

Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy

Our Approach to Ending the Criminal Exploitation of
Vulnerable Children and Adults by Gangs

2018-2021

PREVENT

PROTECT



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Foreword

Gangs, and the youth violence that arises as a result of gang activity, can have a devastating impact on both the individuals involved and surrounding communities. Though only a small number of our young people are embroiled in gangs – less than 1% of Kent’s children and young people come into contact with the Criminal Justice System in total – these individuals can have a disproportionately negative influence on wider society as a result of their anti-social behaviour and crime.

We have seen a steady increase in the number of gangs operating across Kent and Medway – from mostly London-based street gangs venturing into Kent to sell drugs, to the development of local ‘home grown’ gangs – and a corresponding increase in ‘gang on gang’ violence and the grooming of vulnerable individuals by gang members.

To enable our multi-agency partnership work together to best effect to deal with gangs and youth violence in the county, we have developed this strategy. This document sets out our approach to tackling gang crime and ensuring community safety, outlining where we are now and where we want to be in the future in order to better lead, plan, commission and deliver services across our partnership. Correspondingly, the activities we are undertaking are honed to disrupt and enforce as well as support gang members and those affected by gangs.

This document does not replace the individual strategies and action plans each agency has in place to deal with gangs operating in Kent and Medway or local area Community Safety Partnership plans. Rather, this strategy sits over our individual agency strategies, providing a clear ‘statement of intent’ in relation to our partnership work in this arena and a

collective focus to address gangs together through an agreed set of objectives, outcomes and measures. This strategy also allows us to establish a common language and shared understanding of what a gang is and what it does across our partnership – enabling us to work across our agency boundaries more effectively to tackle the issues arising. See our glossary of terms on page 16.

As a result of local profiling, we know that the majority of young people involved in gangs in Kent and Medway are aged between 15 and 25. This strategy therefore focuses on this cohort. However, we recognise that gangs can target vulnerable people of any age and put them at risk of serious harm, and we take this into account in both our strategic approach and operational practice. Furthermore, we recognise that young people involved in gangs can be subject to multiple other associated risks, such as trafficking, going missing, sexual exploitation and even radicalisation.¹ We work tirelessly to ensure that these associated risks are identified early and that we provide the right services to support young people in the best way to keep them safe and to promote their wellbeing.

This strategy provides us with a clear framework around which we can focus our resources and energy to have the greatest impact, with an emphasis on prevention and diversion alongside enforcement. Perhaps most importantly, we want to stop young people from becoming engaged with gang activity at the earliest stage and to make it easier for them to exit gangs when they are already involved.

Only by working together can we achieve these goals and this document underscores our commitment to doing so.

Gill Rigg, Chair,
Kent Safeguarding Children Board

John Drew, Chair,
Medway Safeguarding Children Board

Cllr. Mike Hill,
Kent Community Safety Partnership

Cllr. Adrian Gulvin,
Chair, Medway Community Safety Partnership

Executive Summary

This strategy is the first multi-agency commitment to tackle gangs operating across Kent and Medway and to support those affected by gangs and gang-related crime. It underscores our dedication to forging a truly joined-up response to gangs and our prioritisation of this issue across the partnership.

As such, this document outlines how we will be working together to foster a better understanding of what works well and how we will be using this learning to improve the services we provide to help and protect those vulnerable to gang exploitation. The strategy covers a range of approaches, from diversion and preventative activities to enforcement and offender management, so that we are able to better recognise and deal with gangs and the associated challenges they present at the earliest opportunity and in the most effective way.

This is a three year strategy that sets out what we are aiming to achieve by 2021; it is underpinned by an action plan which will be reviewed on an annual basis. Taken together, these documents set out what we are doing now and what we will be doing into the future to deal with gangs on a cross-county basis, as well as how we will assess whether our actions are making a difference.

Our vision is to:

Protect and prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs; to tackle gang-related harm and youth violence; and to pursue effective enforcement action to deal with those embroiled in gang activities.

We will do this by working together collaboratively, across our local agency partnerships, to achieve the key objectives that we have identified as central to delivering our vision. These are:

1. Create a shared understanding of gangs across the local partnership and a common language and approach to our work with gangs and groups.
2. Strengthen our early intervention and preventative work to stop young people becoming involved with gangs early on, and to dissuade those on the cusp of becoming drawn into gang activity - primarily through improvements in the sharing of information.
3. Protect vulnerable individuals who may be targeted by gangs and who are vulnerable to criminal behaviour.
4. Develop support pathways to help young people out of gangs and violent behaviours.
5. Drive forwards effective enforcement and offender management to deal with those individuals involved in gangs who refuse to reform.
6. Create and manage public spaces in a way that discourages gang congregation and associated anti-social behaviours.

This clear mission statement will help to facilitate strong local leadership and better, more collaborative working so that we can successfully confront this issue together.

Key to all of this is the efficient collation of information and intelligence, and the effectual sharing of that information across agencies that have statutory safeguarding responsibilities in order to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe. We see this as the key to obtaining a comprehensive understanding of gangs across our local partnership and to reducing the harm they cause to individuals and communities. As a result, this is a central plank of the Kent and Medway Gangs Strategy, 2018-2021.

National picture and legislative context

In 2011 the Home Office published 'Ending Gang and Youth Violence', a cross-party report which set out the growing problem of gangs and gang violence. The review marked the beginning of a new commitment to working across the various departments of central Government and tiers of local government to tackle gang culture and serious youth violence - most notably through the Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme². Annual reports on progress were published between 2011-2015 and since this time Government has continued to take steps to address gang violence and exploitation.

