

Written evidence submitted by Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner (SOC0058)

To Chair of Home Affairs Select Committee – Dame Karen Bradley

Dear Dame Karen

Many thanks first of all for inviting me to speak at the recent HASC meeting on the Impact of Serious and Organised Crime on Local Neighbourhoods.

I hope that you found what I had to say interesting and informative. I promised to send in a further written response to add some rich texture and expand on some of the subjects. It has taken a little longer than anticipated as I wanted to get more detail so apologies.

In doing so I shall try not to repeat old ground but rather give additional information that
hopeful **Scale of Drug Crime / Govt Drug Strategy**

There is an inherent dissonance between the number of drug offences and the amount of crime driven by addiction. These are not the same thing. Drug offences per se measures police activity as it covers supply and possession. In Dorset this is a small percentage of crime ie 1488 out of a total of 47124 – 3%. However we know that 11/15 SOC groups in Dorset deal in drugs. Dorset has the 9th highest use of heroin and crack cocaine according to From Harm 2 Hope. We know from Dame Carol Black's work that the illicit drug market is worth 9.4 billion.

We know addiction drives theft / violence and shoplifting. A drug testing on arrest pilot in Dorset showed 65-70% of Domestic Abuse offenders had cocaine and or heroin in their systems. So use of drug offences is a blunt tool to assess the scale of the problem. The NCA describe drugs as our highest threat.

This being the case and the main driver of criminality why is the drugs threat not being gripped. We used to have an independent drug advisor, a minister designated as the drugs lead, a drug lead in the Home Office, a drugs strategy and a quarterly interministerial forum which connected across portfolios and down to the frontline. The only one of those we still have is the independent advisor but only reinstated recently. We cannot hope to halve VAWG, halve knife crime or have safer streets without addressing the underlying issue.

2. **County Lines / Police Operations and Fast Parcels**

In part due to the now embedded Police Operations Operation Viper and Scorpion the County Lines Modus Operandi has shifted and adapted. The major shift is to greater localisation and activity both in urban and rural areas. Lines tend to be more local with local children and young people exploited. A just in time philosophy is adopted for drug supply with safe house rotated and other storage options utilised. Phones are given to clean skins and runners can change on a daily basis. Recruitment can occur online or in school by other pupils. Marketing is via social media and smartphone apps.

I have attached below a summary briefing on Op Viper, Morile and County Lines in Dorset with more detail. It also contains an example of Clear Hold Build which has worked.

The challenge with CHB is getting the Hold and Build to happen – a stronger duty on local authorities to collaborate on such initiatives would be welcomed.

29.06.026

Clear Hold Build (CHB) and County Lines Briefing:

This briefing provides an update on how county lines criminality has evolved and the current scale of drug-related harm across Dorset, with a focus on both urban and rural communities, along with an update on CHB.

PCC Dashboard:

Op - Viper*	22/23	23/24	24/25	12-months to 31st Mar	Change v 24/25	
Disruptions	1035	1033	1267	712	-555	
County Lines Closed	35	51	26*	25	n/a	
Cash Seized	£56k	£98k	£150k	£297k	+£147k	
Safeguarding (People)	88	109	102	78	-24	
Drugs Seized (kg)	6.3	11.3	33.7	80.0	+46.3	

*Since Oct 2024 there has been a Force change in the way that County Lines are recorded as being closed. This is now in line with National guidance where they meet a Type 1 or Type 2 line closure. Previously lines were recorded as closed if they ceased to be actively operating in Dorset. The change in this recording process will impact on the number of lines recorded as closed against these new guidelines but does not reflect a change in practice or a reduction in effort by the Force.

Please note that the data is updated on a quarterly basis, so there will not be a further update available until next month

Information gathered, to provide context on Morile, FMS, County Lines in Dorset:

County lines activity in Dorset continues to adapt, with a clear shift towards greater localisation of operations. Whereas historically lines were run by offenders travelling in and out of the county, networks are now more likely to become embedded locally once established, supported by locally recruited runners and infrastructure. Approximately 20 active lines are currently mapped, including both locally based offenders and

networks extending from metropolitan areas, particularly London. Established lines demonstrate the longevity and resilience of these groups.

There has been a notable change in operating tactics, with reduced reliance on traditional “cuckooed” addresses for storing drugs due to increased detection risk, and a move towards more fluid and concealed storage arrangements. Groups also frequently rotate runners and mid-level distributors, sometimes on a daily basis, to frustrate law enforcement efforts and obscure supply chains, making identification of upstream organisers increasingly complex.

