

High Sheriff walking the County Line of Dorset to raise awareness of County Lines



Between June 25th and the end of October, I will be walking the whole County line of Dorset, about 216 miles, to raise awareness of County Lines and in particular the exploitation of children and young people.

- The walk will take place in 5 stages, the first leg, beginning in Charmouth to Portland, stopping at West Bay and Abbotsbury enroute.
- Stage 2 is from Weymouth to Swanage via Kimmeridge and Lulworth and then to Sandbanks.
- Stage 3 is from Sandbanks to Cranborne via Bournemouth, Christchurch and Ferndown.
- Stage 4 continues to Shaftesbury and onto Sturminster Newton and Sherborne. Finally
- Stage 5 follows the Somerset and Devon border ending in Lyme Regis. The walk will be just over 200 miles and I will be visiting charities, police and fire stations and coast guard stations along the way. I hope to be joined by friends and colleagues on each leg.

I hope to raise £10,000 for 10 grass roots' Dorset charities that work upstream to support those most vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation, including Future Roots, Escape Line, The Front Skate Park , YMCA Bournemouth and The Talk About Trust. You can read more about the walk and how to join and my campaign here: [Facebook](#)

[Walking The County Line of Dorset for County Lines - a Charities crowdfunding project in Dorchester by High Sheriff of Dorset](#)

Please do walk with me, for a half day, day or several days! Please contact me for full details of the days chosen via highsheriffofdorset@gmail.com or 07876593345

What is County Lines and how does it affect us in Dorset?

'County Lines gangs are united by their pursuit of profit through drug supply, the exploitation of children and vulnerable adults, and a readiness to use violence. In 2025 the number of individuals charged in connection with County Lines increased by over 25% compared to the previous year.' National Association of Police and Crime Commissioners 2025 report

Key places where county lines gangs target, approach and manipulate vulnerable young people include schools and social care spaces, street grooming and increasingly digital channels including social media, private chat apps and online gaming.

Advertising for "runners", they glamorise gang life and entice young people who might otherwise feel like they have no options for the future, once they have their attention, they coerce their victims to commit criminal acts in return for rewards.

Most victims end up feeling 'trapped' in this criminal underworld, experiencing violence, intimidations, and threats. In addition to drug supply, county lines involves other serious crimes such as sexual exploitation, extreme violence (gun and knife crime), money laundering, human trafficking and modern day slavery.

Those exploited often do not realise that they are victims or that they have been groomed until they are trapped as initially, they are offered gifts of money, clothes and food and feel loyal to those grooming them in return for couriating illegal drugs and money across cities, towns and villages. Once trust has been gained, loyalty is put to the test. It starts with asking the young person for favours, with the gang offering a sense of family and protection. This is followed by exploitation through fear, debt bondage, trafficking, isolation from family and friends and physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

County Lines in Dorset and the Southwest

'In the past decade the County Lines model has evolved. 'Going Country' has given the gangs far greater market reach and some have moved permanently into the coastal and county towns, forging links with local criminal business organisations and recruiting local children as runners who can market the drugs in their schools, colleges and neighbourhoods.

Increasingly they are local children with no previous links to welfare or criminal justice agencies. The County Lines 'offer' has also changed, with a broader range of products being offered to an expanding client base that is less reliant on addicts, targeting instead adult and adolescent 'recreational' use. Between 2013 and 2020 the proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds using drugs rose by 28% (Black 2020). Dame Carol Black's independent Review of Drugs (Home Office 2020) noted that the 'illegal drugs market has never caused greater harm.' Professor John Pitts HM Inspectorate of Probation Academic insights

Drug-related crimes rose 14% from 9,932 to 11,295 across the South West in the year ending March 2025 and there are 19 established drug lines into Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole alone. As of early 2026, drugs crime in Dorset showed a 15.3% year-over-year increase, with 1.1k crimes reported. This is largely due to the localisation of drug dealing, known as 'Internal lines' (those that start and end within the same force) which have increased by 18.4% this year, following a 232% rise the previous year across the South West.

