

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



Digital Conference

Thursday 12th February 2026



Key Speakers



HEDDLU
TRAFNIDIAETH
PRYDEINIG
BRITISH
TRANSPORT
POLICE

Det. Supt. David Udomhiaye



Junior Smart OBE



Inspector Duncan Evans

**missing
people**

Susannah Drury



**WEST YORKSHIRE
POLICE**

Det. Supt. Marie Bulmer



**MERSEYSIDE
POLICE**

Det. Supt. Gary Stratton

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



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Programme

09:30 AM	Delegate Online Login
10:05 AM	Chair's Welcome and Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew Scott, <i>Managing Director, TONIC</i>
10:10 AM	Keynote Address: County Lines and Child Criminal Exploitation – Insights into National Trends and Emerging Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 • Inspector Duncan Evans, <i>Lead for Child Exploitation, National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC)</i>
10:40 AM	Keynote Address: Questions and Discussion
11:00 AM	Comfort Break
11:10 AM	Panel Session One: Proactive Safeguarding – Identifying Risk and Intervening Early to Counter Grooming and Exploitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 • Detective Superintendent David Udomhiaye, <i>Lead for Covert Policing & County Lines, British Transport Police</i> • Susannah Drury, <i>Director of Policy and Development, Missing People</i> • Junior Smart OBE, <i>Founder and Gangs/CCE Lead, SOS Gangs Project; St Giles Trust</i>
12:00 PM	Panel Session One: Questions and Discussion
12:25 PM	Comfort Break

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1:10 PM	<p>Programme Cont'd</p> <p>Panel Session Two:</p> <p>From Insight to Action – Local Intelligence and Multi-Agency Strategies to Break Exploitation Pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lib Peck, <i>Director, London's Violence Reduction Unit</i> • Detective Inspector Gary Stratton, <i>County Lines Investigations, Merseyside Police</i> • Johnny Bolderson, <i>Senior Service Manager, County Lines Support and Rescue Service, Catch-22</i>
2:00 PM	Panel Session Two: Questions and Discussion
2:20 PM	Comfort Break
2:30 PM	<p>Panel Session Three:</p> <p>Disruption and Justice – Targeting Offenders and Supporting Victims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detective Superintendent Marie Bulmer, <i>Head of Serious and Organised Crime, West Yorkshire Police</i> • <i>Senior Representative, Crown Prosecution Service (invited)</i> • Maleeka Dachi, <i>Head of Service, Youth Justice, London Borough of Lewisham</i>
3:20 PM	Panel Session Three: Questions and Discussion
3:40 PM	Final Questions and Chair's Summary & Closing Comments
3:45 PM	End of Digital Conference

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DELEGATE FEES [price per place]					
BOOKING & PAYMENT OPTIONS:	1 PLACE		2-4 PLACES		5+ PLACES
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Delegate Name:	Job Title:	Email Address:
1.		
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Total no. places:		

Invoicing Details:			
Name of Key Contact:		Job Title:	
Organisation Name:		Department:	
Address:		Postcode:	
Email Address:		Telephone No:	
Accounts Dept. Contact:		Telephone No:	
Purchase Order No:		Cost Centre Code (if applicable):	

Card Payments:			
Government Procurement Card (GPC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	MasterCard	<input type="checkbox"/>
		VISA / VISA Debit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cardholder:		Postcode:	
Card No:		Expiry date:	
Date:		Signature:	
		Total Amount:	£ + VAT (at 20%)
		Security Code (CVC):	

Other Payment Methods:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Please Invoice my organisation £ + VAT (at 20%) quoting Purchase Order No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electronic / BACS Remittance of £ + VAT (at 20%) to Nat West Bank Plc, Sort Code: 60-24-12 Account No: 88880419 Please email remittance advice to accounts@policyforesight.com or fax to 020 3633 5766
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