Technology is playing a growing role in both supply and recruitment. Online platforms are now routinely used not only for drug marketing and distribution but also to target and recruit children and vulnerable individuals, often through social media or direct contact near schools. This has reinforced the overlap between county lines activity and child criminal exploitation, with a discernible shift toward the use of local children rather than those trafficked from outside the county. At the same time, enforcement activity indicates that although overall reported violence linked to drug lines has not increased significantly during 2025, serious violence remains an intrinsic feature of the market. This violence is typically directed between rival groups rather than the public, but is highly visible and impactful within communities, as evidenced by recent incidents involving weapons such as machetes and knives. Enforcement operations continue to recover significant quantities of weapons alongside drugs, underscoring the ongoing risk.

The overall scale and impact of drug crime in Dorset remains high and is reflected in both intelligence and organised crime assessments. Drug supply continues to be assessed as one of the highest harm threats facing the force under the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) framework and is a core component of the 2026/27 Control Strategy. Activity is assessed as occurring daily, though a significant proportion remains unreported. Organised crime mapping indicates that 11 of the 15 active organised crime groups in Dorset—over 70%—are linked to drug criminality, predominantly Class A supply and county lines networks. Intelligence volumes further reinforce this position, with 7,610 drug-related intelligence logs recorded in 2025, representing 46.6% of all intelligence submissions and a slight increase on the previous year. This demonstrates both the scale of the issue and its centrality to wider serious and organised crime demand.

Beyond urban centres, there is clear evidence that drug markets and associated harms extend into rural communities, facilitated by the adaptability of county lines models and the use of local networks. Drug-related criminality is closely linked to a range of other threats, including violence, trafficking, child exploitation and money laundering, meaning its impact is both direct and systemic.

Nationally, the threat picture is also intensifying, with diversification in drug markets, evolving importation methods, and increasing drug-related deaths contributing to rising harm levels between 2024 and 2025. Locally, partnership activity and targeted

enforcement—such as coordinated intensification weeks under Operations Mille and Scorpion—continue to disrupt networks, remove drugs and weapons from circulation, and safeguard vulnerable individuals, but the underlying demand and adaptability of offenders mean that drug crime and county lines activity will remain a significant and enduring challenge for Dorset.

Below is a recent slide prepared for the Combating Drugs Partnership board. This is a very current summary of how we are seeing County Lines operating in Dorset.



**DORSET
POLICE**

Focus Area – County Lines operating locally

- County Lines have significantly changed their operating method in recent years, reflected by a change in the national definition to reflect this whereby County Lines can be internal – for example someone supplying between [REDACTED] would be a County Line, not the original definition from a city to an urban or rural area in another county.
- The recruitment of children is now changing, previously we would see out of county children from large inner cities [REDACTED] where they would send [REDACTED] children to Dorset to transport the drugs/cash. This has changed in that they have started to recruit and exploit local children, reduces the risk to the line of children getting stopped in vehicles and trains better securing their business model.
- This is reflected in the number of children open to our SGH's and intelligence around recruitment outside schools and online platforms.
- Bulk messaging is evolving – no longer will they send text saying 'on for both' – we are now seeing blank messages being sent to evade law enforcement or methodology such as using online internet service providers that do not store cellsite or call data.
- Phones are often now held with clean skins [REDACTED]
- Cuckooing – previously lines would hold their drugs and cash in addresses with vulnerable, this is evolving as they recognise the disruption to their activities with police visiting these addresses frequently. They have moved to a more undetectable safe house location.

Executive Summary – Clear, Hold, Build (CHB) Review (April 2026)

The Clear, Hold, Build (CHB) programme is a multi-agency framework designed to reduce Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) by combining enforcement activity with long-term community resilience and partnership working. Introduced nationally by the Home Office, CHB brings together police, local authorities, statutory and voluntary partners to tackle organised crime groups (OCGs) through three concurrent phases: Clear (enforcement and disruption), Hold (preventing re-establishment of criminality), and Build (creating sustainable community improvements)

Outcomes

CHB was launched in March 2024 following analysis that identified a location as a priority hotspot due to:

High levels of organised crime activity.

Significant deprivation.

Elevated MoRiLE harm scores.

Low public trust and confidence.

