



Both sides of the coin - The police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in 'county lines' drug offending

RESPONSE OF DAVID KEANE, POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CHESHIRE

I welcome Her Majesty's Inspectors' report, published 10 January 2020, which sets out the findings of the HMICFRS inspection into the police and national crime agency response to vulnerable people in county lines drug offending. This is a crucial area of policing both in terms of tackling criminality within our communities but also in protecting those vulnerable to exploitation.

It was positive to note that the inspection found that most forces have significantly improved their understanding of the scale of offending in their area and that forces have improved how some people involved in county lines are identified. However, the Inspectorate has identified inconsistencies in approaches and in some case a lack of prioritisation on county lines.

I will be discussing this with the Chief Constable to seek assurance that Cheshire Constabulary is doing everything it can to prioritise this issue.

Joint working is a key theme that runs through the inspection report. This is something I fully support as it is clear that Cheshire Constabulary cannot work in isolation if it is to tackle this issue effectively. Moreover, this is not something that can be tackled by policing alone. The inspectorate rightly identifies the importance of joint working with other public services. I believe we have strong partnerships in Cheshire and that through work such as our Early Intervention Youth Fund projects, we have established even more effective partnerships targeted at preventing criminal exploitation.

I have noted the Inspectorate's comments on the need for policing to use all possible powers and legislative tools at its disposal to tackle this issue and I will be seeking assurance from the Chief Constable that Cheshire Constabulary and more widely our regional organised crime unit is doing so.

The recommendations coming from this report are set at a national level. As such, I will be discussing with the Chief Constable how we in Cheshire can work with other national, regional and local partners to support progression of the recommendations so we can all work more closely to tackle county lines and protect those at risk of criminal exploitation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Keane'.

David Keane
Police & Crime Commissioner
5 March 2020