

As county lines crackdown continues, DIVERT continues to help vulnerable youth

Amid an intensified crackdown on county lines drug networks across the UK, the DIVERT project is a vital lifeline for vulnerable young people. As law enforcement dismantles gangs exploiting children and teenagers, DIVERT offers a confidential, supportive pathway out of crime and exploitation.

Between 23–29 June 2025, coordinated operations by the Metropolitan Police and partners forces shut down over 100 active county lines in London alone, arrested more than 300 suspects, and safeguarded 260 young people from criminal networks¹. This enforcement surge is part of a wider national effort that saw hundreds more arrests and the closure of drug lines across multiple regions.

The **DIVERT App**, active in boroughs such as Camden and Islington, enables police officers to make discreet referrals for young people aged 11–18. After referral, police involvement ends, allowing young people to engage freely with intervention coaches without fear of repercussions. All conversations are confidential, and the project operates separately from the criminal justice system.

DIVERT is a Metropolitan Police custody intervention project — delivered by Bounce Back and funded by the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The DIVERT project works alongside police but remains independent and non-judgmental, offering early intervention both in custody and via community referrals.

Coaching and Confidential Support

Young people referred to DIVERT meet with specially trained coaches who provide one-to-one mentorship, helping them create personal development plans tailored to their needs. These plans include access to education, training, employment opportunities, and community activities like sports and the arts.

“DIVERT isn’t about punishment,” says a Camden intervention coach. “It’s about building trust and showing young people; they have choices beyond the gangs that have exploited them.”

National Context and Growing Need

DIVERT’s approach is particularly timely considering recent government developments. Following the *Casey Audit* published in June 2025, which uncovered systemic failures in addressing group-based child exploitation, the government has launched a statutory

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national inquiry and committed to reforms aimed at better protecting vulnerable children.

Local authorities, too, are raising alarms. In Wiltshire, the Police and Crime Commissioner reported in July that gangs are recruiting children as young as seven into drug trafficking. Efforts there include education campaigns, early intervention services, and support project aligned with DIVERT's model.

Looking Ahead

As the UK intensifies its fight against county lines and gang-related youth exploitation, the need for programmes like DIVERT has never been clearer. By combining enforcement with compassionate, personalised support, DIVERT helps young people reclaim their futures and break free from the cycle of exploitation.

According to the Children's Commissioner for England, around **27,000 children** are currently at high risk of gang exploitation across the country².

A 2024 National Crime Agency report found that **more than 2,000 county lines** were active in the UK, with **children under 18 making up the majority of drug couriers**³. These figures underline the urgency of early intervention efforts like DIVERT, which offer young people a safe way out before long-term harm occurs.

For those interested in learning more or self-referring to the DIVERT programme, coaches are available to offer guidance and support at every step.

References

1. Metropolitan Police. *June 2025 Operations Report* published July 2025.
2. Children's Commissioner for England. *Briefing on Child Criminal Exploitation*, 2024.
3. National Crime Agency. *County Lines Drug Supply, Vulnerability and Harm 2024 Assessment*, March 2024.