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Introduction

This Multi-Agency Audit was held by the Salford Safeguarding Adults Board ('SSAB') on behalf of the Salford Joint Exploitation Group, to contribute towards analysing the effectiveness of safeguarding practices across partner agencies when working with adults who are victims (or at risk of/potential victims of) exploitation in the form of 'cuckooing'.

The SSAB collaborated with partners across Salford to better understand how they work together when supporting those who are victims/at risk of cuckooing, to review the quality of safeguarding provided to the selected adults and to better understand how effective policies and processes across Salford agencies are in protecting those at risk of harm and in achieving the desired outcomes of the adults involved.

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What is 'Cuckooing'?

'Cuckooing' is a form of criminal exploitation, and the term used when criminals use or takes over a person's home for criminal purposes such as to cut, prepare, store or deal drugs, or to store firearms and money relating to drugs. The term originates from comparisons of these criminals to cuckoos, who take over the nests of other birds for their own gain, i.e. to lay their own eggs.

Criminals will often target and exploit adults who have vulnerabilities. Initially, perpetrators may offer friendship, free drugs or other things an adult may need; however, this may progress to threats of violence and/or the victim being made to pay off drug debts through use of their home and/or to assist in drug dealing. Victims may be forced to stay in their property or prevented from freely using rooms in their home. They are usually intimidated and left with little choice but to cooperate.

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Participation

Agencies were given the opportunity to nominate the safeguarding processes of adults for audit where multiple agencies worked together, 'cuckooing' was a significant factor, and they felt there was learning to be had.

Agencies involved were asked to complete self-assessment questions specifically about their involvement with the adult(s), along with broader questions about their safeguarding-related activities. This included record-keeping, policies, processes and workforce confidence in applying these in practice.

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Considerations

Findings from the audit were combined with some excellent suggestions made by agencies and involved adults for how safeguarding victims of cuckooing could be improved:

1. Ensuring adults are always invited to MDT meetings – 'nothing about us without us'.
2. The creation of a GM-wide LA agreement to provide clarity to all parties and drive consistency in the swift, efficient moving and rehoming of victims of cuckooing (or other home-based exploitation) to a place of safety in as smooth and distress-free a manner as possible for the adults involved.
3. The creation of a GM-wide agreed process to improve consistent quality of service, accountability and action in protecting adults at risk who have been exploited in their homes.



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Key Findings

- Agencies built trusted relationships with adults, helping to gain valuable information about cuckooing activity and report crimes.
- Housing and Police acted quickly to move adults at risk away from perpetrators and keep them safe.
- MDTs were arranged quickly to bring involved agencies together and plan collaborative next steps.
- Police Safeguarding Specialists met with adults to explain and inform them about the nature of cuckooing, the risks involved and the reasons why they needed to relocate.
- Partners shared information effectively and staying in regular contact to keep each other informed of progress or changes.

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Pen Pictures

Information from agencies nominating adults, plus from Adult Social Care's Liquid Logic system, was collated to form Pen Pictures, giving the background of adults involved and creating context for each safeguarding case.

These Pen Pictures were discussed and presented on-screen in the multi-agency audit session.

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Adult Feedback

The SSAB sought to interview all of the adults involved in the audit, or their representatives, to gain insight into their safeguarding experiences.

Two of the five adults included in the audit agreed to be interviewed. Their feedback offered valuable insight into how those receiving safeguarding due to 'cuckooing' perceived its effectiveness, including if they felt informed, if they felt they had choice and control within the safeguarding process and whether they felt safer as a result.