The targeting of coastal towns like Bridport, Weymouth and Bournemouth **by gangs from London and Liverpool has led to** [The National County Lines Coordination Centre](#) notes that while the number of young people involved in county lines has slightly reduced nationally, the threat remains high in "importer" areas like the South West

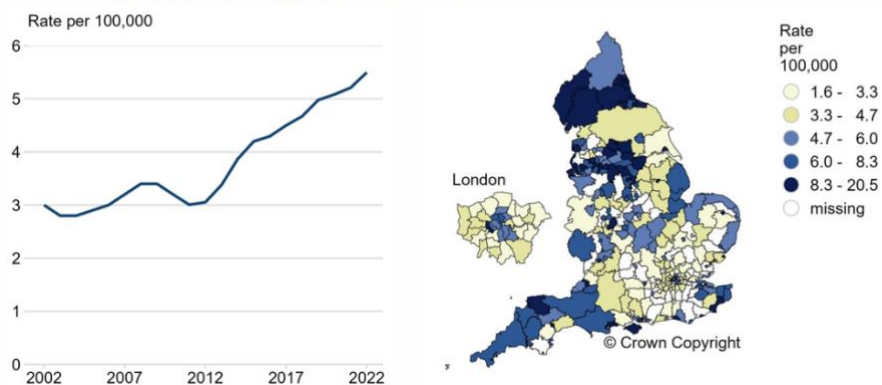
According to Escape Line who support victims of County Lines in Dorset, child exploitation is hidden in plain sight, and the youngest child involved in Dorset is aged just 8. At the County Lines conference held at AFC Bournemouth in 2025 the Dorset Police lead in Criminal intelligence revealed that 34 young people are known to be involved in BCP with a further 50 deemed to be at high risk (repeatedly missing for example).

'It remains the case that children from all types of backgrounds are drawn into County Lines and criminally exploited. Those at increased risk continue to be those already known to County Lines gangs, or on the periphery. Some of the factors that increase the risk include residing in areas of deprivation or poverty; experiencing parental substance misuse; having learning difficulties or special educational needs; having mental health challenges; being in care or known to children's services; school exclusion and/or going missing'. National Association of Police and Crime Commissioners 2025 report

Gangs also frequently take over the homes of vulnerable locals, known as cuckooing. Recent operations in the South West visited 853 such addresses to protect residents.

Most tragically, drug related deaths are some of the highest in England in Dorset, this is partly due to County Lines moving locally from big cities and the 5 fold increase in social media based county line networks. Last year, 89 social media lines were reported by nine forces. This year 429 lines are being reported by about a quarter of all police forces.

Figure 4.20 Mortality from drug misuse



'Don't think it couldn't happen to your child; these gangs are ruthless and their tactics ever-changing. Dorset Police will be robust in tackling county lines and illegal drugs, but it needs all of us to be aware of the dangers, talk to our young people and if concerned, reach out for help. I would also call on people in Dorset to report your intelligence. If you see something suspicious in your neighbourhood, tell the police about it here: [Tell us something you've seen or heard | Dorset Police](#). It may be your information is the missing piece of the puzzle needed for police to take act'. David Sidwick Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner

I do hope you will get involved in my campaign this year which highlights that County Lines is on our doorsteps in this beautiful County. Walk with me, offer me accommodation, sustenance or sponsorship.

Thank you so much!

Helena Conibear High Sheriff of Dorset 2026

We would really appreciate it if you could help me raise funds for the vital cause of raising awareness of County lines, where children and vulnerable young adults are exploited and coerced by drug cartels. I hope to raise at least £10,000 for Dorset youth charities that provide safe spaces, opportunity, skills, education or protection across the county, including Future Roots, Escape Line, YMCA Bournemouth, The Talk About Trust Drug Education Charity and The Fron Skate Park.

Please either donate via:

[Walking The County Line of Dorset for County Lines - a Charities crowdfunding project in Dorchester by High Sheriff of Dorset](#)

Or via:

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/countylineofdorsetcharitywalk>

or you can set up your own giving page linking to **The Dorset Shrieval Charitable Trust**

Receive updates online via [Facebook](#)

You can also read more about my campaign here: <https://www.swanage.news/high-sheriff-to-walk-through-purbeck-in-200-mile-trek-for-youth/>

Follow us on Instagram via [@highsheriffofdorset](#)

How to Report Concerns in Dorset

If you are concerned about a child, you can contact the **Children's Advice and Duty (ChAD) Team** at 01305 228558 or the [Dorset Police online reporting tool](#). For anonymous reporting, use the [Crimestoppers "Fearless" service](#) which is designed specifically for young people