

Police, Fire & Crime Panel Report

September 2019



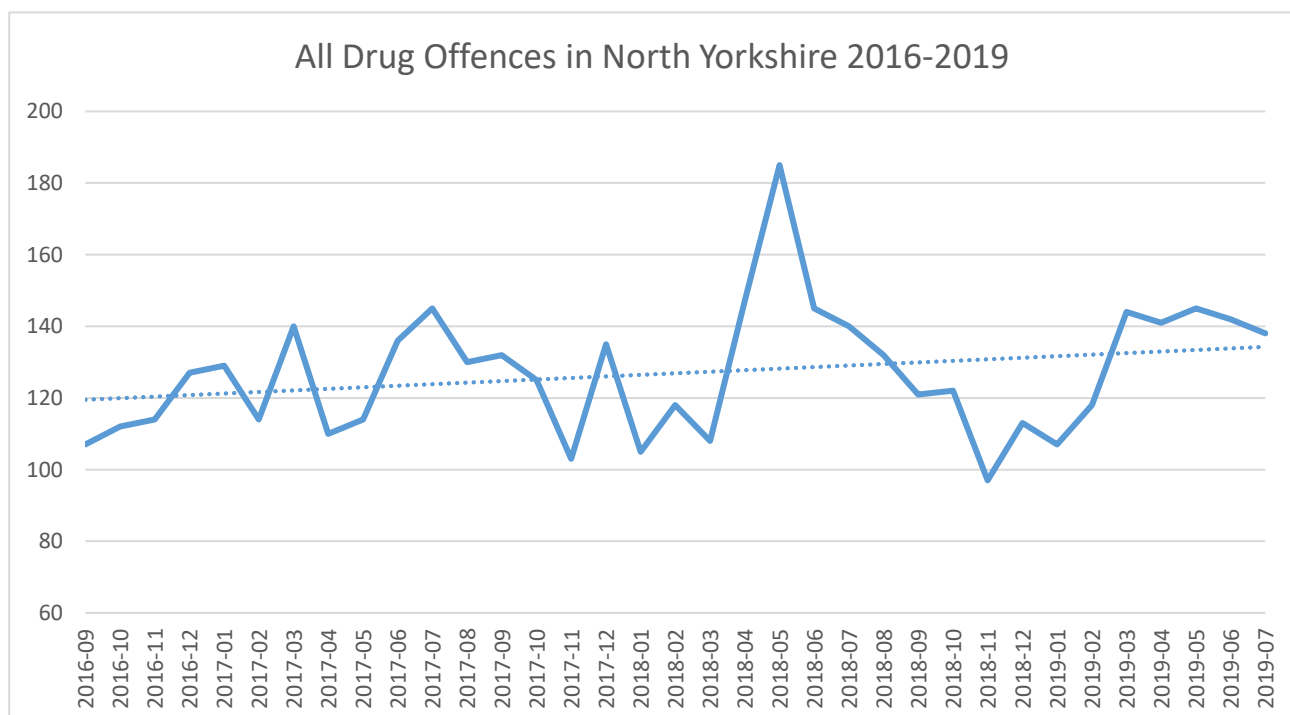
Drug dealing and how it is being tackled in North Yorkshire

The Commissioner has been concerned about a steady growth in drug crime, both nationally and locally, as she has made clear to Panel on several occasions. The rise of the County Lines drug trade and related crime is being felt across the country and North Yorkshire is being targeted by organised crime groups. The public are clearly aware of this and are telling us about increased visibility of drug use. They are concerned about young people being drawn into more serious drugs and crime and about violence linked to dealing.

As this report will show, North Yorkshire Police have a good understanding of the challenge and are proactively responding – disrupting trafficking routes and protecting vulnerable people. Partnership work is developing but more is required to ensure consistent, proactive and pervasive messaging to reach all communities.

Drug crime in North Yorkshire

Drug offences have risen steadily over the last three years as the graph below shows. Nationally there was an 11% rise in the year to March 2019, and North Yorkshire saw the same increase. While recorded drug offences equate to 3.6% of total crime in North Yorkshire, the impact of this crime on vulnerable people and communities is considerable. Much of this crime remains hidden.



Of the 4547 offences over the last three years, the possession of cannabis is the most recorded offence (58%). Trafficking in controlled drugs made up 16%.

Harrogate, Scarborough, York and Whitby are the hardest hit areas. Drug offences are linked to more serious crime such as modern slavery and human trafficking, fraud, violence, kidnap and serious assault which have also increased, especially in the last year as County Lines has become the predominant form of drug dealing.

In the last year, 1404 people were arrested for drug offences. 44% were for Class A drugs, 48% for Class B. A third are from outside North Yorkshire, though national gangs organising local dealers means that the impact of external groups is more significant than this suggests.

The police have a good understanding of supply and demand through those they interact with, but there is a gap in understanding true demand in North Yorkshire. Police intelligence highlights an unknown demand from affluent middle class use linked to cocaine, which though likely to be small will increase the demand on county lines dealing and Class A supply into the county.

Nationally, drug deaths rose by 16% in the last year. North Yorkshire saw the highest increase in the YaTH region.

County Lines

County Lines (CL) is the trafficking and dealing of drugs by organised criminal groups across the country, and refers to the telephone 'lines' used to facilitate this.

