

CUCKOOING

What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing involves criminals and or gangs taking over the home of an adult at risk in order to establish a base to conduct illegal activities such as drug dealing or sex work. Other types of cuckooing can include the storing of money or weapons or even taking over the property as a tenant financially abusing the occupant. The term "cuckooing" comes from the cuckoo bird which takes over the nest of other birds.

Who can fall victim of cuckooing?

Adults at risk are the mostly likely to become victims of cuckooing, criminals or gangs will target those who are lonely, isolated or alcohol and/or drug dependant.

Criminals or gangs will attempt to befriend an individual in order to take advantage of their current circumstances. Victims of cuckooing are often left with little choice but to cooperate.

What are the signs of cuckooing?

It's really important to be aware of the signs of cuckooing which may indicate an individual is being exploited, this may include:

- **Frequent visitors** - An unusual number of different individuals visiting a property at all hours or seeing an increase in people that don't usually associate with the tenant. There may also be an increase in vehicles or bikes left outside the property.
- **Changes in behaviour** - The tenant has become withdrawn, anxious or has begun to show significant changes to their physical appearance or health.
- **Neglect of the property** - The home may appear to show signs of neglect or sign of damage a reasonable person would address. There could be signs of drug use with the area as well as an increase in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).
- **Presence of security measures** - The property may have a new CCTV system installed or have other security measures which may not be typical in that particular area. This may also include blocking windows keeping curtains drawn to prevent visibility.

Cuckooing recruitment

- **Targeting** - Criminals will deliberately target individuals who are socially isolated, financially vulnerable, substances users, suffer with mental or physical disabilities.
- **Grooming & Exploitation** - Grooming techniques are used to build trust and a dependency over time, this may include forming relationships, providing gifts (which may include alcohol and/or drugs), promising and/or providing protection.
- **Exploitation & Coercion** - Once trust and dependency has been built the criminals will then begin to exploit the individual by threats & intimidation, issues a debt bondage, control addiction (this could include upping the usage of substances or removing to establish control) isolating the individual from family, friends and support agencies.

Legislation

Recent changes to legislation now means that "Cuckooing" will become a specific criminal offence under The Crime & Policing Bill, after years of campaigning from Justice & Care and The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ).

In previous years the offence of cuckooing has been investigated under the following acts:

- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Misuse of drugs Act 1971
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Housing Act 1985/ Housing Act 1996

Under this new standalone act, offenders found guilty can serve up to a maximum of 5 years in prison.

What to do if you suspect someone is a victim of cuckooing?

Call the Police - If an emergency: 999 - For non-emergency – 101

Crimestoppers - Anonymously report any concerns - Call 0800 555 111

Wolverhampton - Adult Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

In hours – 01902 555392 - Out of hours – 01902 552999 - AdultMASHSecure@secure.wolverhampton.gov.uk