children. In summary, there is probably not much I can add to what DCI Jones has gone through.

The Chair: That is fine, thank you. I was really interested in why children in particular are vulnerable to being recruited. What is it that the perpetrators are looking for? What is it that makes it easy for them to get to children?

Anthony Jones: To give you an example, all the children we have arrested in the MPS county lines task force, Operation Orochi, have been looked-after children. We know these children are vulnerable to exploitation from county lines gangs. This finding is replicated across other forces. I am sure in Kent it is the same.

Talking to our colleagues in BTP, whom we work with closely, they intercept children across the country and these characteristics are the same. Issues such as domestic abuse and mental health will play a part, but any child can be exploited and groomed in relation to county lines. There are several cases where young children from affluent backgrounds with strong support networks, even private school education, have been involved. Essentially, there are key trigger points here, either adverse child experiences or, unfortunately, experiences within their family circle that mean they get exploited or reach out to exploiters.

Fundamentally, there is a group of areas that we have to look at here. We look at the child and the individual. If they have learning disabilities, substance misuse issues or mental health problems, they are going to be more susceptible to the exploitation. We look at their own position within their home and family, and whether there is neglect, abuse, any experience of violence or parental substance misuse. If they are coming out of their family home and they are with peers who are in similar situations, there is a knock-on effect. They may even be exploited by their peers or experience peer-to-peer abuse.

Then of course there are schools. This is another category: people being excluded from schools. There is a lot of evidence from DfE about this. A high percentage of those who are involved in violence or county lines are excluded. That is not just from schools, but also those who do not have employment or other things to keep them busy. All-encompassing here is the neighbourhood, of course: what neighbourhood that child is in and what they are exposed to on a day-to-day basis. They are the fundamental elements. That is really what we have seen through our work.

The Chair: Thank you for that. It certainly resonates with a lot of other evidence that we have had.

Q232 Baroness Pinnock: Good morning to you both. My question is particularly for Detective Inspector Rabey, because it is about the consequences of domestic violence, which we have just heard a bit about in relation to county lines and triggering events there. We have heard from other witnesses that a number of children are experiencing abuse and witnessing domestic violence. That was increasing before the pandemic, but there is a concern that it has increased significantly during the pandemic.

In your assessment, how large is the gap between the provision of support and the number of children at risk? Has the number of such children at risk risen during the pandemic? What about the severity of the risk? Has that changed? There is quite a lot there to start with.

Chris Rabey: Just to introduce myself, I am a detective inspector. I work for Kent Police. I currently work in our protecting vulnerable people command, and I have had experience over the past few years of working on investigations around vulnerability, including child abuse and domestic abuse, both within Kent and in the eastern region organised crime unit.

If I may break down your question to help me answer it, talking about the difference between the provision of support and the need for support, as police it is problematic for us to equate that fully, because often we are the referrers for support rather than the deliverers of it. What is obvious to police is that there is a gap between the needs and the provision of children and adolescent mental health services in particular. We see increasing waiting lists for children who need support with their mental health, and that then increases their vulnerability to crime and exploitation.

Another point around the provision of support is in our investment in diversionary schemes and intervention schemes. There is a lack of sustained funding that would probably identify a better evidence base of best practice. Because we have maybe year-long grants, there can be quite a confused landscape for practitioners to know what is available and for how long that will be available. It is maybe not as efficient as if we had longer-term funding in these areas, so that we could properly identify what is best to help children, and that could then be replicated on a local, regional and national level. With the pandemic, there has been a gap where provisions have moved from face-to-face services to reassessing and working out how they can continue to support people. That will inevitably have left a gap where people in need of that intervention have not received it.

Moving on to the second part of your question about changes in risk, within Kent we absolutely have seen changes in risk and changes in how we identify that risk within children. To demonstrate that, I have a number of points. We can show that the level of domestic abuse increased during the pandemic. That is then coupled with more children being in the house, which means that more children are present and witnessing domestic abuse. We can also show that the level of high-risk domestic abuse increased throughout the pandemic. Since those restrictions have moved on, that has gone back to the level we saw previously.

We can show that the number of children, as I said, present during domestic abuse has increased, which then means we have more referrals to the provision of support, whether that is through social care, education or health. We have seen the level of child protection investigations increase, and they have continued to be at that high level post restrictions or post lockdown. To show that, in the first six months of this year we recorded on average 1,874 child protection investigations every month. This is 237 per month more than last year and 423 per month more than 2019. That is quite telling of the increases in child protection.

