

Cuckooing, Criminal Exploitation and Modern Slavery



What is cuckooing?

Cuckooing refers to a form of exploitation where criminals take over the home of a vulnerable person, often using the property as a base for illegal activities such as drug dealing, storing weapons, or other criminal operations. Sometimes sex work or sexual exploitation takes place in cuckooed properties. Cuckooing typically involves the perpetrator befriending or coercing an individual to gain access and control over their home.

The term originates from the behaviour of cuckoo birds, which lay their eggs in other birds' nests, taking over the space for their own benefit.

Who is affected?

- The adults who have their homes taken over by criminals. They may be vulnerable for many reasons such as drug dependence, isolation, mental health challenges, age-related factors, physical or learning disabilities, poverty or debt.
- Children or vulnerable adults who are being exploited through forced criminality can also be in cuckooed properties. They may refer to such locations as a 'trap house' or 'bando'. In addition to criminal exploitation, children can experience other forms of abuse in these properties.
- Neighbours near the property that has been taken over may be impacted by the exploitation through anti-social behaviour, criminality, intimidation and fear.

Spot the signs

Property

- Frequent new visitors, including unknown children or drug users
- Communal doors and gates propped open or buzzers frequently pressed
- Vehicles/bikes frequently arriving or loitering outside the property
- An increase in parties, anti-social behaviour or noise complaints
- Signs of violence i.e. smashed windows, property damage or broken CCTV
- Presence of suspicious items or waste that may not align to the tenant, for example drug paraphernalia, multiple phones, large sums of cash and litter
- Drug use or an odour of drugs coming from the property

Victim

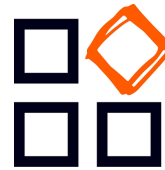
- Reduced interaction with friends, family, neighbours and professionals
- Hesitant to allow people inside the property
- Self-neglect, weight loss, not taking medication, appearing unkempt and becoming withdrawn
- Sleeping rough despite having a home
- Leaving home whilst others remain inside
- New people or 'friends' who they think are helping them
- Increased or new drug use
- Being made to participate in drug dealing, housework or other activities against their will

Exploitation and cuckooing

Cuckooing is exploitative, and can be regarded as modern slavery if the adult is forced to do something for the exploiters against their will, like selling or preparing drugs, cooking, cleaning or providing any type of work. If an adult is experiencing modern slavery, they can be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The NRM is the UK government's system used to identify and support potential victims of modern slavery. Adults must consent to a referral. This support can be explored via referrals to all three boroughs' cuckooing panels.

Sometimes people who are cuckooed may have also perpetrated crimes (for example anti-social behaviour). This does not mean they aren't a victim of cuckooing, it is possible to be both a victim and a perpetrator.

Children in cuckooed properties are highly likely to be experiencing criminal exploitation, which is child abuse. Concerns should always be reported to police and the relevant local authority for a child safeguarding response.



modern slavery & exploitation helpline

08000 121 700

Reporting pathways



Cuckooing involves criminality, and should be reported to police via 101 or 999. If you are concerned a property has been cuckooed please contact the relevant local authority and they will assess the needs of vulnerable adults. Children must always be referred to children's services.

To refer a case to **Westminster City Council's** cuckooing panel email communitysafety@westminster.gov.uk.

Adult Social Care: 0207 641 2500 / adultsocialcare@westminster.gov.uk

Children's Services: 020 7641 4000

To refer a case to **RBKC's** Joint Action Group (JAG) where cuckooing cases are heard, email communitysafety@rbkc.gov.uk.

Adult Social Care: 020 7361 3013 / socialservices@rbkc.gov.uk

Children's Services: 020 7361 3013



Safeguarding Adults Executive Board



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA



City of Westminster