In 2015 the Serious Crime Act put into statute additional powers to help law enforcement agencies pursue, disrupt and bring to justice organised and gang-related criminals – including through the use of gang injunctions. In the same year, the Early Intervention Foundation published its 'Preventing Gang and Youth Violence' report, which demonstrated that disaffected young people often do not have the social and emotional skills needed to integrate into wider society; as a result, they can be more vulnerable to gang exploitation. Whilst children and young people from any background may lack these necessary skills, young people from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to have a dearth of them than children from wealthier backgrounds³. Finally in 2015, the National Police Chiefs' Council published 'Child Centred Policing: National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People'. This strategy recognises that young people who come to the attention of the police can often be both an offender and a victim – and that those below the age of 18 should be treated as children first, offenders second.⁴

In January 2016, Government published a refreshed approach to dealing with gangs via a six priority plan.⁵ The priority areas are:

1. Tackle 'county lines' crime (the exploitation of vulnerable people by a hard core of gang members to sell drugs).
2. Protect vulnerable locations – places where young people can be targeted, including Pupil Referral Units and Residential Care Homes
3. Reduce violence and knife crime – including improving the way national and local partners use tools and powers

4. Safeguard gang-associated women and girls – including strengthening local practices
5. Promote early intervention
6. Promote meaningful alternatives to gangs such as education, training and employment

In July 2017, Government published new guidance on dealing with 'county lines' crime, that focused on the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. The guidance provides frontline professionals with information to help them better identify potential victims and to take the right steps to safeguard these individuals.⁶

More broadly, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (as amended by subsequent legislation) already places a duty on each responsible authority (including police, local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, probation services and clinical commissioning groups) to do all they can to reasonably prevent crime and disorder, misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances and to reduce reoffending in their area. These authorities work together through statutory Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to tackle these issues and any emerging concerns identified in their community safety plans. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 guidance also requires all agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities to work together to protect and promote the welfare of all children in their area. Furthermore, the Care Act 2014 sets out how local authorities and partner agencies must work to safeguard vulnerable adults at risk of abuse or neglect. This is underpinned by Section 14 of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance 2017.

We have taken all of this into account to inform the development of this strategy and our individual agency approaches to dealing with gangs in Kent and Medway.

Local picture: Gangs in Kent and Medway

In 2015 the Home Office-funded Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme identified Thanet as one of their 'local priority areas', needing specific support to deal with gangs and youth violence. In 2016, Medway was also identified as a priority area. These reports highlighted that some good partnership work was being undertaken – particularly in relation to the Margate Taskforce – but that this was insufficient to prevent risk to vulnerable young people. The reports also stressed that the issues of serious, gang-associated youth violence, vulnerability and exploitation were not limited to one geographical area in isolation.

The Home Office Programme helped the county to profile the emerging issues and weaknesses we faced in relation to gangs. We know that Kent and Medway have been subject to 'county lines' crime for some time, and that this vulnerability has been compounded by young people with gang connections being moved from London into youth detention accommodation in Kent over recent years – with drugs markets operating between the capital and various points across the county. We have also seen a significant increase in the number of homeless London families being relocated into Kent; some of these individuals have existing gang connections and some are vulnerable to gang exploitation owing to their situations. These factors combined have led to the establishment of organised crime networks and the exploitation of vulnerable people in those areas in order to sell drugs (human trafficking) and, in some cases, to become drugs users. More recently, Kent has seen the development of 'home grown' gangs at different locations across the county. These groups have been targeting vulnerable people to sell drugs in the same manner as 'county lines' crime rings.

Trends and Patterns

Over recent years we have seen an increase in the incidents of young people carrying knives. This is in-line with national data, which shows us that knife crime and the harbouring of offensive weapons are on the increase.

We also know that nationally a high proportion of gang members have a mental health condition – ranging from depression to personality disorder. This picture may well be replicated in Kent and Medway,

though we do not at present record these statistics. This demonstrates that gangs often target already vulnerable young people as they develop and expand.

The average age of a gang nominal operating in the county is 15, but extremely young children can be targeted and groomed by gangs – the youngest reported in the county was 10 years old. This highlights the importance of teaching young children about the risks of gangs and gang related crime early, so they are equipped to act appropriately if the circumstances should arise. It is worthy of note that a significant proportion of gang nominals are also in their early 20s.

In addition to this, statistics show us that a high proportion of the gang nominals and associates operating in Kent and Medway are from BAME communities⁷ - though the 'profiles' of gangs can differ depending on whether they are 'home grown' or 'county lines' groups. **As such we need to ensure our frontline staff are aware of the vulnerabilities of certain communities to gangs, that we are working with high levels of cultural awareness and that we are involving local communities to help find the right ways to best protect vulnerable young people and adults, and to divert them from gang involvement.** That said, we know that gang members can come from any ethnic or cultural background and that we need to build a relationship of trust and resilience both within and across our local communities in order to tackle gangs and gang crime effectively.

Moreover, we also know that there are currently gaps in the data we collect relating to gangs, both on an individual agency and collective level, and that we need to better record and collate our data in order to create a 'baseline' and meaningful measures against which we can gauge our progress. This has already been recognised in the Kent Children and Young People's Framework, 2016-2019 – but we know that we need to do more, and more quickly, to address this.⁸

A Complex Issue

We further recognise that gangs are a complex issue. There is, for example, no such thing as 'a gangs profile' – we know that each gang is different and that they require a diverse and tailored approach in order to effectively address the issues arising as a result of gang activity in a particular area. However, we also recognise there are commonalities in the way gangs develop, evolve and operate and that learning can be collated to help tackle gang problems across the county.

Finally, **we appreciate that the children and young people involved in gangs are, first and foremost, vulnerable young people.** They may need help and support to turn their lives around and this support needs to be extended to their families. Only by taking a whole-family 'trauma-informed'⁹ approach, and recognising that gangs and youth violence does not start or end with an individual, can we begin to build the resilience necessary to collectively tackle the lure of gang culture. This support also has to be available to provide for the range of needs that each young person may have – from universal services through to specialist support – and we need to ensure that our services are available to, and accessible by, the full range of individuals and communities living in Kent and Medway.

Where are we now?

Successes, Achievements and Challenges

We have recognised that gangs are a current and growing issue in Kent and Medway and we are committed to working together to effectively eradicate gangs and the harm they pose to local communities.

