

CUCKOOING POLICY

October 2024



BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY
SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A SAFER CITY

 **RESET**

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 **RESTART**

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The term Cuckooing takes its name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds to lay their eggs. In the unlawful sense of the word, it is a practice where people take over a person's home and use the property for some form of exploitation.

Cuckooing is named after the nest stealing practices of wild cuckoos. It is a form of criminal exploitation where vulnerable people are coerced into providing access to their home to criminals, who then use it as a base for their activity. Such activity may include sex work, storing cash and weapons, or dealing drugs. Perpetrators may also take over a property to financially abuse its occupier.

Cuckooing might sound quite a tame term, but it masks horrific stories of often extremely vulnerable and terrified people becoming prisoners in their own homes and it probably should be referred to as a home invasion, which far better describes the practice.

There are different types of cuckooing:

- Taking over or using the property to take drugs.
- Using the property to manage the "workforce" of drug runners and to carry out acts of violence.
- Taking over or using the property for sex work / human trafficking.
- Taking over or using the property to store weapons.
- Taking over the property as a place to live.
- Taking over the property to financially abuse the homeowner/tenant.

The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take over a person's home and use it to store or distribute drugs.

People who choose to exploit will often target the most vulnerable in society.

They establish a relationship with the vulnerable person to access their home.

Once they gain control over the victim - whether through drug dependency, debt or as part of their relationship – larger groups will sometimes move in.

Threats are often used to control the victim.

It is common for the drug dealers to have access to several cuckooed addresses at once, and to move quickly between them to evade detection.

The victims of cuckooing are often people who misuse substances such as drugs or alcohol, but there are cases of victims with learning difficulties, mental health issues, physical disabilities or socially isolated.

WHO MIGHT BE AT RISK OF CUCKOOING?

In some cases, the criminal gangs are known to utilise consenting adults to assist their criminal activity by getting them to open up their homes to the gangs and allowing the use of their home addresses for running and holding drugs or firearms.

However, the gangs usually target people who are often unable to protect themselves from being exploited. The criminal gangs then use a range of clever tactics to manipulate and exploit their victims, some of these tactics may be so subtle that the victim doesn't always realise that they are being cuckooed, so their predicament may go unnoticed for some time.

Cuckooing usually involves the criminals identifying vulnerable people who may, for example:

- Use drugs and/or alcohol.
- Be former addicts.
- Have connections with other people involved in gangs.
- Lack a safe/stable home environment.
- Have a history of being in care.
- Have prior experiences of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Be vulnerable due to mental or physical health impairments.
- Be elderly and may be socially isolated.
- Have cognitive impairments.
- Have learning disabilities.
- Be experiencing economic deprivation.
- Be single mothers.
- Be sex workers.

The gangs may use a tactic known as “debt bondage” which is where a real or perceived debt is used as a method to exert control over individuals, to provide the use of their properties for the preparation and/or dealing of drugs.

HOW CUCKOOING MAY BEGIN

The cuckooing may begin by the criminals:

- Giving gifts or paying bills.
- Offering friendship.
- Offering sex.
- Offering drugs in exchange for use of the person’s home.

The gang then expects “repayment” for the debt and, all too often, the gangs coerce and sometimes threaten the vulnerable person into allowing them to take control of their home, so they can use it for their criminal activities as repayment for the debt.

Women who have entered into relationships with gang members are often subject to coercion, control and domestic abuse to book hotels, hire cars and identify addresses for cuckooing.

Once they gain control over the person, whether through drug dependency, debt or as part of their relationship, larger groups will sometimes move in. In several cases, the victims of cuckooing may ultimately find themselves homeless.

In May 2024 an amendment was introduced within the criminal Justice Bill which now means Cuckooing is a stand alone criminal offence.

The following explains the criminal powers West Midlands Police have.

“Occupation or control of another person’s residence for criminal purposes “Cuckooing”

A person commits an offence if the person occupies or exercises control over the home of another person in connection with the commission of a criminal offence or offences using any of the following methods:

- the threat or use of force or other coercive behaviour.
- abduction, kidnap or false imprisonment.
- fraud or other deception.
- the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability.
- the giving of payments or other benefits to achieve the consent of a person who has control over.

A person also commits an offence under this section if the person arranges or facilitates the activity set out above.

A person who commits an offence under this section is liable -

- on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years,
- on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the general limit in a magistrates’ court or a fine (or both).”

