

# **CUCKOOING GUIDANCE**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**  
**Supporting People**

**Version 2**  
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## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. The purpose of this guidance is to provide staff with information on how to identify signs of cuckooing and support adults at risk of cuckooing.
- 1.2. This guidance also aims to support staff to deal with cases involving cuckooing and be aware of other departments/organisations both internally and externally they may need to contact. This can include housing, community safety, mental health teams and the Police etc.
- 1.3. The words person alleged to be causing harm have been used throughout this guidance. Other services may refer to these persons as prosecuted criminals and gangs involved in cuckooing.

## **2. What is cuckooing?**

- 2.1. Cuckooing is a form of criminal exploitation. It is the term used when a person alleged to be causing harm uses the house of an adult at risk for movement of cash proceeds, to store and/or supply drugs, weapons and other criminal activities.
- 2.2. Adults at risk are often adults with care and support needs. They can be an older person living alone, a person with physical or learning disabilities or a mental health condition. Adults with a substance misuse or criminal history can also be at risk, as well as individuals who are socially isolated and lonely who look for friendships of any form.
- 2.3. The person alleged to be causing harm may gain access to the individual's home through befriending them, using coercion or offering them free illegal drugs in exchange for using their home for criminal activities. The person alleged to be causing harm may also use females/males to befriend the other person and become their partner. The female/male will then introduce their friends to the adult at risk and they may take over the property.
- 2.4. People alleged to be causing harm move around and they may target multiple people at once (staying for short periods in each home and then moving on). The home may be used for a few hours, days or even longer in order for them to avoid detection by the Police.
- 2.5. Adults at risk may become homeless as a result of people taking over their property. They may also be at risk of domestic abuse, financial abuse, sexual exploitation and violence.
- 2.6. Cuckooing can be linked to county lines as criminals may take over a local property. County lines is when illegal drugs are transported from one area to another often by children or adults at risk. Further information can be found in appendix 1.
- 2.7. Cuckooing can often also be linked to other forms of exploitation and crime such as mate crime, modern slavery and human trafficking. The person alleged to be causing harm may exploit both adults and children. Definitions can be found in appendix 1.

## **3. Signs to look out for**

3.1. There are several signs/triggers to look out for and many of these are the same as other forms of exploitation and abuse. This is not an exhaustive list:

- The individual being isolated or withdrawn
- Lack of funds and no food in the house
- Change in behaviour such as being scared or an increase in drugs or alcohol misuse by the individual
- Appears depressed or signs of self-neglect (unkempt)
- An increase in the number of vehicles visiting the property. This includes new vehicles or an increase in the number of taxis or hire cars
- An increase in the number of people coming and going from the property
- Disengagement from support services, this can include a reduction in the number of health and social care workers visiting the individual
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in and around the property
- Individual may be in debt or start selling their items
- Possessions in the property may become sparse
- The individual may start to become involved in crime – stealing to survive
- The house may start to become in a state of disrepair and need repairs or replacement of locks
- Other professionals visiting may be aware of unidentified people being in the individual's home
- Rehearsed statement – 'I am fine, no they are not using my property. They are my carers'
- The individual is working for free for the person alleged to be causing harm in order to repay a perceived debt
- Repeat requests from the individual for e.g. repairs or complaining and then withdrawing the complaint
- Complaints from neighbours regarding drugs and/or alcohol or anti-social behaviour
- Individual has previously been exploited

3.2. Programme Challenger, Manchester's partnership approach to tackling serious organised crime, have identified signs of exploitation and abuse as:

- Are they receiving more calls than normal?
- Are they carrying or selling drugs?
- Are they hanging out with someone that is older or younger than them and controlling?
- Do they have any unexplained injuries?
- Do they seem very reserved and like they have something to hide?
- Are they going missing from home or school?
- Unwillingness to allow entry to the property
- Change in behaviour or attitude
- Change in physical appearance

#### **4. Reasons individuals may not report cuckooing**

4.1. There are various reasons why individuals may choose not to report cuckooing. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Individuals may choose not to report crime taking place in the home as they may fear repercussions from the person alleged to be causing harm due to previous threats.
- Individuals may also fear being evicted due to offender activity taking place in their home (including anti-social behaviour).
- Individuals may fear that they will get in trouble with the Police. Section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 states that it is an offence “if an individual knowingly allows activities involving drugs in premises they either live in or manage.”
- The person alleged to be causing harm may also allow the individual to build up a drug debt, that they are unable to pay, leading to threats and violence and they are too afraid to seek help.
- The person could have made new friends, but is unaware of their intentions and gain.
- The individual may be benefitting from the crime e.g. person alleged to be causing harm is providing them with free drugs.