We have also seen big increases in the number of investigations concerning the taking, making and sharing of indecent images. A big majority of those are self-generated images. Children who are within the home are still vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, particularly as more and more children are spending time online. That only increases their vulnerability. That is replicated in the level of investigations and referrals

that we see into our paedophile online investigation team, which has seen a 12% increase in investigations over the past year. That represents a trend that is suspected to continue.

There is one other quite pertinent point about the changes in risk during the pandemic. We saw a reduction of 24% in missing children throughout 2020 in comparison to previous years. However, for the high-risk children, that level stayed the same. That indicates to me that those children who are at high risk and are going missing, regardless of what else is going on in the outside world, are clearly being strongly pushed away or pulled away from something. The fact they are high risk tells you that this is not going to be something good.

Q233 Baroness Pinnock: Thank you ever so much for that full response. I have a couple of queries, really. How do you identify children potentially at risk of, say, domestic violence? Do you come in when it is at crisis level or are you able to get alerts earlier, before the worst of the abuse has been perpetrated?

Chris Rabey: We would always want to try to intervene in advance of things becoming critical. Often when police are called we have reached that critical point. However, there are two factors that help with identifying risk. The first is that officers need the ability to identify what makes people vulnerable. We achieve that through training and continuous professional development. Vulnerability is a thread throughout all our training courses. Whether that is your initial training as a police officer, crime investigation training, a specialist domestic abuse course or a child protection course, vulnerability is key throughout.

We also have something called the "aware principles" within Kent. This is a toolkit and a means for officers to work through and identify what is a vulnerability, and then articulate it, which is just as important. Often, the decision-maker around support will not be the officer at the scene; it will be multiple people down the line. Training is extremely important.

Information is critical to identifying vulnerability. We have strong information-sharing relationships with our partner agencies. We have a central referral unit, which is effectively the same as a multiagency safeguarding hub, but it actually offers more services. We have multiple meetings. We have district contextual safeguarding meetings and we share information so that, when officers are arriving at a scene, when they are investigating a crime or when they have any engagement with a child, they have ready access to information, which will then inform their judgment.

Then we have skill sets. We have dedicated officers who will respond to matters of vulnerability. As an example, we have youth engagement officers within our community safety units. They are trained, and it is their role to go and engage with children. That is the first factor: it is around the ability to identify risk.

The second point is about the opportunity to see it and, exactly as you said, the initial response. Officers are trained so that, regardless of what they are turning up to, whether they are dealing with a road traffic accident, domestic abuse or anything else, they are trained to be able to pick up child vulnerability within that. They do not have to just be going to something that they are being advised is a child protection incident to make that a part of their consideration.

There is then the way it runs through our investigation. The voice of the child is at the beginning of every investigation. Whether it is relevant or not, you consider it to make sure that it is at the forefront of people's minds. We then have our proactive work, with our community safety units and youth engagement officers, working with partners and task forces. They share information and identify people who are vulnerable to risk.

The last opportunity around risk is youth justice. We have a youth justice team that holds weekly meetings with partner agencies to identify the best outcome for a child who may have been involved in criminality. Where it has not resulted in, unfortunately, the necessity of charging that person and going to court, we look at the bigger picture. As police, we may not take action, but it will lead to intervention from another agency. Those are the points: the skills and the opportunities to identify risk.

Baroness Pinnock: Thank you ever so much. That is a very full answer. May I just pick up one point? Otherwise, my dedicated time slot will run out. You mentioned one-off grants that just last a year. You said that that is not always the best way to deal with issues such as these. I just wonder whether you can give us an example of how it is not as helpful as it might seem and perhaps some pointers as to what would be better.

Chris Rabey: One example that springs to mind is our violence reduction unit. We have invested a lot to have a partnership created that looks to tackle violence in under-25s, but also focuses on county lines and other aspects of child vulnerability. There is a focus on knife crime and things.

Again, the funding is year on year. That can mean that you need to implement, deliver and evaluate all within quite a tight period, and then show results. I am not an expert in it, but in my mind, if you know you have sustained funding, you can start to properly invest. You can take the time and think, "We may not get to where we want to be within the next 12 months, but we are certainly going to be able to progress towards that. We have security that we are still going to be here in two or three years".