- Kent Police has adapted to meet the demands caused by the emergence of 'home grown' gangs and 'county lines' crime. Under the New Horizon model Kent Police has formed Gangs Investigation Teams, dedicated to tackling gangs in each division. As part of this process a gangs matrix has been developed to help identify and map the individuals involved in gang activities and to assess the threat, risk and harm they pose. The matrix covers gang nominals and associates based in Kent and Medway as well as those based elsewhere whose actions are impacting upon us. This tool has enabled the police to take a considered approach to pursue activities to achieve the best outcomes in relation to each individual and gang. Kent Police has also recently been restructured to enable the force to better protect the most vulnerable people in the county from crime and exploitation. As part of this redesign, 20 Youth Engagement Officers have been recruited specifically to work with young people at risk of abuse and neglect, including through gang involvement.
- The Margate Taskforce has achieved notable success in the proactive identification of individuals vulnerable to gang exploitation. This was achieved primarily through the use of peer group analysis i.e. producing a visual network of individuals known to be involved in gangs, employing intelligence obtained from different organisations to map their relationships. This process was then used to identify schools that would benefit from awareness raising sessions on gangs and individuals who would benefit from a Family Support Panel. To add to this, the Taskforce used geo-mapping to assess safeguarding risks by identifying 'hot spots' of activity that could then be targeted. This learning, as well as other established good practice, could be scaled to inform the allocation of resources across the county.
- Medway Community Safety Partnership, in partnership with the Council's Youth Services and the Woodlands Centre, made a successful bid to the Home Office Knife Crime Fund in 2017. This funding has allowed Medway to pilot early intervention work in schools looking at negative peer groups, joint enterprise, Child Sexual Exploitation and gang association. It has also enabled the Council to undertake training with professionals to educate and inform the workforce about gangs (including gang recruitment processes e.g. via social media) as well as to run youth engagement work and sports events designed to focus young people on positive activities and to divert them from gang involvement.
- In 2016 Kent County Council undertook a review of its youth justice provision and changed the configuration of its service from the criminal justice based model of onward referral and intervention, based primarily on offending behaviour, to an adolescent risk model which recognises and addresses the broader context of adolescent risk – including a greater focus on ensuring that children and young people are engaged in education, training or employment.
- The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme aims to create a coherent framework for partners to manage adult and young offenders who are committing the most crimes and causing harm to local communities. The scope of the IOM has recently been expanded to include gang nominals, which is a positive step.

Case Study: Sharing Intelligence

Over the course of 2016/17, professionals in one District area observed an increase in the number of adolescents involved in anti-social behaviour and a corresponding increase in new entrants coming into the Criminal Justice System. The team also observed an aligned emergence of 'home grown' gang activity. To address these interrelated issues, Kent Police convened a gangs intelligence meeting to bring together key multi-agency professionals (from early help, social care and Prevent, the anti-radicalisation initiative, alongside schools) to begin to compose a picture of the perpetrators and victims of gang crime. The aim of the exercise was to better identify vulnerability, risk and to put in place effectual diversionary tactics to stop young people from being drawn into gang involvement. After a few months the District, working in partnership, was able to map and monitor patterns and trends in gang behaviours that enabled the professionals involved to better understand the emerging issues, to triangulate the available 'soft intelligence' and thereby to better safeguard individuals vulnerable to exploitation. The Police were then able to pursue the right perpetrators of gang crime.

Bridging the Data Gap

We know one of the areas we urgently need to improve upon is our multi-agency data recording, collation, analysis and sharing processes. This is essential to help us gather the right intelligence so that we can build a comprehensive and robust picture of gang activity in the county. This, in turn, will allow us to identify patterns in gang behaviour and enable the right agencies to target their services in these areas at the earliest opportunity.

Other Challenges

We also recognise that we face other specific challenges, at operational and strategic levels, which will need to be addressed to achieve successful delivery.

These challenges include:

- We know that gangs are currently operating in Kent and Medway – and that this is a fast moving picture, with gangs developing and changing often quickly over time. It is therefore difficult to obtain a full and up-to-date view of the emergence and prevalence of gangs issues across the county. This strategy will help us to work collaboratively to

build a better, more complete picture of gangs in the county – which we will use to hone and refine our activities and practise, and to speed up our cooperative responses to gangs as they emerge and change; we will also use it to hone to reduce, and where possible eradicate, gangs and associated serious youth violence. This is particularly important when working across different geographical areas, such as District boundaries, to ensure we have the flexibility to respond across and between tiers of local government.

- One of the major challenges we face is the fact that young people may be simultaneous victims and perpetrators of crime – involved in initiating criminal activity, but doing so as a result of coercion, grooming and criminal exploitation. To address this, we are working to utilise Modern Slavery legislation to prosecute more gang offenders by protecting the trafficked victims of gangs and targeting the ring leaders of these crimes. If we are unable to identify who is perpetrating such exploitation, we will work to prevent harm and reduce other risk factors by sharing information with multi-agency partners so that we can work together in an informed, holistic way to safeguard every vulnerable young person.
- We need to ensure our commissioned services are aware of gang issues and able to respond to the associated needs arising. This will allow us to offer more consistent services across the county and to be confident that our providers can identify gang risks and respond appropriately.
- We know there is a need to hone and refine our governance processes since gangs issues are currently being dealt with by a variety of different bodies throughout our partnership, and we need to be sure this challenge is being handled with clarity and cohesiveness. This will put us in the best position to deal with gangs across the county.
- We need to ensure staff from across our partnership are receiving training that will empower them to identify gangs and gang vulnerabilities, that they are aware of what services are available to meet the presenting needs, and that they are equipped with the right skills to undertake direct interventions as appropriate. This should extend from training to recognise 'real world' harm, to education on the risks posed to young people online as a result of gang virtual grooming.
- We also need to ensure that the public are aware of gangs and how to report their concerns into the appropriate partner agencies.



Where do we want to be?

Our Vision and Key Objectives

Our collective vision is to:

Protect and prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs; to tackle gang-related harm and youth violence; and to pursue effective enforcement action to deal with those embroiled in gang activities.

