



# **An Examination of the Insights and Experiences of Cuckooing Experts**

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Report For

**Kirklees Council**

written by

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

- County lines is used to define a nation-wide method of selling drugs
- A county lines operation involves individuals who undertake various roles
- Cuckooing is a form of exploitation in which individuals move themselves or others into the address of another
- There are large intelligence gaps within policing
- Hindered by the fact that cuckooing is not a home office classified crime type
- The process in which individuals become a victim of cuckooing varies
- Four typologies of cuckooing have been put forward: parasitic nest invading, quasi-cuckooing, coupling and local cuckooing.
- Access to victims by offenders was often found to be via the drug dealing activity
- Drug addiction may cause an individual to be vulnerable to cuckooing
- A known unknown is what makes someone a suitable victim
- One approach of stopping cuckooing was by issuing them 'cuckooing letters'.

## Method

- A total of 39 individuals took part in the study.
- They were drawn from mostly policing, public sector and safeguarding roles
- A questionnaire was administered in which they were asked about their experiences
- The questionnaire was distributed through national exploitation working groups
- The data was analysed using thematic analysis

## Main Findings

- A number of core themes were generated from the findings such as the prevalence of the offence, risk factors related to it, signs and indicators of cuckooing, levels of awareness and challenges of dealing with it.

## Recommendations

- A number of recommendations were made across 6 key areas: Education & Training, Data, Reporting, Legislation, Enforcement/Initiatives, Research.

## Conclusion

- There is a serious lack of empirical work into the issue of cuckooing
- While there has been advancement in data collection and data sharing further research is needed to better understand the nature of the issue overall.

# ▶ INTRODUCTION

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County lines is used to define a nation-wide method of selling drugs, characterised by the movement of drugs and a phone line dedicated to the sale of that drug (NCA, 2019). This can also be accompanied by the exploitation of children and adults. A county lines operation involves individuals who undertake various roles within the county line such as controllers of the line, couriers of drugs, local or trafficked drug sellers also known as runners, enforcers who carry out violence on behalf of the line, and cuckooed individuals who are either involved in or a victim of cuckooing.

Cuckooing is a form of exploitation in which individuals move themselves or others into the address of another, subsequently taking over the address for the use of criminality (NCA 2019). There are large intelligence gaps within policing along with knowledge gaps in academia surrounding the characteristics commonly seen in victims and offenders and the process offenders undertake to identify and cuckoo a victim. This is perhaps hindered by the fact that cuckooing is not a home office classified crime type and is usually defined by multiple other crimes such as assault, sexual abuse, murder, and modern-day slavery. Therefore, there is no national available statistics for victims of cuckooing linked to county lines,

## Methods of cuckooing

There is an awareness that the process in which individuals become a victim of cuckooing varies between offenders and victims. Spicer, Moyle and Coomber (2019) reviewed two previous qualitative studies to define four different typologies of cuckooing known as parasitic nest invading, quasi-cuckooing, coupling, and local cuckooing. These four typologies focus on the method used by offenders to gain access to a victim's property. These typologies have been left intentionally broad by the authors, meaning that they require further research in order to be defined and truly understood, as to why offenders take these different approaches.

Parasitic nest invading is used to describe when an offender cuckoos an address by giving false pretences or by force, usually focusing on those deemed vulnerable by health or drug use.

Quasi-cuckooing is used to describe when a victim is consenting or compliant with offenders using their address due to perceived rewards offered however offenders often then take part in further criminality or stay longer than what was originally agreed upon. Coupling is a gender specific method of cuckooing in which a male offender forms a sexual attachment to a female victim in order to gain access to their home. It is similar to quasi-cuckooing, in which there is a perceived benefit to the victim. The fourth typology is local cuckooing. Whereas the previous three are defined as being used within a county lines methodology, local drug dealers can use these behaviours to form local cuckooing. The identification of different methods used towards males and female is important and presents research opportunities as to whether this method is specific to those in heterosexual relationships and whether there have been cases of females using this method as offenders.

An example of parasitic nest invading was demonstrated by Moyle (2019) who performed in-depth interviews with drug runners and cuckooed individuals. A participant discussed how the offender approached them with a method of them earning extra money and gave the false pretence of renting out their spare room for a family member to stay in the area which led to the participant being cuckooed. Spicer (2021) also provides a similar example in which a victim allowed access to their home under false pretences and was kept captive in their bedroom for a number of days to allow dealing to take place in their home.