As I say, that really adds to the confused landscape of what is available, because there are a lot of provisions for support out there. If you speak to people, they will talk to you about lots and lots of interventions, prevention and people who want to help. Working on child abuse is not a contentious issue, but there is a lack of identified best practice. Within Kent alone, you will have different services available depending on where you are in the county, and that is replicated nationally.

There are a lot of people working towards a lot of things, but a bit more co-ordination and a shared approach might make things more efficient and give you the evidence to say, "This really works; this is where we should be investing our money". I would look at domestic abuse as an example of that and our use of IDVAs—independent domestic violence advisers. That is recognised as national best practice and they are present throughout the country, but that does not seem to be the case within child abuse and child vulnerability.

Baroness Pinnock: Thank you ever so much. That has been very helpful indeed.

Q234 **Baroness Pitkeathley:** Thank you to our two witnesses for their most illuminating answers so far. My questions follow up things that you both mentioned about collaboration and co-ordination. I am going to put them to you separately first of all, starting with you, DCI Jones, if I may.

I would like you to tell us more about how you work with agencies such as schools and social services. Could you particularly mention the role of the NHS in the work you have told us about? When we think about collaboration, we always think about where the snags in it are, so you could mention what the barriers might be.

Anthony Jones: Tackling child exploitation definitely requires a proactive, holistic multiagency approach. We are always looking to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of children. The last thing we want to do is have a child in custody. These measures include considering fully a child's circumstances when making those decisions; the development of more effective non-criminal justice pathways for vulnerable children, especially those who commit lower-level crimes; providing early intervention and diversion opportunities, as has been explained previously; and then identifying those most at risk.

I could give you examples specific to those agencies that you talk about. Custody is a key crossroads. We know that there is plenty of opportunity there to understand why that individual is in custody. For example, we have the intervention programme DIVERT, which works with charities to provide opportunities to prevent reoffending. Another example would be the violence reduction units that have been mentioned already. They work closely with policing and stakeholders to understand this at a strategic level as well as providing the funding for those preventive programmes.

On a more local level, we have integrated gangs units, which work with local authorities and children's services. They sit alongside outreach services. They are able to have those quick discussions and make quick interventions based on events that have happened and come to the notice of the police.

You mentioned the NHS. The public health approach is important and something that we believe in. There is a growing consensus, as I am sure you have heard already in your committee, about the public health

approach, which looks at prevention as well as cure and addressing the root causes of the violence and the crime. That public health approach is a multiagency effort.

More locally, we have officers linked closely with charities in hospitals, such as Oasis and Redthread. Officers and charity mentors meet with the young people who come into A&E. They work with them at teachable moments. When they are most in need, their support and advice can provide immediate signposting to programmes and opportunities, and, I hope, signpost them out of the potential gang life they are in. Those are some examples of what we are doing for you.

Schools are also important. We have our really strong Safer Schools partnerships. It is really important that we work with schools and colleges across London to build those positive relationships and have a regular presence of officers within schools. That really helps build confidence between the police, teachers, parents and, inevitably, the students. That information sharing helps us predict potential disorder or fights, identify those carrying weapons and encourage the reporting of crimes and exploitation.

Clearly, there are barriers to these collaborations. As you ask, these are probably things that you have heard already. There are competing demands and priorities across collaborations. What one person demands on a day may not meet the other's demand. There are different capacities. For really strong collaboration, both sides have to have capacity, whoever is involved. The more complexity there is, the more difficult those sharing agreements become.

Certainly in my world, geography can be a barrier to that collaboration. At the moment, we have successful collaborations with over 22 county forces. While they are really strong collaborations, the geography often slows down the process; it slows down intel flow. These are all things that we have to overcome, but inevitably there can be barriers if we do not work strongly together on those. I hope that helps.

Baroness Pitkeathley: It does indeed. Thank you very much for identifying those barriers, which we are all very aware exist, and fitting this into your extremely demanding schedules. What about the data? We have heard sometimes that it may be difficult to access the data from the NHS. Do you have any difficulties with that?

Anthony Jones: No, I do not think so. There is national mandatory reporting of emergency department data. Police are informed of relevant injuries. As I say, we have officers working in hospitals now to get a better handle on what is going on in the moment. For example, the Met is piloting trauma support teams in one particular hospital, which I hope will help build rapport at that early point. Yes, I have certainly not heard or had reported to me that it is an issue.