The programme delivered strong partnership-led enforcement activity involving Dorset Police, SWROCU, local authorities, Trading Standards, Immigration Enforcement and other agencies. Public engagement was prioritised through the creation of the “A Clear Hold Build Strategy” brand, helping to increase community awareness and support.

Key Results (to November 2025)

44 arrests for drug, weapon and vehicle-related offences.

5 county lines closed.

4 vehicles seized.

3 closure orders obtained.

£1.3 million of illicit tobacco, vapes and cigarettes seized.

£15,000 cash seized.

Significant quantities of Class A and Class C drugs recovered.

Disruption of commercial premises linked to organised crime.

Crime Reduction Impact

Compared with the previous year, the area experienced:

Violence against the person reduced by 4%.

Theft reduced by 18%.

Sexual offences reduced by 20%.

Robbery reduced by 25%.

Public order offences reduced by 19%.

Weapons offences reduced by 8%.

Drug offences increased by 46%, detections attributed to enhanced enforcement activity.

Community Confidence

The programme has generated increased public confidence, improved community intelligence flows, and positive feedback from residents, businesses and the Business Improvement District. These indicators suggest improved trust in partners and support for local policing interventions

Challenges

Despite success in disruption and enforcement, progress through the Hold and Build phases has been limited by:

Funding and resource constraints.

Continued focus on enforcement activity.

Lack of a strong resident community base.

Absence of an established community leader or group capable of driving long-term Build-phase initiatives.

The predominantly commercial nature the location has reduced opportunities for sustained community ownership, which is a key requirement for successful CHB delivery.

Future Direction

The review concludes that CHB has been effective as a framework for tackling organised crime and delivering place-based improvements. However, the programme has now reached a stage where further formal CHB activity is unlikely to deliver significant additional benefit beyond normal operational policing and partnership activity.

Looking ahead, SOC profiles identify other location as potential areas for future CHB implementation. One of these locations, benefits from an existing community group, active local engagement and support from elected members, making it more suitable for progression into the Hold and Build phases.

Strategic Recommendations

Conclude the formal CHB programme in two locations, transitioning activity into business-as-usual policing and partnership operations.

Use SOC local problem profiles as the primary evidence base for identifying future CHB locations.

Secure strategic commitment through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), with tactical governance and decision-making through the Partnership Co-ordination Group (PCG).

Establish a Task and Finish Group for Charminster to develop a full CHB framework, informed by SOC intelligence, community feedback and clear partner responsibilities.

Overall Conclusion

The review finds that CHB has delivered measurable reductions in crime, significant disruption of organised crime groups, and improved public confidence within two locations. While long-term Build-phase objectives have been constrained by local demographics and resources, the programme has demonstrated the effectiveness of a coordinated multi-agency approach and provides a strong model for future implementation in more community-focused locations.

Regarding fast parcels – the use by serious organised crime of the post network is undeniable. In Dorset for example in the period February to May, the SWROCU made 44 seizures the majority being cannabis with a street value of £564,795. The relationship and co-operation between agencies and the Post Office is paramount. I can supply more detail if that is wished.

1. **Serious Organised Crime in the Rural Environment**

It is obvious that large plant and machinery theft such as tractors / ATVs etc is serious and organised. Waste crime and on an industrial scale similarly. What is less well understood is that hare coursing can also be serious and organised with large gambling operations associated with it. Regional Organised Crime Units use a threat risk and harm prism that is violence based. This by definition tends to be more urban – speaking candidly it is difficult to get rural SOC to be given the consideration it requires. Please speak to **the National Rural Crime Unit**. They will be able to give you the National perspective. There are links from Rural SOC with Modern Day Slavery, Violence, Drugs Supply, Firearms. The operation is both regional and international to Europe and beyond with connection through the ports to Europe and beyond. They can give examples of the cross border nature eg a gang operating across seven force areas specialising in stealing GPS systems.

There is a lot of academic work emerging:

[Rural Crime: Serious Organised and International. Who Victimises Rural Communities?](#)

2. **Police Reform**

I was glad to be able to discuss a little of my concerns regarding Police Reform – it was slightly curtailed so I thought I would add some detail. I actually asked a consultancy specialising in policing to look at the issues from the perspective of the people of Dorset. My greatest concern is that I have not seen a cost/benefit analysis linking to the high volume / low harm crime which is the concern of my residents. The cost is going to be huge – (one estimate I have heard is £1.2billion) and at the same time core elements that address SOC are being defunded eg ROCUs / BTP County Lines Task Force / Waste Water Analysis / Drug Testing On Arrest. We are rearranging deckchairs when we should be avoiding the iceberg.

