

## Cuckooing

Cuckooing is when Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) or perpetrators take over properties through force, deceit or coercion. It is often included with county Lines occurring when gangs take control over a vulnerable adult's address, as a site to store/supply/produce drugs. Individuals sometimes use the properties for pop-up brothels, storing weapons or other illicit and unwanted activity. Gangs will do this in order to avoid Police detection themselves. The term Cuckooing takes its name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds to lay their eggs. It often starts by a member of the crime group befriending vulnerable adults. They will then offer the vulnerable adult something of interest to them, this could be a relationship, friendship, drugs and/or alcohol, money, clothing support to access services or a sense of belonging. In exchange they may ask to 'borrow' a room, to store something or meet other 'friends' at the property. In some cases, the gang may make it clear that this is for criminal purposes, i.e. drug supply, or they may use an excuse as to why they want to use the property. In other instance they will gaslight the victims in to thinking they are consenting because of a relationship. Gradually the 'benefits' will reduce and may eventually come to an end, and more and more people will come and go from the address. The crime group members may threaten the vulnerable adult verbally or physically if they try to put a stop to their criminal activity. They may discourage family/friends and support workers from visiting the vulnerable person's address or they may intimidate the victim to make them feel they cannot be at home.

## What are the types of cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a crime where a criminal, or criminal gangs, exploit vulnerable people. The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take control of the victim's home and use the premises to store, prepare or distribute drugs often as part of county lines networks.

It is common for these gangs to have access to several cuckooed addresses. They can move quickly between people's homes for just a few hours, a couple of days or sometimes longer. This helps the gangs evade detection. By cuckooing, the criminals can operate from a discreet property, which is not associated with them and probably under the radar of the police; this is what makes it an attractive option for these gangs.

### Other different types of cuckooing include:

- Taking over or using the property to take drugs.
- Using the property to manage the "workforce" of drug runners and to carry out acts of violence.
- Taking over or using the property for sex work / human trafficking
- Taking over or using the property to store weapons.
- Taking over the property as a place to live.
- Taking over the property to financially abuse the homeowner/tenant.

## Who might be at risk of cuckooing?

In some cases, the criminal gangs are known to utilise consenting adults to assist their criminal activity by getting them to open up their homes to the gangs and allowing the use of their home addresses for running and holding drugs or firearms. However, the gangs usually target people who are often unable to protect themselves from being exploited. The criminal gangs then use a range of clever tactics to manipulate and exploit their victims, some of these tactics may be so subtle that the victim doesn't always realise that they are being cuckooed, so it may go unnoticed for some time.

## Cuckooing usually involves the criminals identifying vulnerable people who may, for example:

- Use drugs and/or alcohol.
- Be former addicts.
- Have connections with other people involved in gangs.
- Lack a safe/stable home environment.
- Have a history of being in care.
- Have prior experiences of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Be vulnerable due to mental or physical health impairments.
- Be elderly and may be socially isolated.
- Have cognitive impairments.
- Have learning disabilities.
- Be experiencing economic deprivation.
- Be single mothers.
- Be sex workers.

## What are the signs of Cuckooing?

Cuckooing usually takes place in multi occupancy or social housing properties. Sometimes, the person being exploited has no idea that they are being used or is simply too afraid to speak up, which can make it difficult to spot what is going on.

## However, there are some signs to look out for:

- Suspicious items in the property, such as weighing scales, multiple phones, sim cards or drug paraphernalia.
- Unexplained presence of cash, clothes and other items of value.
- Conversely, the property may appear almost sparse of valuable possessions inside and begin to go into a state of disrepair both inside and out.
- Distancing away from family and friends
- Doors and windows which have been blocked off.
- New faces appearing at the property and the property regularly changing residents.
- Presence of unknown people in the property, who may act as friends of the inhabitant; their accents may indicate that they are not local and may have travelled to traffic drugs.
- More people than normal entering the property, or people arriving and leaving at unusual times.
- Possible increase in anti-social behaviour in and around the property and increased litter such as drinks cans and takeaway packaging outside the property.
- Increase in bikes or mopeds outside the property.
- Concerns that the inhabitant of the property has not been seen for a while; they may feel too afraid to leave the house

## Resources

[Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults \(Home Office\).](#)  
[County Lines \(National Crime Agency\).](#)

Humberstone Police—[report it online](#) or call [101](#). safeguarding adults