We will do this by working together collaboratively, across our local agency partnerships, to achieve the key objectives that we have identified as central to delivering our vision. These are:

1. Create a shared understanding of gangs across the local partnership and a common language and approach to our work with gangs and groups.
2. Strengthen our early intervention and preventative work to stop young people becoming involved with gangs early on, and to dissuade those on the cusp of becoming drawn into gang activity - primarily through improvements in the sharing of information.
3. Protect vulnerable individuals who may be targeted by gangs and who are vulnerable to criminal behaviour.
4. Develop support pathways to help young people out of gangs and violent behaviours.
5. Drive forwards effective enforcement and offender management to deal with those individuals involved in gangs who refuse to reform.
6. Create and manage public spaces in a way that discourages gang congregation and associated anti-social behaviours.

Approach

We will deliver our key objectives through adopting the national 'four pillars' approach to tackling gangs and serious organised crime groups – often referred to as the '4Ps'. These are: **Prevent** people from engaging in this type of activity; **Protect** - increase safeguarding to stop people from being drawn into gangs; **Pursue** via prosecution and disruption of those engaged in gangs and serious organised crime; and **Prepare** – reduce the impact of this criminality where it takes place.¹⁰

PREVENT

The prevent approach will seek to identify and target young people at risk of joining gangs and participating in illegal activities/actions which may cause harm and to divert them from this path. We recognise that involvement in gangs is not a lifestyle choice and that many young people are being manipulated and groomed by gangs from an early age. There is therefore often little opportunity for us to steer some young people away from gangs – making early, targeted preventative work all the more important. Similarly, as part of this approach we will seek to better identify and safeguard vulnerable individuals who may be targeted by gangs, for example, to become drugs runners. Vulnerable groups at risk may include children in local authority care, children who have recently suffered a bereavement, adults who have experienced poor mental health or adults with learning or physical disabilities.

We will do this by:

- Undertaking multi-agency 'problem profiling' of gangs and gang nominals operating in Kent and Medway, to obtain a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of where and how gangs are operating, in order to better target our resources and channel our collective energies to tackle this issue;
- Improving the knowledge-base of our employees through reviewing the current training offer and developing a comprehensive programme of multi-agency training on gangs, groups and vulnerabilities, so that frontline staff are confident to recognise risk factors and empowered to act appropriately;
- Undertaking awareness raising activities with the general public, elected Councillors, communities and the voluntary sector, and targeted awareness raising and intervention work with parents and young people e.g. gang 'myth busting' sessions in schools and a review of parenting support e.g. parenting programmes aimed at adolescent online safety;
- Providing individuals at risk of gang involvement and their families with focused support and wrap-around services to dissuade them from entering into gangs and criminal groups – building confidence, interests and self-esteem;
- Encouraging the sharing of information between professional bodies (since the individuals involved in gang activity are often known to a range of services) so that we are able to undertake early intervention and preventative work at the first possible opportunity; to facilitate this, map services that are likely to be in frequent contact with vulnerable adults and children e.g. for health this may include A&E, Minor Injuries, sexual health and substance misuse services and sexual assault referral services. Also, the development of a bespoke information sharing protocol.
- Ensure our knowledge of gangs, groups and related vulnerabilities are embedded in safeguarding and protection practice;
- Exploring the potential to offer evidence-based interventions such as mentoring to young people vulnerable to gang involvement.
- Developing a programme of youth intervention, in collaboration with schools, to help raise the profile of gangs and gang related issues
- Ensuring transition planning for care leavers takes into account the risks posed to these young people by gangs, particularly in relation to accommodation and the potential use of their properties for the purposes of 'cuckooing'. See page 14 for more information.

What Does Success Look Like?

- Better identification and safeguarding of vulnerable children, young people and adults targeted by gangs and exploited by them
- Measured reduction in fear of crime / gangs / knife crime perceptions by young people
- Targeted prevention activities leading to successful diversion from gangs
- Reduced risk of offending
- Staff report greater awareness and knowledge

PROTECT

The protect approach aims to safeguard individuals and the wider community from gangs and gang related activity. As part of this, we will strive to improve our controls and practice in relation to gangs, strengthen our information exchange between agencies and make the best possible use of our resources and referral pathways.

We will do this by:

- Enhancing our current methods of information and intelligence sharing across the multi-agency partnership; creating a more open 'feedback loop' between the front line and senior managers to ensure our processes remain effective and fit-for-purpose;
- Ensuring that signposting to relevant services is clear and accessible and that referral pathways are promoted, both amongst professionals and the general public;
- Developing a robust pan-Kent, multi-agency shared data set, which all relevant agencies can access to inform planning and collaborative activities;
- Strengthening our work with the voluntary sector to broaden community and partnership involvement in order to best tackle gangs;
- Creating a Single Point of Contact or 'gangs specialist/champion' in each agency, that professionals can communicate with to develop a shared response to/understanding of gangs, and guide access into other agencies;
- Exploration of joint case management sharing via a Local Responsible Owner for Gangs issues through the local Social Organised Crime Boards.

- Working across tiers of local government, using the full range of powers at our disposal to create and manage public spaces and discourage gang congregation.

What Does Success Look Like?

- Creation of a robust multi-agency shared data set on gangs, drawing on learning from the Kent Missing Children data set and local patterns and trends
- Development of a programme for the sharing of intelligence amongst the multi-agency partnership and the wider public, to reduce the risks posed by gangs
- Improved access to comprehensive information to improve risk management
- Positive information sharing through Local Community Safety Partnerships and Protecting Vulnerable Persons (PVP – a Kent Police body) at Divisional Level
- Utilisation of the full gambit of environmental enforcement and planning processes as well as Public Space Protection Orders to safeguard the local community from gangs and gang activity

PURSUE

As part of the pursue theme, we will work together in partnership to progress enforcement action against those who perpetrate gang activity and youth violence. We will seek to disrupt gangs from crime and to prosecute those responsible. We will do this through strong and effective collaborative working and joined-up multi-agency leadership, united against gangs. We will also develop our capabilities to detect, investigate and disrupt gangs, and utilise our legal powers to deal with the threat of gangs early on.