Below is the email I have written to local MPs which summarises the issues.

I am really worried about policing and the current direction of travel.

POLICE REFORM PROPOSALS AND MY CONCERNS

There is a clear ambition from government for Police Reform. I believe and agree that it is sensible to standardise procurement, systems, technical procedures and policies. However the rate of change, the lack of integration with other systemic reforms and the critical lack of understanding of the people's desires rather than just that of policing, will in my opinion, mean that it's delivery will be seriously compromised or fail completely. It needs to be paused and reconsidered from a practical locally delivered perspective rather than an ideological political one. It cannot risk delivering a poorer service for the public yet charging them more for the privilege. No one including in Dorset the very professional hard working police officers would want that to happen.

There are three core elements to the reform process.

1. National Police Service (NPS)

The original element which was first discussed is the creation of a new national police service (NPS) that will draw together and rationalise the existing national police agencies. This principle is sensible as long as what is currently delivered locally by national or regional entities is preserved. The issue is that this is a major transformative change which will cost significantly – we are repeatedly told that there is no funding to support this. The only conclusion will be that current police budgets will be top sliced including that of the lowest centrally funded force in the country – Dorset. This then presents a real risk of compromising local neighbourhood policing for a more remote central edifice.

It is worse still as to fund police reform which will cost hundreds of millions government is already cutting core elements that address local and serious organised crime such as Hotspot Policing, Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs), British Transport Police County Lines Task Force, Waste Water Analysis and Drug Testing On Arrest. Truly it is rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic whilst it sinks.

More concerning from an ideological change is that this new centre will dictate policy. It will be commanded by a new “super” chief constable. Local and regional chief constables will be directly influenced and indirectly answerable to this new “super” chief who in turn will report directly to the Home Secretary.

Currently, democratic accountability of chief constables and the responsibility for setting local police priorities rests with PCCs and Deputy Mayors on behalf of their residents in their police and crime plans. Under these new structures setting priorities and accountability will shift from the local to the national level. That is no surprise as the title of the new proposed police reform white paper is, *From local to national: a new model for policing*. The logical continuation of this direction of travel for police reform is a police state. All of which are in direct contravention to the ethos of policing in this country as defined in the original Peelian principles, key of which is that the police are the public and the public are the police.

2. Police Force Restructure

If it were possible of even more concern is the review of Police Force Structure. Lord Hogan-Howe, the ex-commissioner of the Metropolitan Police is due to present his results. The terms of reference of this review, and statements by Lord Hogan Howe made it clear, even before the commencement of the review, that he was determined to amalgamate small forces into larger forces. There is no evidence to show that bigger forces deliver a more efficient and effective police service; in fact, quite the opposite is true. The counties with the lowest crime rates are those policed by the smaller forces. In Dorset despite being the lowest centrally funded force and a small force through strategic grip we have improved from 10th safest place to 4th.

But even more shocking than the lack of unbiased analysis is that it has been made very clear that no additional funds will be made available for amalgamations

It is clear that there are a number of issues. The concept is based on three flawed assumptions

1. Bigger forces are better at cutting crime
2. Forces can combine differing structures, policies, technical data and communication systems without an input of funding
3. That there would be no increase in crime during the merger process – this has been seen in many large mergers.

It is totally naive to think that we could continue to deliver the current level of policing while trying to combine the various and often differing policies and technical data and communication systems and procedures of two or even three small police forces into one larger force.

To be clear the most likely suggestion is a SW Force and I believe there will be an operational bias towards large urban areas and a subject bias towards serious crime at the detriment of high volume low harm crime ie ASB, Shoplifting, Drug Dealing, Rural Crime – the very things the people of Dorset wish to see addressed.

The Cabinet Office statement of last week stated that “regional police forces, fire and rescue services and Integrated Care Boards align with the boundaries of strategic authorities”. The most likely strategic authority boundary for us remains Wessex, and both BCP and Dorset are reported to be pushing hard for this to happen, as are the other areas. I appreciate that BHH may think different, but this statement from Govt clearly cuts across whatever it is that he may be hoping for.

