

Cuckooing and Covid-19: 7 point Briefing

This briefing is intended for individuals working in housing, including private and social landlords, health and social care professionals and voluntary organisations.

1. What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing is where a criminal (or abuser), or someone connected with them, befriends an individual who lives on their own. The criminal then moves in and uses the property to operate unlawfully or carry out an abusive activity. The person being cuckooed is often lonely, isolated and vulnerable.

2. Who are the victims?

The people susceptible to cuckooing are normally 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' adults. They may be:

- Drug Users or living with forms of addiction
- Older Adults
- Living with mental or physical health condition, learning or other disability
- Involved in prostitution
- Single Parents
- Isolated

3. Controlling the victim

During the Covid 19 National Pandemic a number of people may be grateful for individuals moving in to order support and comfort, only to be taken advantage of financially using the property and/ or their finances to benefit the abuser.

The discreet location can be used to stay out of sight of the police and continue to conduct their unlawful business or they may be abusing the trust of the individual and using their finances to supplement their own money whilst living rent free.

Once the person realises they are no longer in control, the intimidation levels can escalate to include the use of threats and violence. Covid 19 threats and anxieties may be used to threaten the victim to stay within the home.

4. Spotting the signs

There will be some of the following:

- New people in the property or visiting / parking nearby
- The helper going out frequently whilst the person inside is self-isolating and not able to talk to anyone outside the home
- Someone moving in just before or just after lockdown who is overly protective
- An increase of anti-social behaviour near the property

5. The Adult at Risk

- They have stopped engaging with services
- They have unexplained injuries
- They do not understand the government guidelines about what they can and cannot do in relation to Covid 19
- They have suddenly paid off their debts in full including any housing debts
- They appear withdrawn, fearful of disclosing information for fear of “betraying” the criminal / abuser, being subject to further abuse or eviction
- They have changed in appearance and may be neglecting their wellbeing

6. Cuckooing Legality

Each situation is different and the council will take into account the circumstances before taking action. Some of the options include:

- A civil injunction – this means going to court to make the abuser move out and not return to the area where the individual is living
- Possession Proceedings – when the individual has moved out and the abuser is now living in the property then the court can be asked to make them move out and an injunction, as above, not to return.
- Criminal Proceedings – led by the police if drug taking or other criminal activity is taking place. Sometimes individual are worried and do not want to give evidence, and it may be necessary for the police to liaise with the landlord or third parties such as neighbours to provide that evidence; this can be better, where possible, as it protects the individual from reprisals. Landlords need to be aware that under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, they or their property managers can receive up to 14 years imprisonment or a substantial fine for having drugs residing at their property in addition the premises may be ‘closed down’ and boarded up under the terms of a Premises Closure Order: (Section 76 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014) so it is in their interest to support the police with their enquiry.

If the individual has consented, with capacity, to the criminal moving in and is now unable to make free decisions or express their genuine consent, the local authority could apply to the High Court for inherent jurisdiction to support the individual.

7. What to do if you are concerned about someone you know, your property and someone living in it?

- Crimestoppers – anonymous reporting of any concerns call: 0800 555 111
- Police – In an emergency call 999. For non-emergency concerns call 101
- Adult Safeguarding call 0117 922 2700