Moyle (2019) also found examples of Quasi-cuckooing in which benefits offered to victims of cuckooing have taken the form of money or drugs, originally being seen as a good opportunity and beneficial to the victim which led to cuckooing. Under this typology Spicer, Moyle and Coomber (2019) note that consent is often withdrawn when weapons are either brought into the home or items, such as kitchen knives, are discovered missing from the home. However, there is no indication as to whether this is due to a victim's fear items will be used to cause harm to themselves or be involved in a violent crime. This method also demonstrates offenders using elements of the crime type coercive and controlling behaviour, such as isolation from friends and family, which has previously been seen by offenders towards females in organised crime gangs (Havard, Densley, Whittaker and Wills, 2021).

These typology definitions were created by the review of two qualitative studies. These studies focussed within two force areas. Additionally, the sample size given was minimal; the first study had twenty-seven police officers and professionals, with the second having eighteen individuals who had been involved in the drug market, with seven of these participants being identified as experiencing cuckooing themselves. It is argued that defining cuckooing behaviours using only two areas and a small sample size is not representative considering the nationwide impact of cuckooing, however this study does provide a basis for further research and acknowledges the complex nature of cuckooing.

Another method has also been identified by Coomber and Moyle (2018) commonly known as debt bondage, during which a victim is in debt to the offender over the sale, or loss, of drugs. The victim is then offered to 'pay' this debt by allowing offenders to use their homes for criminality. The debt is never paid, possibly due to continued drug use by the victim or by the offenders giving false reasons for further debt. This allows the offenders the opportunity to stay as long as they are able to if the victim remains compliance and no family or agencies intervene.

Initial access to victims by offenders was often found to be via the drug dealing activity, either by regular interaction with the offender via drug deals or meeting at a central hub or house in which drug dealing was taking place (Moyle 2019, Coomber and Moyle 2017).

## Cuckooing and vulnerabilities

There are many factors that contribute to a victim's vulnerability. Spicer (2021) found that drug addiction may cause an individual to be vulnerable to cuckooing, and also discussed that there is an increased use of an 'ideal' victim, however it is not understood what characteristics make an ideal victim, or what offenders look for in potential victims of cuckooing and it's a known knowledge gap within this area of study. Coomber and Moyle (2018) reviewed their previous studies in the south of England in which they had undertaken both quantitative and qualitative research using observation and semi structured interviews with both relevant professionals and drug users. This work focused on individuals' recruitment and experience within a County Lines context. They found that individuals who experience cuckooing are more likely to have drug addictions, along with psychological concerns. The type of psychological concerns is not further explored and presents an opportunity for further research into whether there are certain conditions which are commonly seen among cuckooing victims. Moyle (2019) also found that individuals who were a victim of cuckooing had drug addiction, mental health concerns and that individuals with learning difficulties had also experienced this crime type. All individuals in this study were also unemployed but whether this contributes towards vulnerability to cuckooing is unknown. Spicer, Coomber and Moyle (2019) also discussed individuals who were 'classically' vulnerable, as defined by Chakraboti and Garland (2015) being subject to cuckooing, these were defined as mental illness, disability, or elderly. Research also identified victims of cuckooing that had physical vulnerabilities along with other attributes which were commonly seen among victims of exploitation (Macdonald, Donovan, Clayton and Husband, 2022). Isolation within cuckooing was seen by Spicer, Coomber and Moyle (2019) in which offenders stopped victims contacting friends, family, and partnership agencies. Macdonald et al (2022) researched 'home takeover's, which have the same features of cuckooing, and found that one of the main characteristics among victims were feelings of isolation and loneliness which led to what they described as 'mate crime', offenders befriending victims for the purpose of exploitation, in some

cases victims being aware of exploitation but continuing with the relationship due to their isolation. This is echoed by Havard, Densley, Whittaker and Wills (2021) who identified females who felt isolated were recruited into gangs. Previously discussed vulnerabilities to cuckooing are also experienced after cuckooing, victims reported mental health concerns, such as duress, stress and anxiety, however it is not known whether these also occurred beforehand or the length of time these vulnerabilities lasted after the cuckooing had taken place (Moyle, 2019, Spicer, 2021).