## **5. What to do if you suspect a person is being targeted**

- 5.1. If you suspect a person is being cuckooed it is important to alert the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). An assessment of risk will be undertaken by MASH by contacting the individual where possible and undertaking network checks. If the individual is at risk of immediate harm please contact the Police via 999 or 101 for a welfare visit by the Police.
- 5.2. Professionals should report concerns using the [SABP form](#) on the Council website (this can be found under what should I do if I suspect abuse?) and email it to: [asc.mash.safeguarding@camden.gov.uk](mailto:asc.mash.safeguarding@camden.gov.uk) or call Access and Response on 020 7974 4000 option 1. If you are unable to find the SABP form please email the MASH team to request a copy. If there are any children involved or living at the property, please report to the children’s MASH team on 020 7974 3317 or email [LBCMASHadmin@camden.gov.uk](mailto:LBCMASHadmin@camden.gov.uk)
- 5.3. MASH will review the referral to determine immediate risk and whether the individual is known to a worker and/or team in Adult Social Care or Camden and Islington Foundation Trust. If known MASH will ensure the safeguarding referral is passed to the relevant worker and service accordingly, whilst ensuring immediate risk is addressed.
- 5.4. The relevant worker may refer the case to community multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) or the High Risk Panel to support with multi-agency working. MARAC is a multi-agency meeting where information on adults at risk is shared to draw up safety plans. The High Risk Panel provides a multi-agency way of supporting individuals with complex needs presenting with high risk in order to secure positive and person-centred outcomes.
- 5.5. When the individual is not known or has been closed to another service for longer than 12 months MASH will undertake initial enquiries known as a section 42.1 enquiry. The purpose of this work is to ascertain whether the individual:
  - appears to have care and support needs
  - appears to be experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect
  - as a result of those needs the individual appears to be unable to protect themselves against the abuse or neglect, or the risk of it.

- 5.6. When determining the above MASH will undertake a number of network checks, which may include contacting the following groups of people. This is not an exhaustive list:
- Other local authorities
  - GP
  - Community Nurse
  - Hospital staff
  - Police via 101 or MASH Police for advice and support
  - Housing Services
  - Community Safety/Safer Streets- community mobile services within the local area
  - Family/Friends
- 5.7. If the individual does not meet the statutory thresholds under the Care Act for the safeguarding to move forward onto a section 42.2 enquiry then MASH would consider a non-statutory enquiry where appropriate.
- 5.8. When MASH have established whether the referral should progress to section 42.2 enquiry then it will be passed to appropriate community social work team or service in Camden and Islington Foundation Trust.
- 5.9. A planning discussion/meeting will be undertaken, which could involve a number of agencies involved in the person's life. The purpose of the meeting will be to ascertain who is responsible for what action. Where appropriate the individual who is being cuckooed will be invited to these and other meetings. Assessment of the individual's mental capacity and their need for advocacy would also be considered. If required referrals will be made for a Care Act advocate or Independent Mental Capacity Advocate.
- 5.10. Any discussions should look at mitigating risk to the individual concerned, such as, is it safe for the individual to remain in the property.
- 5.11. As part of the enquiry process it may be appropriate and necessary for professionals to conduct visits to the individual at the property. These visits should be carefully planned with the support of the Police and/or Housing Officer. Professionals need to ascertain the risk to the adult(s) and themselves when visiting the person's home. Consider having keys words, which can be used to determine whether the adult is safe, or if it is safe for professionals to visit. Please see the lone working and personal safety [guidance](#) for further information.
- 5.12. It is important to minimise the risk of the person being identified. For example, by exploring other places to install key safes, asking care workers not to display their uniform and not pressing other residents' doorbells to gain access into the estate or flat. Further information on Adult Social Care policies and guidance such as key safe guidance can be found on the Adult Social Care Practice Guide.
- 5.13. Where possible, risk assessments and safeguarding plans should be created with the support of the individual concerned and with multi-disciplinary input.
- 5.14. Further safeguarding meetings will be held as required to discuss the findings of the enquiry, agree further actions and safeguarding plans as required, and identify any

lessons learned. This should involve all the agencies involved in the enquiry or in supporting the adult and where appropriate, the individual themselves and/or their advocate.