We will do this by:

- Working to deter those involved in low-level criminality, actively pursuing those involved in medium and high-level criminality as appropriate;
- Making the best use of the risk management tools at our disposal to better recognise threats and risks and to adopt the most effective approaches identified;
- Better and widest possible use of civil powers to deter offenders e.g. anti-social behaviour legislation;

- Working across the Integrated Offender Management Scheme to ensure the correct individuals are referred for robust multi-agency management;

What Does Success Look Like?

- Gangs as an issue to be 'owned' by a Local Responsible Officer (Kent Police); Learning will be taken from the current Organised Crime Group management processes. A bespoke 4P plan is applied to the gang with sub owners.
- Evidence of wider use of legislative powers, as well as full use of Anti-Social Behaviour powers to aid disruption activities (e.g. Community Protection Notices).
- Reduction in youth violence
- Increase in prosecution of high-level gang members

PREPARE - reduce the impact of gang criminality where it takes place.

The prepare theme aims to strengthen the resilience of victims and communities to mitigate the harm caused by gangs and youth violence. This requires closer, more collaborative working with the public and voluntary and community sector organisations in order to improve the outcomes for those impacted by gangs and gang crime.

We will do this by:

- Working to improve channels of communication with communities from across Kent and Medway, to build trust and confidence in multi-agency services;
- Identifying key community members, who have the influence and experience to work within those communities most likely to be effected by gangs and those at risk e.g. via the Medway Interfaith Forum. These individuals can also be positive role models for young people, and help to dissuade them from entering gangs and criminality in early life;
- Engaging with relevant Voluntary and Community sector bodies to make sure our provision is joined-up, accessible and that we are working together to best effect.
- Foster a greater understanding of gang issues across the partnership;

- Establish a shared resource of evidence and 'lessons learned' to inform multi-agency working, based on what we know works.

What Does Success Look Like?

- Better, more collaborative community working reported by community members and staff
- Enhanced signposting made available and accessible
- Key community members identified and actively working with the partnership to address vulnerabilities
- Victim support offered

Safeguarding/Protection

Vulnerable children and young people at risk of criminal exploitation by gangs are also at risk of a whole range of aligned abuse as a result of gang affiliation - from emotional and psychological maltreatment to sexual abuse and debt bondage. They may also be in situations which result in the neglect of their basic needs, live in an unsafe environment, have poor attendance at school and correspondingly poor long-term outcomes. **Certain groups of young people are at more risk of particular types of abuse.** For instance, professionals have particular concerns about the risks posed to vulnerable gang-associated girls and young women, who can be subject to specific forms of sexual and physical abuse in gangs situations and are often a 'hidden' cohort. As such, we need to be sure we are putting the right processes in place to ensure they are safeguarded – whether they are the victims of abuse or they want to leave gangs.¹¹ Knowledge about these interconnected vulnerabilities and associated risk factors (such as the potential for peer-on-peer abuse) need to be shared and embedded in our frontline practice.¹²

Another risk relates to the **safeguarding of vulnerable adults.** We know that particularly vulnerable individuals – such as single parents, those with learning difficulties, the elderly, those with mental health problems or drug dependencies – may be more at risk of being coerced and exploited by gangs. 'Cuckooing', where gangs use the homes of vulnerable adults as a base from which to deal or harbour drugs, is an ongoing concern; these individuals may also be groomed and manipulated by gang members to sell drugs on the gang's behalf. Vulnerable adults may further be coerced into becoming drug 'runners.'

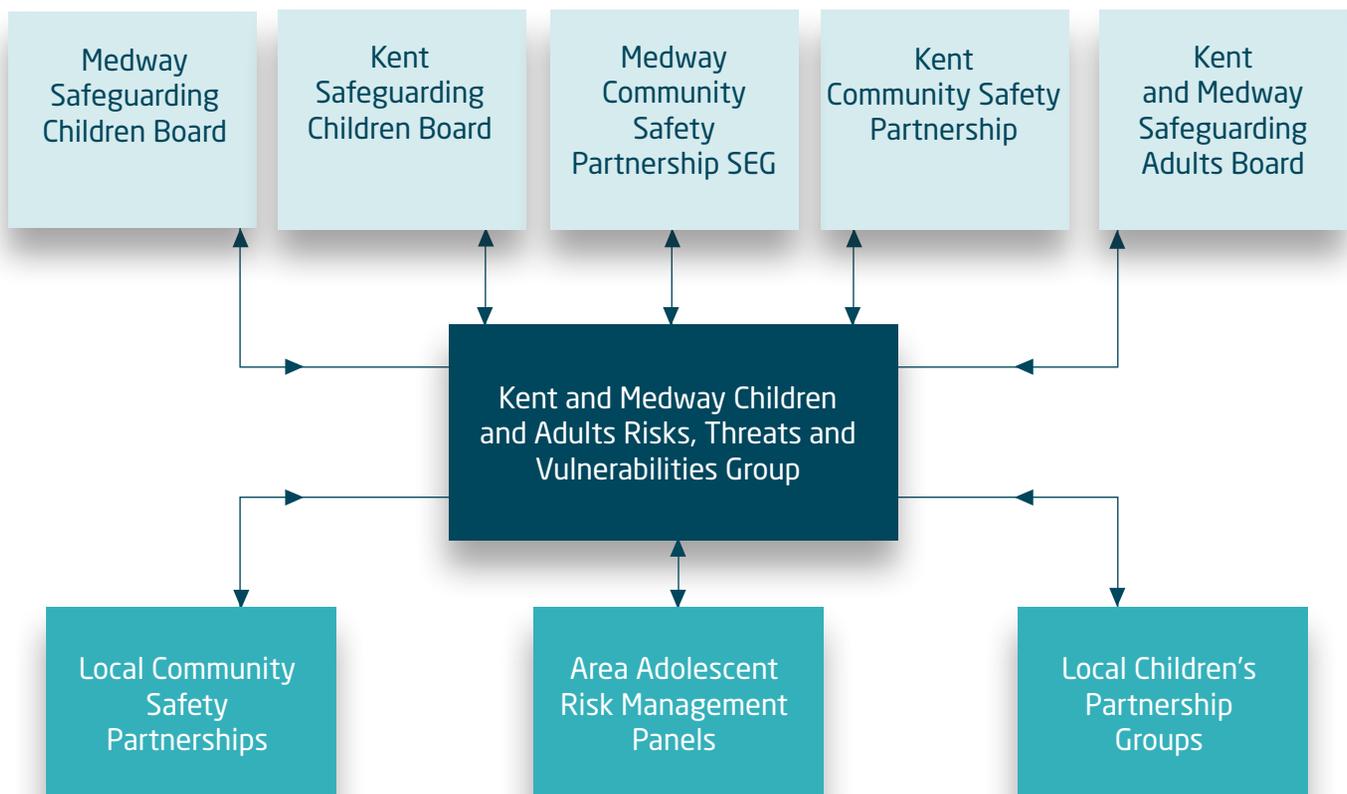
We recognise it is extremely important to put effective early help services in place to assist these individuals before problems escalate. We need to ensure our interventions are targeted, so that we can divert young people from gangs and provide them with viable alternative pathways so that they can avoid gangs altogether or exit them at the earliest opportunity. We also know we can only truly reduce the prevalence of gangs and gang related harm by working with colleagues from across our public sector agencies – from health and education providers to probation services and local authorities – to identify the warning signs early and to provide a comprehensive and coordinated local offer. **This offer needs to extend from Early Years providers to those working with people in later life such as the residential care sector, so that we are supporting families across every 'age and stage' to raise awareness and ensure that risks and threats can be effectively reduced.**