## Cuckooing and violence

Moyle (2019) found that in some cases offenders would supply drugs to victims as a controlled method of avoiding using violence. Moyle (2019) also found that the use of violence, in the form of threats and presence of weapons, existed within these offender and victim relationships. Moyle (2019) interviewed seven cuckooing victims, who also worked as runners, who reported physical violence during their exploitation. Spicer, Coomber and Moyle (2019) also found that if offenders knew a victim wished to remove offenders from their home, the risk of violence increased. They also found cuckooing victims who were witnesses to firearms in their homes, however, it is not known whether the presence of firearms was used as a controlling factor to keep victims submissive or purely being present in the home for storage. As discussed earlier one method of cuckooing victims, as found by Spicer, Moyle and Coomber (2019), named Parasitic nest invasion in which the use of force is a method of cuckooing, an example of this is provided in which a victim was beaten daily by offenders. This is further supported by Spicer (2021) who found the use of physical force as a method for entering a home.

## Females and cuckooing

Havard, Densley, Whittaker and Wills (2021) found that romance followed by elements of domestic violence or coercive controlling behaviour was seen by females who had been recruited into organised crime gangs, a similar theme has already been discussed in the coupling method of cuckooing (Spicer, Moyle and Coomber, 2019). Moyle (2019) provides examples of this method of cuckooing using in depth interviews with females, Moyle (2019) found that females entered into relationships with offenders who then went on to Cuckoo and exploit them. Like females in organised crime gangs, elements of coercive controlling behaviour were found after females became victims of crime, participants discussed derogatory verbal abuse directed toward their sense of worth and appearance. Moyle (2019) also found that females had exchanged sex for drugs as another method towards the exploitation of females in cuckooing and in county lines. There is no current research which discusses whether there are any female or male offenders of cuckooing who take a similar approach towards males when cuckooing or whether the use of false romance is a specific gender approach only seen by females, this is a current knowledge gap within this area of study. Also, the author notes that due to limitations regarding sample size and area, these findings are not generalisable.

## Length of cuckooing

The length of cuckooing varies between victims, and may be intermittent, based on the offender's requirements (Coomber, 2015, Coomber and Moyle, 2017). Various studies make note of offences occurring from one day to 8 months, they have also been described as occurring for prolonged periods of time, however this is not further defined (Coomber and Moyle 2017, Moyle 2019, Spicer, Coomber and Moyle 2019). This is a current knowledge gap within this area as it is important to understand how long victims experience this crime type, what are the long-term implications and does the length in which an individual is cuckooed depend on their vulnerabilities.

## Disrupting cuckooing

One method of stopping cuckooing performed by police, observed by Spicer (2021), was to inform victims police were aware of criminality and that their address was being watched by issuing them 'cuckooing letters'. Spicer (2021) also noted police conducted welfare visits to known drug users who



may be being subject to cuckooing. This method of finding cuckooing offenders by using drug users is similar to the method noted by Coomber and Moyle (2018) and Moyle (2019) in which offenders found victims by identifying drug users. Spicer (2021) notes that this method helped police to meet safeguarding requirements while potentially locating cuckooing offenders. Police intervention to stop cuckooing offences was also noted by Spicer, Moyle and Coomber (2019) who found victims would inform offenders police were aware of criminality ongoing in the address in order to get offenders to leave. Police methods observed by Spicer (2021) did stop current cuckooing offences for victims visited, however did not appear to be an effective long-term solution, cuckooing still remained commonplace and offenders were noted to move to new areas to continue the practise. Furthermore, offenders would also change their methods and working practises in order to avoid police detection, changing the type of victim or housing targeted to further evade police. Spicer also noted the need for increased education and culture changes needed within police forces to effectively tackle drug use and the exploitation associated in order to have a true partnership agency approach to tackling cuckooing. Agency intervention is also discussed by Macdonald et al (2022) who identified isolation as a theme among cuckooing victims. Macdonald et al found that agency intervention could intensify those feelings of isolation resulting in the person still being vulnerable to cuckooing. Moyle (2019) found that those with controlled drug use, such as the use of methadone, were at a lower chance of being exploited and were able to effectivity stop their exploitation. Moyle (2019) also discussed other protective factors, such as support from peers or community awareness that they would not undertake criminality activity reduced their chance of being cuckooed. This is further supported by Spicer, Coomber and Moyle (2019) who identify the protective factors of 'Social Capital' when protecting against cuckooing. In contrast, those who were not able to control drug habits were at further chance of re-victimisation by cuckooing offenders, including those who had previously been safeguarded.

## Background to the Current Project

The authors were contracted by Kirklees Council to conduct an independent piece of research into the nature and scale of Cuckooing, to provide insights in respect to how to develop an effective response. The research was based on a mixed methods methodology, which included quantitative and qualitative responses to a questionnaire. It is important to note here that this research is on the basis of materials and information provided, and the authors are not to be held responsible for any shortfalls or omissions, or any inaccuracies, due to errors or gaps in knowledge and/or information received.