- 5.15. If an individual has been cuckooed it may be necessary to move them to a different accommodation. If they are a council tenant Housing can provide temporary accommodation or offer housing in another part of the borough when this is necessary to keep people safe.
- 5.16. Closure orders may be issued as part of the resolution/enforcement stage. For further information on closure order procedures and community safety panels please refer to the Housing Practice Guide or speak to the neighbourhood housing officer or Community Safety.
- 5.17. When the safeguarding enquiry is concluded and the risk has been mitigated sufficiently, it is important that agencies review the safeguarding plan and risks at regular intervals.
- 5.18. The safeguarding process should be clearly documented and shared with relevant networks.
- 5.19. Further information on Safeguarding Adults in Camden can be found on the [Council website](#) or Adult Social Care Practice Guide.

## **6. Prevention and moving forward**

- 6.1. It is important for professionals and communities to identify adults in their local area who might be at risk of being targeted by criminals for the purposes of cuckooing.
- 6.2. The housing team will work with other agencies and Community Safety in response to cases of cuckooing in the Council's stock. This is also a preventative approach as it helps to identify and put in place support for other adults at risk of being cuckooed in the area.
- 6.3. Joint working in cases of cuckooing is essential. The housing team may also work with tenant and resident associations to support the local neighbourhood, address any concerns and reassure the wider community.
- 6.4. Providing the appropriate preventative services will minimise the risk of cuckooing occurring, such as the Integrated Camden Drug service, Community Safety, Mental Health services etc.
- 6.5. It is important that adults at risk have access to health and social care support services, which can support them effectively and make them less reliant on criminals for their care and support needs.
- 6.6. Professionals working with vulnerable or isolated groups should consider the risks of cuckooing to the individual as part of their assessment and risk management strategies.
- 6.7. It is important that risk is reviewed on a regular basis for individuals at risk of cuckooing.

- 6.8. When services have supported an adult at risk with stopping criminal activity within their home it is important that communities and partnerships work together to prevent reoccurrence where possible.

## References

1. Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance, Home Office, September 2018
2. London Multi-Agency Adult Safeguarding Policy & Procedures, April 2019.
3. Protecting Children From Criminal Exploitation, Human Trafficking And Modern Slavery: An Addendum, November 2018
4. Programme Challenger, Tackling Serious and Organised Crime Together, <https://www.programmechallenger.co.uk/resources/cuckooing/>
5. Housing Practice Guide - Premise Closures Order guidance

## Legislation

1. Environmental Protection Act 1990
2. Crime and Policing Act 2014
3. Housing Act 1996 & 2004
4. Care Act 2014
5. Modern Slavery Act 2015
6. Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

## Appendix 1: Definitions

- a. **An adult with care and support needs** is someone aged 18 and over who
  - has needs for care and support (regardless of whether these needs are being met by the local authority or not) and
  - Is experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect
  - As a result of those needs is unable to protect him or herself against abuse or neglect or the risk of it (Care Act 2014).
- b. **Mate crime** - The [Safety Net Project](#) defines mate crime as "when adults at risk are befriended by members of the community who go on to exploit and take advantage of them." The London Multi-agency Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures states 'mate crime is committed by someone the adult knows and often happens in private.'
- c. **Modern slavery** is defined in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 as 'slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour'. It is a form of organised crime in which people are treated as commodities and exploited for criminal gain.
- d. **Human trafficking** is defined in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 as 'the arranging or facilitating of another person's travel with the view of them being exploited by recruiting, transporting or transferring, harbouring or receiving a person or exchanging a person. Trafficking can include travel within the same country.'



- e. **County lines** - The Home Office describes county lines as ‘a term used to describe gangs and organised offender networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and adults with care and support needs to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons’.
- f. County lines exploitation is a major cross cutting issue involving trafficking, gangs, drugs, violence, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation and missing persons. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local adults with care and support needs by force or coercion.<sup>1</sup> Further information can be found in the County Lines guidance by the Home Office.
- g. An inspection by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation<sup>2</sup> found that:

‘Children’s travel may be ‘arranged and facilitated by a person, with the view to them being exploited’, which amounts to human trafficking according to section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Children may then be forced to work for the drug dealer, often held in the adult at risk’s home against their will and under the force of threat if they do not do as they are told. This meets the definition of ‘slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour’ in section 1 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance, Home Office, September 2018

<sup>2</sup> Protecting Children From Criminal Exploitation, Human Trafficking And Modern Slavery: An Addendum, November 2018