Governance

This strategy and aligned action plan will be owned and driven by senior leaders across our partnership, most notably through the Chairs of the Safeguarding Children Boards, Kent and Medway Children and Adults Risks, Threats and Vulnerabilities Group (RTV)¹³, Medway Community Safety Partnership SEG, Kent Community Safety Partnership and Kent Police Serious Organised Crime Board. Progress will be monitored and reported into the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Boards, Safeguarding Adults Boards and the Kent and Medway Community Safety Partnerships and their aligned sub groups. The RTV will also be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Strategy and aligned action plan.

This puts Kent and Medway in the best position to drive the Gangs Strategy as we move to the new 'Safeguarding Partnership' arrangements, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

We recognise that this Strategy needs to be a 'lived' document in order to be an effective driver for change and improvement. As such, each partner agency has an accountable officer who will 'own' the strategy day-to-day ensure it is considered when developing policy documents or action plans pertaining to gangs. Each agency will also need to develop their own operational action plan to address gangs issues, linking into, and feeding from, the strategic plan, if they have not already done so.



Definitions

These definitions allow our partnership to foster a common language and shared understanding of what we mean when we talk about 'gangs' in Kent and Medway:

Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs)

There is no legal definition of organised crime in England and Wales. For the purposes of this strategy, and in-line with the Government Serious Organised Crime Strategy 2013, SOCGs are people who work together on a continuing basis in order to plan, coordinate and conduct serious crime. Organised crime is characterised by violence or the threat of violence, and by the use of bribery and corruption.

Gangs

As with SOCGs, there is no single national definition of gangs – though most bodies proscribe to the description presented in the 2009 Centre for Social Justice's report 'Dying to Belong', that a gang is 'a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (or are seen by others) as a discernible group; engage in criminal activity and violence; lay claim over territory; have some form of identifying structural feature and; are in conflict with other, similar gangs.'¹⁴ However, in reality the lines between SOCGs and gangs are often blurred as gangs can quickly develop into sophisticated crime networks, trafficking both people and goods (such as drugs) to build resilient and profitable enterprises.

County Lines

County lines crime is a national issue whereby groups extend their drug dealing from their 'home' areas to a new location. This process can often involve the use of mobile phones and almost always involves the exploitation of vulnerable people.¹⁵

Gang nominal

A gang nominal is someone who has been identified as being a member of a gang and this is corroborated by intelligence from more than one source (e.g. police, partner agencies or community intelligence).

Gang associate

A gang associate is defined as someone who offends with gang members; who is associated by the police, partner agencies or community intelligence with gang members; or who has displayed, through conduct or behaviour, a specific desire or intent to become a member of a gang.

Vulnerable adult

A vulnerable adult is any vulnerable person over the age of 18 with needs requiring care and support, who is at risk of - and who is experiencing - neglect or abuse, including financial abuse. Such individuals may be unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Vulnerable child

Any child can be vulnerable to gang exploitation. Some young people are at a greater risk of gang involvement than others. For example, Children in Care and care leavers are at an increased risk of gang exploitation, as are children with a disability and those who have recently suffered a loss or trauma. As such, for the purposes of this strategy, a '**vulnerable child**' is defined as any child under 18 – but in particular those who are known to social care services; who have a physical or mental impairment; who are in the care of a public authority or are care leavers; or who are provided with accommodation by a public authority in order to secure their wellbeing.

Kent and Medway Gangs Action Plan

PREVENT

Identify and target young people at risk of joining gangs and participating in illegal activities/ actions which may cause harm, and divert them from this path.