Birmingham City Council can use civil remedies such as Premises Closure Orders and injunctions. Closure orders restrict who can enter the property. Breaking a closure order is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment, meaning police can immediately arrest unwanted people found in a home with a closure order on it.

Birmingham City Council will work with West Midlands Police, and other support services to protect vulnerable people from cuckooing in Birmingham.

MAKING A REPORT OF CUCKOOING

When reporting known or suspected incidences of cuckooing activities to the police and/or Birmingham City Council, try to provide as much information as possible including:

- The address of the property.
- A description of the concerning behaviour, including dates and times.
- Names and dates of birth for the usual occupants of the property (if known).
- Any known vulnerabilities of the usual occupants.
- A description of any visitors to the property including names and other details (if known).
- The registration numbers and/or a description of any suspicious vehicles.

Cuckooing may be part of wider and more organised crime with links to criminal exploitation, but it may also be a less organised and more localised issue.

You can report cuckooing using any of the below.

- a) West Midlands Police 101 or [Contact us | West Midlands Police](#) or Live Chat
- b) Birmingham City Council Telephone 0121 464 4700
- c) Birmingham City Council online
[Reporting antisocial behaviour | Antisocial behaviour | Birmingham City Council](#)
- d) Birmingham City Council Community Safety Team online
www.birmingham.gov.uk/comsafetyenq
- e) Postal address: Birmingham City Council, Contact Us, PO Box 16616, BIRMINGHAM, B2 2HN

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF CUCKOOING?

Cuckooing usually takes place in multi-occupancy or social housing properties. Sometimes, the person being exploited has no idea that they are being used or is simply too afraid to speak up, which can make it very difficult to spot what is going on.

However, some of the signs that cuckooing may be going on at a property include but are not limited to:

- Suspicious items in the property, such as weighing scales, multiple phones, sim cards or drug paraphernalia.
- Unexplained presence of cash, clothes and other items of value.
- Conversely, the property may appear almost sparse of valuable possessions inside and begin to go into a state of disrepair both inside and out.
- Doors and windows which have been blocked off.
- New faces appearing at the property and the property regularly changing residents.
- Presence of unknown people in the property, who may act as friends of the inhabitant; their accents may indicate that they are not local and may have travelled to traffic drugs.
- More people than normal entering the property, or people arriving and leaving at unusual times.
- Possible increase in anti-social behaviour in and around the property and increased litter such as drinks cans and takeaway packaging outside the property.
- Cars arriving at the property for short periods of time.
- Signs of drug use and open drug dealing.

There are also signs to look out for in the vulnerable person; these might include:

- Concerns that the inhabitant of the property has not been seen for a while; they may feel too afraid to leave the house or may have been prevented from doing so by the drug gang.
- Disengagement by the inhabitant of the property with support services / healthcare services.
- They have paid off debts such as housing debts in full and in cash.
- They are appearing withdrawn and frightened of disclosing information for fear of betraying the criminals, or of receiving abuse or eviction.
- They are associating with new unidentified people who are often present at the home.
- They have changed their appearance, either wearing expensive clothing or appearing unkempt.

WE WELCOME ALL FEEDBACK FROM OUR CUSTOMERS AND PARTNERS.

If you are pleased with the service that you have received and you would like to pass on your comments to the member of staff concerned or their line manager, or if you are not satisfied with the service that you have received and would like to make a formal complaint, or you may wish to provide a comment you may do this by contacting us in the following ways:

Via the website - [Comments, compliments and complaints | Birmingham City Council](#)

By Telephone – 0121.464.0798

In writing – Birmingham City Council, Contact PO Box 16616, B2 2HN

In person at one of our customer service centres:

Erdington Customer Service Centre, 67 Sutton New Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 Northfield

Customer Service Centre, 1a Vineyard Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 1PG

We also run a weekly advice surgery at Druids Heath Library.

These are on Thursdays from 9am, on a first come first served basis.

POLICY MONITORING AND REVIEW

We will review this policy every three years to ensure that any changes in legislation or best practice are included and updated.

We will consult with service users, staff, internal and external partners in the review.

HOW TO CONTACT COMMUNITY SAFETY

Report a community safety concern:



www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50222/community_safety/2917/report_a_community_safety_concern

For more information on community safety please visit



www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50222/community_safety

For more information on the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership please visit



www.birmingham-community-safety-partnership.co.uk

For further information

Address:

Birmingham Community Safety
City Operations Directorate

Postal Address: PO Box 16930 | Birmingham | B2 2HN

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