

Interim Multi-agency Guidance - Exploitation – in the form of ‘Cuckooing’ (2022)

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 storing firearms and money relating to drugs. Criminals will often target and exploit adults who have vulnerabilities.

Initially perpetrators may approach the vulnerable person offering free drugs or other things they 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 bedroom or are prevented from freely using rooms in their home such as their kitchen / living room. They are usually intimidated and left with little choice but to cooperate. Sexual assaults or exploitation may also take place.

Drug networks / gangs are likely to target several people who live close by to each other so they can quickly move between the different properties and avoid getting caught.

Older children/young people are also being exploited by older criminals to enter properties that have been cuckooed and are used as drug runners and for manning the drugs (mobile telephone) line.

What are the Challenges?

Many of the signs of cuckooing look like anti-social behaviour; however, being aware and recognising the indicators of cuckooing, and by raising your concerns about what may appear to be anti-social behaviour to the Council, or the housing provider, will also help tackle both issues. Each cuckooed address is likely to accompany localised increases in anti-social behaviour, crime, and fear of crime.

What can increase the risk to adults?

- Mental health problems
- Drug / alcohol addiction
- Physical disability
- Elderly / frail
- Care needs
- Previous homelessness
- Single parent
- Poverty
- Living alone
- Social isolation
- Ground floor flat / close proximity to stairwell / easy access
- Spare bedroom

What might cuckooing look like?

Potential indicators of cuckooing	Potential indicators of child criminal exploitation
Anti-social behaviour / crimes	Large amounts of money / cash
Complaints of noise	Evidence of travel e.g. tickets, etc
Increased / nuisance visitors 'comings and goings'	Unexplained gifts - new clothes / trainers / accessories (new phone)
Young people frequenting the property	Secretive / withdrawn
Curtains / blinds closed	Criminal behaviour
Person scared / not willing to disclose what's happening or leave the property	Associations with known offenders – Gang / OCG members
Unexplained injuries	Missing from home
Damage to property / doors open	Carrying weapons / weapons found
Increased fob use	Unexplained injuries
Lost / replacing key fobs	Picked up & dropped off in cars
Availability of space – spare bedroom to grow cannabis	Returning with large amounts of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs
Lack of engagement	Possession of drugs paraphernalia, snap bags, grinders
Evidence of takeaway boxes/litter	Older friends, different peer group
Electric scooters and/or scooter helmets at the property	Fearful, change in demeanor – anxious, anger, panic, etc
Security safe in the property	Drug debts with no way to pay
Poverty	Unkempt / poor self care

Key messages

- Cuckooing is when criminals use/take over someone's home to exploit them
- The criminal may present as a friend to the person, or make threats about if they report it
- The person is often reluctant to want any action taking or to report it
- The perpetrators may store drugs, weapons or drug money at the property or use it as a base for drug dealing
- They may force the person to sell drugs for them to clear their 'drug debt'
- They may threaten or harm the person whose home they have taken over
- Perpetrators will move from one victim to the next in a relatively small area e.g. targeting a block of flats or properties within a few streets of each other
- Look out for reports of an increase in strangers, including young people coming and going at all hours, not seeing the person who lives there or seeing them looking stressed and anxious
- If the tenant avoids appointments or disengage with the service – this is a serious cause for concern, and you should seek advice and consider making a referral



What should I do if I am worried that someone is a victim of cuckooing?

If you spot some of the indicators above and are concerned about someone you know who you suspect is being cuckooed, you need to report this to your line manager or designated safeguarding officer who will then advise about any onward referrals.

It is really important that this is all approached in a person-centered way and by keeping the potential victim at the center of the multi-agency discussions and decisions i.e. what does the person want to happen? What are the risks to the person? What needs to happen to keep the person safe? Who needs to be involved?

If possible, have this discussion with the person before making a referral – this will give further information/insight into the situation.

Referral Pathway

Adults	Children / Young People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If there is an immediate risk of harm to an adult, ring 999 ➤ Refer to Adult Social Care using the online referral form https://www.salford.gov.uk/adult-safeguarding ➤ Or contact 0161 206 0604 ➤ If you need to speak to someone outside of these times, please contact the Out of Hours Service on 0161 794 8888 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If there is an immediate risk of harm to a child, ring 999 ➤ Refer to the Bridge using the online referral form: https://www.salford.gov.uk/worriedaboutachild ➤ Or contact 0161 603 4500 ➤ If you need to speak to someone outside of these times, please contact the Out of Hours Service on 0161 794 8888

Sharing information and intelligence

Where there are concerns that a person is at risk of, or is experiencing exploitation, you are legally permitted to [share information](#) on a need to know basis with other relevant agencies who have a responsibility to safeguard any potential victims, this can be via a referral or through an multi-agency meeting. This includes sharing information without consent where a person may be being coerced or under duress, to prevent a crime being committed or where others are at risk which is extremely likely in cases such as these.

Also, if you see or hear something and have a feeling that something isn't right and have concerns that person may be being exploited through cuckooing, but don't have enough information to be able to make a referral, it's really important to share this information with GMP so they are aware and can begin to develop a picture and to determine if any further action is necessary. To share information/concerns you should complete the [GMP Partner Intelligence Form](#) and once completed, it can be sent via email to FIB@gmp.police.uk

What should happen next?

Once a referral has been made, it will be screened initially by the Bridge or the Adult Contact Centre and shared with the appropriate team for further action which could include multi-agency discussions where involved agencies can share their information to assess the level of risk to then determine what actions should be taken and by whom. Consideration of the multi-agency risk assessment may be necessary to fully document key risks and actions identified.

How to escalate the concern if not responded to?

This is a new area of work so may be unfamiliar to people, and it could be confused with anti-social behaviour so may not be taken as seriously and the referral may not progress to the relevant team to respond and for action. If this happens, you should raise this with your agency designated safeguarding officer or line manager who can then escalate to the relevant team.

Other Useful Links

- **SSAB** [Cuckooing 7-minute briefing](#)
- **SSAB** [Cuckooing PowerPoint \(8 minute video\)](#)
- **SSAB** [Intelligence Submissions PowerPoint \(8 minute video\)](#)
- **New Local Government Association Guidance** [Supporting modern slavery victims: guidance & good practice for council homelessness services](#)
- **Gov.UK** [Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities: Chapter 25 Modern Slavery & Trafficking](#)
- **Gov.UK** [Report modern slavery to the NRM / Complete Duty to Notify](#)

Organisation	Telephone	Website or contact
Salvation Army, Victim Care Contract – confidential 24/7 referral helpline	0800 808 3733	Modern slavery The Salvation Army
City Hearts, Northwest Provider – outreach, drop in and telephone support for victims pre and post NRM	0151 709 9599	Home - City Hearts ISP@cityhearts.co.uk
Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking Guardians – Greater Manchester was an early adopter sites, all under 18 potential victims must be referred	0800 043 4303	ICTG - Greater Manchester Barnardo's (barnardos.org.uk)