Baroness Pitkeathley: That is very good news. Can you talk us through what happens following the arrest of a child? What about informing the

parents? How do you refer on to a youth offending team and so on? How, indeed, do you decide whether to prosecute? I realise that is a difficult question, but it would be very helpful to get an insight into that.

Anthony Jones: I will try to touch on all of those. When someone is in custody and they have been arrested, clearly we have a responsibility under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act to inform those responsible for that child, I hope their parent, guardian or carer. That is something we will absolutely do. We want to do that at the earliest opportunity and we do that.

When they are in custody, as I mentioned earlier, it opens up a whole suite of safeguarding. We take a holistic view of this. We will immediately put on a child coming to notice, which is created and sent to the MASH—the multiagency safeguarding hub. As mentioned earlier, the police MASH will have a real input into the safeguarding. They will be notifying the youth offending teams. That will happen while that individual is in custody. There are other things such as the NRM. We will raise a child exploitation CRIS to enhance that safeguarding approach.

The custody element is also crucial. Not only are we providing care to that individual, but we use the THRIVE+ model to understand threat, risk, vulnerability and harm to that individual and whether we can make early interventions. Notifying children's social care is a key part of a child's arrest. That would be within four hours.

We have Op Harbinger, which is an information-sharing memorandum between London forces, so the Met, BTP and City of London. That will notify the local authority, child social care and, as I said, MASH. It will look to provide that early intervention. We will also have youth workers in custody in Met detention. That is not even talking about the police officer pathway to reporting and our responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children's Act to report everything we see, even if it is not a crime and someone is not in custody.

There is a whole suite of safeguarding measures that we undertake. The key focus for us is to understand why that child is there and to divert them away from the reasons, perhaps, that they have become known to us.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Thank you so much. That is very helpful indeed. May I turn to you now, Detective Inspector Rabey, and ask you that collaboration question? How do you work with schools, social services and the NHS in your work with the victims of abuse?

Chris Rabey: On collaboration work, we have really good, strong partnership working in Kent. That starts with our contribution to child multiagency partnerships at an executive level. Our head of protecting vulnerable people is an executive member of the multiagency board, which oversees and co-ordinates the responses of all agencies in relation to child vulnerability.

We contribute to task forces. We have multiagency task forces where Kent Police employees are co-located with partner agencies from health, education and the Department for Work and Pensions with the common goals of tackling crime, preventing violence and safeguarding those who are most vulnerable. They then look to provide or commission bespoke diversion and intervention for individuals, and to look for themes and trends that are affecting vulnerable children across their area. I also mentioned the violence reduction unit. It is a co-located partnership of agencies, which looks for community-led solutions to child vulnerability and violence.

Internally, then, within Kent Police we have two strategic commands that take ownership for partnership working and aspects of vulnerability. We have our protecting vulnerable people command and our partnerships and community commands. At the operational level, we have a central referral unit, as mentioned. We have a multiagency safeguarding hub for Medway, which is a unitary authority, where co-located officers and employees work with their equivalents in health and social care, so that we have that joined-up working from the initial response and in managing ongoing risk.

We have multiple teams, as DCI Jones alluded to, that work closely with partners on a day-to-day basis. We have vulnerability investigation teams, missing child and exploitation teams, county lines teams and a lot of others. There is definitely strong partnership working.

If we look at the barriers, when we talk about information sharing or data sharing, there is a framework for us to share information freely. There is very clear guidance on what the thresholds are. It is all about the welfare of a child and sharing information to prevent a risk of harm. The bigger bit is the accessibility of that information. It is not that I am unable to share the information; it is about where this information is going and how I know what other partner agencies know about the child I am dealing with.

If I am a front-line officer turning up at a domestic or stopping a vehicle and speaking to a child, how do I know what is relevant to the vulnerability of that child, there and then, to make those decisions? I have to have sufficient concern to justify going into our central referral unit and holding a multiagency strategy discussion to work out who knows what: "Actually, social care knows this. Education knows this. Health knows this". There is a gap there in the accessibility of information.

I do not say it lightly, because I am sure it is an extremely difficult task. If we are going to be totally joined up, each agency needs to know what the others are doing. Otherwise how can I say that what I am dealing with is important or necessary for a social worker who might be working with that family to know? I might not even know that they are working with them. That is the first point about barriers.

There is another really important point about common goals and thresholds. To give you an example of that, for the first six months of this year there were something like 7,000 referrals into the central referral unit's front-door services, so into its assessment, from other agencies as well, but a lot from police. For 50% of those referrals, which is a massive amount, no further action is taken beyond maybe recording the information or potentially some signposting.