Action/Objective	Lead/Delivered Through	Timescales	Success Factors
Undertake multi-agency 'problem profiling' of gangs and gang nominals and associates operating in Kent and Medway, drawing on learning from the Margate Taskforce geo-mapping and peer group analysis approach, to obtain a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of where and how gangs are operating in the county in order to better target our resources and channel our collective energies to tackle this issue. Information to cover both vulnerable children and adults.	Kent Police Kent County Council Medway Council With input from all partner agencies (in particular Health, regarding A&E admissions and safeguarding concerns) District and Borough councils	July 2019 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better identification and safeguarding of vulnerable children, young people and adults targeted by gangs and exploited by them Measured reduction in fear of crime / gangs / knife crime perceptions by young people Targeted prevention activities leading to successful diversion from gangs
Improve the knowledge-base of our employees through reviewing the current (single as well as multi-agency) training offer and developing a comprehensive programme of multi-agency training on gangs, gang culture, groups and vulnerabilities, so that frontline staff are confident to recognise risk factors and empowered to act appropriately. Training must cover trauma-informed practice and learning; online grooming; risk assessment and referral pathways and increase awareness of the Beech House Sexual Abuse Referral Clinic (SARC). Training also needs to include how to work with young people linked with gangs and focus on strategies for engagement and supporting desistance.	RTV Group	July 2019 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced risk of offending Staff report greater awareness and knowledge
Undertake awareness raising activities with the general public, elected Councillors, communities and the voluntary sector, and targeted awareness raising and intervention work with parents and young people e.g. gang 'myth busting' sessions in schools and a review of parenting support e.g. parenting programmes aimed at adolescent online safety. Learning can be gleaned from successful Government communications strategies e.g. in relation to Modern Slavery, and local approaches e.g. campaigns to raise awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation (Operation Willow).	Kent Police Kent County Council Medway Council Kent and Medway Schools Local Community Safety Partnerships	July 2019	
Provide individuals at risk of gang involvement and their families with focused support and wrap-around services to dissuade them from entering into gangs and criminal groups	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration; also District partners e.g. via Community Safety Action Plans.	Ongoing	

Encourage the sharing of information between professional bodies (since the individuals involved in gang activity are often known to a range of services) so that we are able to undertake early intervention and preventative work at the first possible opportunity. To facilitate this, develop a bespoke information sharing protocol.	Kent County Council Medway Council Kent Police Acute Trusts (via the national Child Protection Information System and patterns of admissions to A&E)	July 2018 (review)	
Ensure our knowledge of gangs, groups and related vulnerabilities are embedded in safeguarding and protection practice	Kent County Council Medway Council	July 2018	
Explore the potential to offer evidence-based interventions such as mentoring to young people vulnerable to gang involvement.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration (lead resources have been proffered by Kent Fire and Rescue and Kent Police)	July 2018	
Develop a programme of youth intervention, in collaboration with schools, to help raise the profile of gangs and gang related issues (led by Kent Police Youth Engagement Officers)	Kent Police Kent and Medway schools	December 2018	
Ensure transition planning for care leavers takes into account the risks posed to these young people by gangs, particularly in relation to accommodation and the potential use of their properties for the purposes of 'cuckooing.'	Kent County Council Medway Council	Ongoing	
Develop a Memorandum of Understanding to assist with inter-agency cooperation in dealing with gangs.	Kent Safeguarding Children Board Medway Safeguarding Children Board	December 2018	



PROTECT

Safeguard individuals and the wider community from gangs and gang related activity.

Action/Objective	Lead/Delivered Through	Timescales	Success Factors
Develop a robust, pan-Kent multi-agency shared data set, which all relevant agencies can access to inform planning and collaborative activities, drawing on learning from the joint Kent missing children multi-agency data reporting process.	Kent County Council Medway Council Kent Police	December 2018 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a robust multi-agency shared data set on gangs, drawing on learning from the Kent Missing Children data sets.
Enhance our current methods of information and intelligence sharing across the multi-agency partnership; create a more open 'feedback loop' between the front line and senior managers to ensure our processes remain effective and fit-for-purpose.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a programme for the sharing of intelligence amongst the multi-agency partnership and the wider public, to reduce the risks posed by gangs
Review current governance processes to ensure we are in the best position to deal with gangs issues across the county	Kent County Council Medway Council	December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved access to comprehensive information to improve risk management
Ensure that signposting to relevant services is clear and accessible and that referral pathways are promoted, both amongst professionals and the general public	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	July 2018 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive information sharing through Local Community Safety Partnerships and Protecting Vulnerable Persons (PVP) at Divisional Level
Develop informed care approaches to children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system	Kent County Council Medway Council Health	December 2018 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration of joint case management sharing via a Local Responsible Owner for Gangs issues through the local Social Organised Crime Boards.
Strengthen our work with the voluntary sector to broaden community and partnership involvement in order to best tackle gangs.	Kent County Council Medway Council	July 2019	
Create a Single Point of Contact or 'gangs specialist/champion' in each agency, that professionals can communicate with to develop a shared response to/ understanding of gangs and guide access into other agencies.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	July 2018	
Ensure each partner agency has an accountable officer who will 'own' the strategy day-to-day and ensure it is considered when developing policy documents or action plans pertaining to gangs. This person could also act as the 'gangs champion'.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	July 2018	

<p>Working across tiers of local government, using the full range of powers at our disposal to create and manage public spaces and discourage gang congregation</p>	<p>District and Borough councils Kent County Council Medway Council Parish Councils</p>	<p>January 2019 (review)</p>	<p>Utilisation of the full gambit of environmental enforcement and planning processes as well as Public Space Protection Orders to safeguard the local community from gangs and gang activity</p>
<p>Continue Kent and Medway's dialogue with the London Boroughs and Central Government about the placement of vulnerable families into Kent, specifically:</p> <p>a. to obtain agreement that the Boroughs notify Kent and Medway in advance of any such placements;</p> <p>b. to lobby Government to make such notifications a mandatory process, as is currently the case with Children in Care placed out of area.</p>	<p>Kent County Council Medway Council</p>	<p>December 2018 (review)</p>	



PURSUE

Working together in partnership to progress enforcement action against those who perpetrate gang activity and youth violence

