

Cuckooing & Adult Exploitation

What is Cuckooing?

Exploitation is typified by a **power imbalance** which perpetrators use to **force, coerce, entice, and/or manipulate victims for material, social or other gain**. This offence can be committed by individuals and/or groups.

The **perpetrator** usually, but not always, provides something a victim 'needs' as part of a **grooming process**. This need can include money, clothes, food or be relationship-based including assertions of affection, friendship, and support. The victim is then 'indebted' to the perpetrator and forced, coerced and/or manipulated into harmful situations. Victims often do not realise that they are being exploited and can feel responsible for what is happening.

Cuckooing is a form of exploitation, it is the term used to describe a situation where a person's home is taken over by another individual or a group of individuals through coercion and/or force. It is sometimes referred to as 'home takeover'.

The aim of this briefing is to provide an introduction to the topic of cuckooing as a safeguarding concern.

Content:

- Definitions
- Learning from Practice
- Prevention: Understanding Vulnerability
- Identification and Response
- Resources

The Crime and Policing Bill

In February 2025 the Home Office and Ministry of Justice announced a plan to create a new criminal offence of cuckooing. The Crime and Policing Bill will make it an offence to exercise control over another person's dwelling without their consent for the purpose of enabling the dwelling to be used in connection with the commission of specified criminal activity. This will include drugs offences, sexual offences and those associated with offensive weapons, with the provision to add other relevant crime types in the future.



To support implementation of the offence and strengthen the wider response to cuckooing, the government will publish guidance for police and other operational partners. The guidance will help improve identification of cuckooing and support professionals to take effective action against perpetrators and identify the best pathways to support and safeguard victims.

Learning from Practice

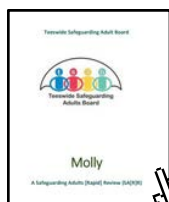
Safeguarding Adults Reviews take place when an **adult with care and support needs has died as a result of abuse and neglect**, or has **suffered serious abuse**. These reviews look at the work of all involved agencies and professionals to **identify learning** that can be used to **improve practice** for other adults at risk.

The **consequences of cuckooing** can be severe for victims, with **adults suffering harm due to financial abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and, for some, extreme physical abuse resulting in injury or death**. The SAR depository features a number of reviews where adults have subsequently died by suicide. It is essential that adults who are being cuckooed are identified, and safeguarded.

Ms Stitch has a diagnosis of an uncommon neurodegenerative condition that impacts across all areas of functioning. Ms Stitch received support from health and social care services, and from specialist voluntary sector organisations. In 2023 Ms Stitch suffered serious physical harm due to abuse perpetrated by two adults who were known to her.



Key areas of learning included the need for practitioners to recognise the signs and indicators of cuckooing, the need for professional curiosity, and the importance of language choices and management oversight as part of quality assurance processes.



Molly had been a victim of sexual abuse in her early childhood, in adolescence she suffered sexual exploitation and began using drugs. **As she entered adulthood Molly continued to be sexually exploited by many men** but some professionals defined this as 'sex work'.

Molly was often the victim of cuckooing with perpetrators causing her serious harm, and their behaviour resulting in Molly being evicted, further increasing her vulnerability to exploitation. Molly was only 25 when she was found deceased in the home of a man who was not well known to her.

In 2024 Hampshire SAB published a Cuckooing Thematic SAR.

Safeguarding Adult Review: Cuckooing

Katie was 53 at the time of her death, she had several physical health issues, reduced mobility and a history of substance misuse. Supporting agencies were aware of and responding to cuckooing, **Katie had begun to use drugs again when the exploitation started**, substance misuse was a key factor in her death.

James was diagnosed with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder and used drugs and alcohol. Cuckooing risks were identified for the 2 years leading to James death. **Those exploiting James were considered part of a local drug network.**

Luke had been a victim of cuckooing by a serious organised crime group in an area outside of Hampshire. **When Luke moved to Hampshire he continued to live in fear of those who had harmed him.** Luke sadly died by overdose.

