



OLDHAM ADULTS SAFEGUARDING BOARD, OLDHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP & OLDHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Exploitation in the form of 'Cuckooing' Guidance



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With thanks to Salford Safeguarding Adults Board

Version: 1.0

Adopted: May 2023

Review Date: May 2024



Contents

1	What is 'Cuckooing'?	3
2	What are the Challenges?	3
3	What Can Increase the Risk to Adults?	3
4	What Might Cuckooing Look Like?	3
5	Key Messages	4
6	What Should I Do If I Am Worried That Someone Is A Victim Of Cuckooing?	4
7	Sharing Information and Intelligence	5
8	What Should Happen Next?	5
9	How to Escalate the Concern If Not Responded To?	6
10	Case Study 1: Peter (Extract from Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board Discretionary SAR Report)	6
11	Case Study 2: Kevin (Extract from The Guardian, 18 September 2019)	6
10	Other Useful Links	7

1 What is 'Cuckooing'?

- 1.1 'Cuckooing' is a form of exploitation and the term used when an individual or a criminal gang target the home of a vulnerable person so they can use the property for criminal purposes such as drug-dealing, hiding weapons and other criminal activities. Criminals often befriend a vulnerable person in order to exploit them and use their property. The term takes its name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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.

2 What are the Challenges?

- 2.1 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.

3 What Can Increase the Risk to Adults?

- Mental health conditions
- Drug / alcohol addiction
- Physical disability
- Elderly
- Drug debt / financial difficulties
- Previously homeless
- Single parent
- People with care needs living independently
- Poverty
- Living alone
- Socially isolated
- Reduced contact with services
- Having a ground floor flat
- Being close to a stairwell
- Having a spare bedroom
- Learning Disability

4 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

5 Key Messages

- Cuckooing is when criminals take over someone's home to exploit them.
- 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.

6 What Should I Do If I Am Worried That Someone Is A Victim Of Cuckooing?

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 You should contact the police via 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or for non-urgent cases via 101 or the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) ['Report a Crime' webpage](#).
- 6.3 Cuckooing cases are likely to have a wider public protection aspect to them, e.g. perpetrators may target more than one victim or household, and therefore, considering the wider public interest, report non urgent cases on 101 or online via the GMP 'Report a Crime' webpage.

6.4 Referral Pathway

Adults	Children / Young People
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ If there is an immediate risk of harm to an adult, contact the police via 999➤ Or, for non-urgent cases contact the police via 101 or the GMP ‘Report a Crime’ webpage.➤ Contact the Modern Slavery Helpline and report your suspicions with as much detail as possible: 08000 121 700.➤ You can contact Adult MASH on 0161 770 7777 8:40-17:00 Monday - Friday or Email: adult.MASH@oldham.gov.uk➤ You can make a professional referral for adults online.➤ If you need to speak to someone outside of these times, please contact the Out of Hours Service on 0161 770 6936.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ If there is an immediate risk of harm to a child, contact the police via 999➤ Or, for non-urgent cases contact the police via 101 or the GMP ‘Report a Crime’ webpage.➤ You can contact Children’s Social Care via ‘Duty and Advice’: 0161 770 7777 8:40- 17:00 Monday - Friday➤ If you need to speak to someone outside of these times, please contact the Out of Hours Service on 0161 770 6936.

6.5 A more detailed referral pathway for all victims of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking can be found in the Modern Slavery Toolkit.

7 Sharing Information and Intelligence

7.1 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, in the wider public interest, which is extremely likely in cases such as these.

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

8 What Should Happen Next?

8.1 Once a referral has been made, it will be screened 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.

8.2 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?

9 How to Escalate the Concern If Not Responded To?

- 9.1 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.

10 Case Study 1: Peter (Extract from Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board Discretionary SAR Report)

- 10.1 Peter (not his real name) lived alone, managed his own finances and affairs. He had a care package and various aids and adaptations in place. There were several disclosures of financial abuse and exploitation by two younger males in the local area by Peter, his neighbours and professionals working with Peter. This included males taking Peter's money, bank card, medication, and his phone. One of the males also tried to prevent professionals from accessing Peter. Examples of concerns raised by neighbours included another neighbour who was borrowing money without returning it and offering to do Peter's shopping but keeping the money without providing groceries.
- 10.2 Paid carers commissioned to support Peter felt unsafe going into his home because of the two males being present inside or outside of the flat. During one care episode, a carer was unable to leave the property due to a known drug user who was carrying a knife loitering outside the property.
- 10.3 Peter made various complaints to his GP, paramedics and other professionals reporting neighbours stealing his money, food, and medication. Peter also reported during a hospital stay that a friend was living with him that was using heroin. He asked for sheltered accommodation but discharged himself before an assessment could take place. Peter once stated a neighbour had pawned some of his jewellery and not returned it and disclosed sexual abuse and exploitation. He reported having no money to pay contributions to his care package and often refused care as he couldn't afford to pay. Peter stated he felt hounded by the males and that he was desperate to move to a safe place.
- 10.4 Peter was found deceased in his flat by the police following a suspected fall. Peter had been a frequent caller to the ambulance service in the months leading up to his death, had some recent admissions into hospital and saw his GP regularly. The Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board used its discretionary powers to review Peter's case to consider concerns of how partner agencies had worked together to protect him.

11 Case Study 2: Kevin (Extract from The Guardian, 18 September 2019)

- 11.1 Kevin (not his real name) was supported by his housing support worker, when he needed to be urgently rehoused, having to be moved with a few hours' notice due to the risk and level of violent threats made to him. Rival drug dealers had turned up at his house and broke in with hammers and knives.
- 11.2 Kevin said, "The problem was that these people were selling from my property but there were also local people selling. So, these were turf wars and I got caught up in them, they made a big thing about slashing people to get the fear up. They really wanted to make a proper point to all the locals. They prey on people with habits and addictions as they use it as a key to get in. In my experience I needed money, and I was lonely. These people pretended to be my mates."
- 11.3 The group of people generally targeted by cuckooing are often mistrustful of authorities and would not necessarily report these incidents to the police as they are fearful for their own safety and lives. Local communities are also fearful of the situation and in this case, they saw Kevin as the perpetrator. Whilst Kevin

still worries about people turning up to his new house, he also misses their company. He said, “They prey on lonely people and drug users. Some people are looking for them to come.”

10 Other Useful Links

- [Oldham Cuckooing 7-Minute Briefing](#)
- [Oldham Modern Slavery Toolkit](#)
- [Oldham Modern Slavery 7-Minute Briefing](#)
- **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
Causeway – North of England service provider offering accommodation and community support for support for victims pre and post NRM	0151 709 9599	Causeway - Modern Slavery & Criminal Justice Support Charity (wearecauseway.org.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)