3. Leadership and Governance Reform

On the 6th of June, the Lords Blunkett and Herbert who headed a leadership commission produced a report entitled *Professionalism and performance, Police leadership for the future*. And I quote from the report; *‘Too many police leaders have lost sight of their core deliverables that make for a successful police organisation that command public confidence. Radical change is needed to ensure that police leaders are trained and equipped with the skills, behaviours and knowledge needed to lead high-performing police organisations. It goes on to state; ‘High profile and numerous instances of police leaders failing to meet standards of integrity, honesty and professionalism highlight the most acute leadership failings.’ ‘Eight chief constables or former chief constables are either currently under investigation or are awaiting disciplinary procedures’, and common themes in the IOPC investigations ‘involve cronyism, nepotism, abuse of position for sexual purpose and corruption’.*

But what is disturbing is that the very senior leadership criticised in the review will be left to put its recommendations into practice. In a democratic society the police should never be allowed to mark their own homework. The Home Secretary did not, I believe, consult with any PCCs before undertaking Police Reform – in this regard it is a bit like a landowner asking poachers if they want gamekeepers.

If policing in this country is not to collapse altogether, police reform must be coordinated and rationalised with the other macro ‘reform’ agenda of this government, which is English devolution and local government reform. Unfortunately, the reform of local government is already starting to unravel due to a failure of public consultation and planning competency. It is a government ambition to restructure local government around mayoral strategic authorities and police governance being delegated to a deputy mayor for policing and crime. The concern must be for the interregnum period of transition between the disestablishment of PCCs and the transfer of the function of police oversight and democratic accountability to a deputy mayor. The observations of the Leadership Commission make the importance of democratic oversight of chief constables very clear. The strategic grip from the people’s needs to the delivery by the police force via the Police and Crime Plan and PCC has to be replicated.

As currently planned during this period when a temporary foundational strategic authority is in place, civilian oversight of the chief constable and police will rest with a police and crime

board which will appoint a police and crime lead. The executive authority of the PCC to hire and fire chief constables and hold their forces to account will surely be significantly weakened when it rests with a temporary board. The worst case will be a transfer to Police Board and then a subsequent transfer to a mayoral authority. Exactly what may happen in Dorset. The obvious solution would be to extend the existing tenures of PCCs to cover that period of transition and political uncertainty. Unfortunately, having been established by the previous government, it is highly unlikely that the Home Secretary will reconsider her decision to disestablish of PCCs, especially when that decision has been actively encouraged by senior police leaders.

If you weaken the local governance as is being deliberately suggested then you effectively centralise decision making to the state. When the different reform elements are considered in total you can see that the Home Secretary will have direct control of policing, both through central priorities over riding local and through hierarchical grip. If the Head of the NPS reports directly, if there are only a roomful of a small number of forces and if the Home Secretary has the power to hire and fire then this looks like a political coup. A translation indeed from the local to the national – a change from local policing delivered for local people to a state police force answerable to the Home Secretary. This is a direction of travel we should all be wary of.

Conclusion

To summarise every transformational change requires funding to enact - without taking that into account is naïve or even culpable. This unfunded reform comes at the same time as Dorset (the lowest nationally funded force) has had to deliver savings of £17million over three years. This is being done at the same time that an unfunded demand is being put on policing of £480 million due to the premature release of prisoners. Where will the money for such large transformations come from if not local policing budgets or more taxation?

There has to be a better way – below are four suggestions:

Fix the unfairness of the funding formula so we all start with an even playing field

With the NPS – cost it out and go slowly without compromising current policing and starting with national procurement.

Dorset has shown that a small force can deliver going from the 10th safest to 4th safest police area. Look at strategic grip and crime reduction not size of force as your measure.

If mayoralities are the goal - transition governance to that smoothly and rapidly without interim measures.

Finally there has been no public consultation about Police Reform and therefore I have started a survey which will allow the people of Dorset to have their say. Please can you share the link:

[Dorset PCC launches public survey on the future of policing · Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner](#)

I have come to a considered position on Police Reform from an evidence base having commissioned an external consultancy to analyse it from the point of view of Dorset – if you would like to meet with me I would be happy to present those insights to you.

It would be wrong to be silent whilst this slow moving train crash unravels – please help me in the interests of the people of Dorset and lobby against this as it stands. My fear is that Dorset Police will disappear and the people of Dorset will be paying more for a lesser service.

I hope that these additional comments are useful – if you wish me to elaborate further on any points I would be happy too.

Kind regards,

Police & Crime Commissioner