Action/Objective	Lead/Delivered Through	Timescales	Success Factors
Work to deter those involved in low-level criminality, actively pursuing those involved in medium and high-level criminality as appropriate.	Kent Police Kent County Council Medway Council Community Safety Partnerships	December 2018 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of wider use of legislative powers, as well as full use of Anti-Social Behaviour powers to aid disruption activities (e.g. Community Protection Notices). Reduction in youth violence Increase in prosecution of high-level gang members Reports of smoother transition between youth detention and adult prison Gangs as an issue to be 'owned' by a Local Responsible Officer (Kent Police); Learning will be taken from the current Organised Crime Group management processes. A bespoke 4P plan is applied to the gang with sub owners.
Make the best use of the risk management tools at our disposal, to better recognise threats and risks and to adopt the most effective approaches identified.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	May 2018	
Employ the best and widest possible use of civil powers to deter offenders e.g. anti-social behaviour legislation.	Kent Police Kent County Council Medway Council Community Safety Partnerships District and Borough Councils	Ongoing	
Working across the Integrated Offender Management Scheme to ensure the correct individuals are referred for robust multi-agency management.	National Probation Service Community Rehabilitation Company Kent Police Kent County Council Medway Council	Ongoing	
Begin discussions with private sector landlords to raise awareness of the dangers of cuckooing; develop a voluntary joint working agreement through which landlords can pledge to take reasonable steps to prevent cuckooing from occurring in their properties.	Medway Council District Councils	December 2018 (review)	

PREPARE

Reduce the impact of gang criminality where it takes place.

Action/Objective	Lead/Delivered Through	Timescales	Success Factors
Work to improve channels of communication with communities from across Kent and Medway, to build trust and confidence in multi-agency services.	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration, via the Community Safety Partnerships	December 2018 (review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better, more collaborative community working reported by community members and staff • Enhanced signposting made available and accessible • Key community members identified and actively working with the partnership to address vulnerabilities • Victim support offered
Identify key community members, who have the influence and experience to work within those communities most likely to be affected by gangs and those at risk e.g. via the Medway Interfaith Forum. These individuals can also be positive role models for young people, and help to dissuade them from entering gangs and criminality in early life.	Kent County Council Medway Council	December 2018 (review)	
Engage with relevant Voluntary and Community sector bodies to make sure our provision is joined-up, accessible and that we are working together to best effect.	Local Community Safety Partnerships Kent Community Safety Partnership Medway Community Safety Partnership	December 2018 (review)	
Foster a greater understanding of gang issues across the partnership	All agencies with statutory safeguarding responsibilities in collaboration	July 2018 (review)	
Establish a shared resource of evidence and 'lessons learned' to inform multi-agency working, based on what we know works (drawing on learning from the Kent Integrated Data -KID- programme and public health research and development arising).	Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Groups Kent County Council Medway Council Kent Police	December 2018 (review)	

End notes

¹ The soon-to-be published National Police Chief's Council/Children's Society authored "Toolkit for working with children and young people trafficked for the purposes of criminal exploitation in relation to 'County Lines'" usefully sets out some of the challenges and knowledge gaps professionals often face when working with vulnerable young people – particularly those trafficked for the purposes of criminal exploitation. The Children's Society (December 2017). Ofsted has also recently issued updated inspection guidance for forthcoming multi-agency Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs). The new guidance broadens the scope of the child sexual exploitation 'deep dive' element of the investigation to consider children at risk of sexual and other forms of exploitation through gang association. www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-inspections-of-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children-february-to-august-2016

² HM Government, (November 2011) Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross Government Report, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97861/gang-violence-summary.pdf

³ Home Office, Early Intervention Foundation (2015), Preventing Gang and Youth Violence: Spotting Signals of Risk and Supporting Children and Young People, website, www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Final-R1-Overview-Preventing-Gang-Youth-Violence.pdf

⁴ National Police Chief's Council (2015), National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People, website, www.npcc.police.uk/documents/edhr/2015/CYP%20Strategy%202015_2017_August%202015.pdf

⁵ HM Government, (January 2016), Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/491699/Ending_gang_violence_and_Exploitation_FINAL.pdf

⁶ Home Office, (July 2017) Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626770/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web__2_.pdf

⁷ As evidenced in Kent police 2015 and 2017

Serious and Organised Crime profiling.

⁸ Gangs have been identified as an overarching issue in the Kent Children and Young People's Framework; these are issues which transcend District boundaries and have an impact across our partnerships. The Framework also identified the need to obtain more reliable data in this regard. Kent County Council (2016), Kent Children and Young People's Framework: Working Together to Improve Outcomes, 2016-2019, website, <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s73002/B4%20-%20App%202%20-%20Kent%20Children%20and%20Young%20Peoples%20Framework%202016-2019.pdf>

⁹ A trauma-informed way of working is a new approach to policing put forward by The International Centre: Researching Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking, at the University of Bedford. This approach recognises that young people exposed to violent and/or harmful events are likely to suffer from trauma, and that the police need to be equipped to recognise the signs of trauma, take account of the impact of traumatic experiences and integrate an understanding of trauma into their operational practice. Hickle, K (2016), A Trauma-Informed Approach: Policing Responses to Child Sexual Exploitation, University of Bedfordshire, website, www.uobcsepolicinghub.org.uk/assets/documents/Trauma-Informed-Approach-Briefing-Final.pdf

¹⁰ Taken from the Government's Serious and Organised Crime Strategy. Home Office (2013), Serious Organised Crime Strategy, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248645/Serious_and_Organised_Crime_Strategy.pdf

¹¹ National research shows us that women and girls involved in gangs are at a greater risk of sexual exploitation and violence. They may also be coerced into holding weapons or drugs or providing other gang members with accommodation.

¹² The DfE has recently issued new guidance relating to the risks of peer-on-peer abuse, which we are aware of and need to embed in our training procedures. Department for Education (December 2017), Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children in

Schools and Colleges: Advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667862/Sexual_Harassment_and_Sexual_Violence_-_Advice.pdf

¹³ The RTV is a joint Kent and Medway group which oversees multi-agency activity relating to Modern Slavery and human trafficking, Radicalisation and Extremism, Gangs, Online Safeguarding, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Missing Children and Vulnerable Adults.

¹⁴ This definition is utilised in the Government's 'Ending Gang and Youth Violence Report'. HM Government, (2011) Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report including Further Evidence and Good Practice Case Studies, website, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97862/gang-violence-detailreport.pdf

¹⁵ The definition of 'County Lines' crime has been taken from the National Crime Agency, Intelligence Assessment of County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding (2015), website, www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file

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