Factors that Increase Vulnerability

'He was generous...he knew he had a learning disability...he tried to do as others do...he wanted friendships...he's at peace at last...now he can't be hurt any more'

(The Murder of Steven Hoskin, A Serious Case Review, 2007)



Reliance on others for day to day support needs may increase risk where care needs are not being fully met by support services.



Drug or alcohol use can increase vulnerability to cuckooing. Contact with drug dealers and criminal networks increases the risk of an adult coming into contact with people who could exploit their vulnerability

An analysis of themes within SARs found that adults with a background of childhood trauma were more vulnerable. This includes those who are care experienced, and/or suffered some form of child exploitation



The presence of speech and language difficulties, or other communication impairment, can increase the vulnerability of an adult to exploitation, and reduce their ability to seek help.



Mental illness can increase vulnerability, and decrease capacity to seek help



Prior experience of homelessness, or insecure housing can increase vulnerability



Cuckooing and Adult Exploitation relies upon a **power imbalance**. **Victims are manipulated** to believe that perpetrators are their friends. They are often **isolated** from their support networks, families and those that care about them. They may **feel responsible** for what is happening, and **they may feel terrified of the consequences of speaking up**.

Think about the vulnerability of the adults you are working with.



Be curious about friends and associates.

Talk about cuckooing and exploitation.



Make sure that the people you support know how to seek help.

Identification & Response

Everyone working with adults needs to be able to recognise the signs and indicators of exploitation and cuckooing. Building on knowledge of best practice, research and learning from serious incidents Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership has developed a checklist to support practitioners and to inform assessments of risk and safeguarding plans. Ask your safeguarding lead for further information.



A pattern of missed or cancelled appointments



The adult appears fearful of others



The adult starts carrying weapons



Increasing isolation from family, friends and support systems



The presence of unexplained injuries



People preventing access to services



Unexplained increase in debt



Reports of antisocial behaviour or noise complaints



The adult is unable to speak freely



Hillingdon Cuckooing Protocol: This protocol is for frontline staff who work with vulnerable adults and is a source of information and advice to support individuals, families, carers, and members of the public. The protocol supports an effective multi-agency response, and provides a risk assessment tool, to prevent, disrupt and reduce cuckooing in Hillingdon. All victims of cuckooing should be referred to CRMARAC in line with the Protocol.

If you are concerned that a crime has been committed, or an adult is at immediate risk, contact the police.

If you are concerned about an adult with care and support needs contact Adult Social Care via socialcaredirect@hillingdon.gov.uk or 01895 556633

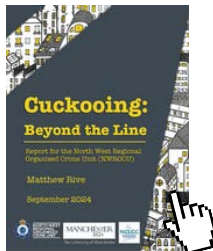
Resources & Training



Yorkshire Police Animation



Newcastle SAB: Home Takeover -
Targeted and Trapped



Cuckooing: Beyond the Line



What is Cuckooing?



Preventing and Disrupting
Cuckooing: Professional Toolkit



Appropriate Language in
Safeguarding Adults



Learning from SARs
Webinar



Ms Stitch
Practice Briefing

Safeguarding Partnership Training Programme

The Partnership commissions a range of safeguarding training relevant to working with children and adults. This training is free to staff in the organisations that jointly fund the Safeguarding Partnership: NHS, Police, and Local Authority. Book on to any of our training at [Hillingdon Learning Zone: Safeguarding Partnership](#). Some courses are chargeable to organisations that do not contribute financially to the partnership, and some courses are free to all.

The courses are for professionals working with children or adults across all local services. This includes: social care, housing, education, policing, probation, health, and voluntary and private sector providers.

Adult Exploitation and Cuckooing Webinar:

- An introduction to cuckooing and adult exploitation
- Learning from local and national practice
- Factors which increase vulnerability
- Recognising signs and indicators that an adult is at risk
- The Adult Exploitation and Cuckooing Checklist
- Hillingdon's Cuckooing Protocol

[BOOK HERE](#)