Even more concerning is that less than 1% related to children who were open to social care. As a police officer I am thinking, "This child needs some sort of support", but there is a disparity between what social care and early help support is available and my views as a professional. I am also not providing the information that will probably be most useful for social care, because, of all the information we are putting in, only 1% is for those children who might be at the highest risk.

That might be a sign that the interventions are really working well, but it probably should be drastically different. I am not saying that you would want it to be 100%, but 1% seems very low. That commonality of goals, priorities and thresholds is important. I have already mentioned sustained funding, so I will not go through that.

Baroness Pitkeathley: If you have those conflicts between your assessment of a situation and, say, children social care's assessment, how does one go about resolving them? What happens?

Chris Rabey: Ultimately, social care workers are the professionals. Their view on the needs of that child from a social care point of view is going to be better than mine, because they have the training; they have the infrastructure; they are aware of the demands.

"Conflict" is probably the wrong word. Whatever decision we are making, it is important for that to be informed by the knowledge of those partners. If, for instance, there is a decision about a child being removed from a family, that is ultimately a decision for social care, but the decision needs to be made in line with what I know as police, and what health and education know, so that it is an informed decision. There needs to be a method so we are able to discuss that, which we have with strategy meetings. We have well-established relationships and the ability to do that.

It is similar to a decision to arrest. Ultimately, that is a decision for police. Other agencies may not agree with that. Officers may make a decision to react to a spontaneous incident in the interests of that child at the time, which may not be in their long-term best interest. At the time, you have to react and deal with things.

In terms of strong differences, we have open relationships and good communication. We have strong supervision. Supervisors can communicate with their equivalents. If things still cannot be resolved through that, there are clear escalation policies as well. There are policies

for how I, as a police officer, raise concerns about a decision for social care and the formal channel through which that flows.

Baroness Pitkeathley: I could go on asking questions, but I must hand back to the Chair in the interests of time. Thank you very much indeed.

The Chair: I was just going to ask Lord Davies to come in quickly, because he is always quite sharp.

Q235 **Lord Davies of Gower:** I will be very quick. I have so many questions about multiagency partnerships and intelligence-led policing, but I just want to ask one quick question. Is there a correlation between county lines crime and knife crime? Perhaps DCI Jones could answer.

Anthony Jones: The answer is undoubtedly yes. County lines fuel violence, and unfortunately that violence is often the knife violence that we see so tragically and regularly. So the answer to that is absolutely yes. That is why we are driving down on the county lines: to suppress the violence.

We are not just working to pursue those line holders; we are working with many of our colleagues throughout the Met. For example, we are supporting homicide investigations where there is a county lines link to quickly identify those in the county lines space and to assist with that. We are working with our partners in the counties who have violence events that are linked to county lines, and we are able very quickly to suppress that tit-for-tat activity.

The answer is that there is undoubtedly a link. In the Met we have the violent crime task force; we work closely with it on intelligence-led operations involving county lines and drug supply throughout London.

Q236 **Baroness Tyler of Enfield:** Before I move on to the final issue of collaboration at national level, could I ask a quick follow-up question about collaboration at local level? We have heard so much evidence today and in previous sessions about teenagers involved in county lines effectively falling into the gaps between the statutory partners. A specific issue that has come up is how effective the accountability and scrutiny of the three statutory safeguarding partners is. Does it all go upwards? Is part of the problem that there is no horizontal accountability so that the agencies have to account for how effectively they are working together, rather than just on their individual bit of it?

DCI Jones, I am ever so sorry, but I have to ask you to be relatively brief, just because of time.

Anthony Jones: No, that is fine. I agree. An experience that we had only recently with the Home Office funding and the collaborations between funded partners has demonstrated that pooling resources and focusing in one direction definitely helps. In respect of those agencies that you talk about, the Department of Health and Social Care or DfE, I absolutely see the benefits in these strategies being linked together, because of the complexities and issues that relate to county lines offending. The

common characteristics of children involved in county lines are wholly relevant to these government departments. Health, social care and education are all key elements of why children fall into county lines supply.

We see it locally through strong partnerships, but I would definitely support the idea of taking that up to the department level in government. I have seen it in an operational setting, and these are areas that will drive the opportunity to join the dots and suppress the activity that is going on. Essentially, those different departments represent the different strands and common characteristics that we see. Yes, I completely agree.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: DI Rabey, would it help to have joint accountability across the safeguarding partners?