North Yorkshire is the biggest importer of CL in the Yorkshire and Humber region, with 20 unique deal line telephone numbers linked to 14 different CLs. These target those places that are best connected by rail and road links: Harrogate is impacted by seven lines, York by four, Scarborough and Whitby by two, and Skipton by one. Six lines originate in West Yorkshire, three in Manchester, two in Liverpool, one in Cleveland. The main drugs supplied are heroin and crack cocaine. These lines have also been linked to child sexual exploitation, firearms, the trafficking of young people both local and from out of area, the exploitation of vulnerable adults, and to serious violence. 102 individuals have been linked to CL offending.

Violence tends to appear where rival gangs vie for control of an area, or where local dealers try to profit from rival gangs. Repercussions have ranged from violent threats, to kidnap, to serious assault by hammer, knife or machete.

Exploitation and Cuckooing

Seven lines are involved in cuckooing which is when dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person and operate their drug dealing from that address. 74 addresses have been identified in the last 12 months. In August alone 27 victims of cuckooing were identified. Most are drug users and tend to be vulnerable to exploitation. However, they are likely to live in both affluent areas with good transport links, as well as more deprived areas.

CL relies heavily on the exploitation of young people and vulnerable adults to traffic and supply drugs between areas. This results in complex safeguarding issues: the police need to arrest to preserve evidence, but by 'catching' the individual make them vulnerable to reprisals. The individual needs to be returned to their home location, identified to social services and their local police, and considerable work is often required to understand whether they are a suspect or a

victim. In the last three years a number of under 16s and over 100 16-18 year olds have been identified.

North Yorkshire Police's response

North Yorkshire Police's response to CL is led strategically by the Serious Organised Crime Partnership Board, chaired by the Deputy PCC, with a prevention sub-board chaired by NYCC's Community Safety lead. Operationally, a Silver Command group oversees the co-ordination of intelligence and tactical operations. The Partnership's Disruption sub-board and Organised Crime Group Mapping meeting co-ordinate the tactical work across partners.

To assess their progress, NYP invited the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre to undertake a peer review in July 2019. Their opinion was positive, with national best practice being identified in NYP's response to cuckooing and its processes to identify and safeguard vulnerable victims. The review also noted the clear strategic leadership for the response and the clear buy-in from the Chief Officer Team. NYP were found to have a good understanding of the threat, risk and harm associated with their CLs. Nonetheless, several areas for improvement were identified, mainly around increased partnership work and a better understanding of demand. These are now being addressed.

The Commissioner would highlight the following areas to the Panel to illustrate NYP's response.

- Cuckooing and exploitation

In relation to cuckooing and exploitation, the Commissioner is particularly pleased that, in line with her Police and Crime Plan, NYP have responded particularly carefully to protecting and caring for vulnerable persons. As stated above, 74 addresses of concern have been identified in North Yorkshire, compared to a total of 11 in the rest of the Yorkshire and Humber region.

As a net importer of CL, NYP have also taken a caring response to the exploitation of vulnerable young people. They have worked hard to improve links with social and children's services in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds, ensuring that when a child is returned they are not left uncared for and that there is direct access to support services for the child and their family.

- Operation Expedite

Op Expedite sees a dedicated team dynamically and proactively seeking to disrupt and deter CL activity to make North Yorkshire a 'no go' area for drug dealing. Started in Harrogate, this is now being rolled out in York, Scarborough and more widely across the County Command, as was mentioned by the Commissioner in May 2019. This involves work at railway stations to intercept traffickers at the earliest opportunity, as well as to spread information and awareness. It includes enhanced use of stop and search and search warrants to disrupt dealing and remove drug stores.

- Organised Crime Team

The OCT has gained extra resource to focus on investigating, prosecuting and dismantling the higher tier of organised criminality behind CL. This involves close work with the 'exporting' police services in Manchester, Liverpool, Cleveland and West Yorkshire to link

intelligence and activity and build cases against groups. As a result, NYP has seen increased support from these areas, with a greater awareness of the impact in North Yorkshire and a more collaborative approach to disrupting activity at source.

Challenges and future plans

As highlighted by the NCLCC report, challenges around partnership work and understanding demand still exist. Gaining the most accurate and full picture of local demand and dependency levels will require a deeper sharing of partnership data across, police, health, local authority and third sector. This has proved productive in other areas, and work has been started through the Partnership Board to achieve this.

This is directly linked to the better management of vulnerability. Other areas are making good use of a vulnerability tracker in partnership and this is under active consideration for North Yorkshire. This will improve predictions around cuckooing so that early intervention can help to prevent vulnerable people being targeted and exploited.

Better understanding will help identify any gaps in substance misuse services that need to be filled, and will also help to improve referral pathways so that care can be better coordinated.

It will also help to understand what training is required. NYP are developing a range of training courses for partners so that frontline workers can help identify vulnerability and criminality, and so that better intelligence can be built across the partnership.

The Commissioner has called for a North Yorkshire Drugs Summit later this year to launch a co-ordinated campaign which will see partners working together to deliver information across schools, businesses and in communities about supply, enforcement, prevention and intervention services. Crimestoppers are hoping to deliver Operation Fearless in North Yorkshire, providing a worker who will work with schools to build education on the dangers of drugs and weapons.

As part of this campaign, the Commissioner and NYP are, and will be, reiterating encouragement to the public to report *all* concerns about drug use to help build a better intelligence picture. Police and partners alike are concerned that the public are seeing but not reporting, whether because they think it won't help or because they fear reprisals.