Chris Rabey: Yes, I totally agree. To echo what DCI Jones says, the joined-up approach starts at the very top. If we have shared priorities and shared goals, that makes a difference to operational delivery. Yes, I would agree.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: That leads into my final question. Apart from the obvious one of having more money, what else would help in terms of the way the Home Office supports police on the front line to protect vulnerable children? If there was a more overt joined-up strategy, perhaps involving the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department for Education, would that help? DI Rabey, would you like to go first?

Chris Rabey: If we are looking at what we would want to support vulnerable children on the front line, the first one is accountability online. That is about not just CSE—child sexual exploitation. As DCI Jones said at the beginning, it plays out through all forms of vulnerability, abuse and exploitation. We need accountability for the tech companies that provide the platform for offending to occur, and not only that, but the service providers, so that people who commit crime online are easily identifiable. Those are the two points: it is enabling and then making sure we can see who is committing crime.

We have spoken about the investment in intervention and diversion. We need sustained funding, the identification of best practice and then to make sure that best practice is shared regionally and nationally. I agree about the joined-up strategy. Shared goals help massively. An example would be in education. It is really important that the health and well-being of a child is assessed at the same level as academic achievement.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: DCI Jones, on this issue about the need for a joined-up strategy at national level between government departments, would that make a difference? If so, what would your top priorities in that strategy be?

Anthony Jones: Yes, to echo what has been said, more centre-led collaboration will definitely help. Bringing in those who represent the true

voice of young people and representing the context and the reality in which they live would help. Bringing together successful grass-roots projects is a priority for that. There are great pockets and examples of fantastic work. Why not bring that up, share it and drive it nationally?

As Chris says, we need to share the best practice of those successes, for sure. With a county lines lens, this is about expanding what we have already seen has been really successful in the Home Office programme, incorporating even more problem solving, bringing more agencies to the table and having that backing from the Home Office, not just financially but in its drive and commitment to work with us on solving those issues.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Just pursuing this theme a bit further, should there be more nationally driven or encouraged joint training between the various statutory safeguarding partners? DI Rabey, would you like to go first?

Chris Rabey: Yes, training is really important. It goes back to shared priorities, shared goals, identification of best practice and then making sure that people are aware of it, and the training is what follows. Yes, shared training across agencies is really important.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Are you aware of any shared training at the moment?

Chris Rabey: We have shared training, which is often led through the Kent Community Safety Partnership. Yes, there is shared training that is delivered. Within Kent, that is driven through our safety partnership.

Anthony Jones: The Met is involved in national training and has access to it. From my perspective, we have been really successful in applying the Modern Slavery Act to county lines. It is an example of where we can take that best practice and share it nationally, certainly around the relevant orders, multiagency partnership work, identification and how we disrupt those offenders who are exploiting children.

It is about taking that best practice and sharing it nationally. The Home Office is doing this, actually, with the programme among our exporters and importers. More of that would definitely be fantastic.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: That is great. Thank you very much indeed.

The Chair: We have had another fascinating morning talking with you about what is happening on the ground in trying to support vulnerable children, whether they are being exploited by perpetrators in county lines, exploited within the home and so on. We are really grateful to you. All of this just adds to the knowledge and understanding that we have of what is going to happen. I have Lord Hogan-Howe with a very quick question.

Q237 **Lord Hogan-Howe:** This is for DCI Jones. I have to declare an interest: I was previously a police officer at the Met. The question, Anthony, is this. Those young people who have been identified as offenders were

arrested for drug dealing, I guess. When they were put into diversion, did the diversion work? Are you seeing any reduction in the number of rearrests? As we know, kids who get involved in crime sadly get rearrested quite often.

Anthony Jones: I know that the DIVERT programme, for sure, has seen successes. I believe that over 800 individuals have been through that programme and 200 or 300 of those have been reported as being diverted into employment and other diversionary activities, so it is having an effect. There are lots of other programmes ongoing that we can learn from nationally. Without a doubt, diversion tactics have a place. We will definitely look to do as much as we can in that space.

The Chair: So they are successful but now wholly successful. I do not think we would expect complete success, but we need to be realistic about which interventions work and which do not, so that we invest in the most effective way. Thank you very much indeed for all your evidence this morning. We will think about that and see just how it fits into our overall picture. It is my responsibility now to formally end this meeting. Thank you all very much indeed.