Due to the lack of noteworthy empirical research into Cuckooing, as well as data quality issues primarily related to how this type of offence is recorded, the current study aimed to build a knowledge base on this issue by targeting professionals with expertise in the area of dealing with and managing Cuckooing as part of their roles. This was done to gather unique insights into their understanding of cuckooing and to try and attempt to do this at scale. Therefore, the aim of this study was to gather unique insights and experience of 'experts' who routinely deal with Cuckooing Offenders/Victims as part of the normal course of their jobs.

More specifically the objectives were to understand:

- a. Prevalence of Cuckooing
- b. Cuckooing Risk Factors
- c. Signs and Indicators of Cuckooing
- d. Awareness of Cuckooing Initiatives
- e. Challenges Faced by this type of Offence
- f. Effectiveness of Partnerships working
- g. Need for Support & Training on this issue
- h. Effectiveness of Investigations and Interventions
- i. Effective Strategies and Best Practice

## Ethics

The current study gained ethical approval from the University of Huddersfield, School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee (SREIC) and as such it abides by the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout, and all participants took part in the study voluntarily. The nature of the study was explained from the start to all participants via the questionnaire landing page, as well as the fact that their responses were completely confidential, that they were free to refuse to answer any questions or stop the questionnaire at any time. Upon understanding the aim of the study and the above conditions all participants had to provide their consent before starting the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire there were again asked to provide their consent for their responses to be used.

## Participants

Thirty-nine individuals took part in the study. Twenty-six (67%) were females and thirteen (33%) males. Participants age ranged from 26 to 61 years old. In terms of occupation these included: Investigator, Tenancy Enforcement Officer, Community Safety Officers, Personal Advisor, Police Sergeant, Senior Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, Team Manager, Detective Constable, Inspector Community Policing, Intelligence Analysts, Youth Justice Lead, Young Person's Resilience Worker, NCLCC Pursue Lead, Detective Inspectors, LIAISE Officer, Partnership Officer, Intelligence Officer, County Lines Prevent and Diversion Sergeant, County Lines Co-ordinator, Prevention Officer, Housing Officer, NCLCC Protect Lead, Police Officers, Locality Manager-Community Safety, NCLCC Civil Orders Officer, Family Coordinator, Principal Homelessness Manager, DS FIB, Quality and Learner Experience Manager, Social Worker Child Contextual Safeguarding and Exploitation Team, Specialist Nurse Safeguarding Children, Senior Practitioner/Deputy Consultant Social Worker, DS County Lines Department Unit.

The individuals who took part in the study were employed at various organisations as follows: Change Grow Live, Hope for Justice, Plus Dane Housing, Safer Kirklees, Kirklees Council Care Leavers Service, Leaving Care Kirklees Council, West Yorkshire Police, Merseyside Police, CGL, NCLCC, Lancashire Constabulary, England Illegal Money Lending Team, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police, Cumbria Police, The Children's Society, The Guinness Partnership, Cheshire East Council, DWP, North West Regional Organised Crime Unit, Homestart Warrington & Cheshire, Halton Borough Council, North Wales Police, Blackpool Council, Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Warrington Borough Council, British Transport Police.

## Procedure

Data collection with those who engage with Cuckooing as part of their job roles was conducted via the distribution of an online survey on Qualtrics that included mainly open-ended questions. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete (See Appendix 1 for full questions).

In order to recruit a relevant sample of individuals, the questionnaire was shared via individuals who sit on some of the national working groups involved with exploitation of vulnerable people. We are confident, due to the reported background of individuals who took part in the study, that we have accessed a group of individuals who can be considered experts in respect of having prior knowledge of Cuckooing.

# Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised in order to analyse the collected qualitative data from the interviews. A deductive and step-by-step approach guides the thematic analysis, which involves, first engaging with the data reading and re-reading source material, noting down any initial thoughts and extracting the themes. The researchers closely examined the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly.



## FINDINGS

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As previously mentioned, thirty-nine individuals from across policing, safeguarding, social care and other relevant organisations took part in this study. All response data obtained from these individuals were analysed using thematic analysis and the most important themes/findings are presented below.

### Prevalence of Cuckooing

Participants were asked to indicate how prevalent they thought cuckooing was. The responses varied based on experience and their job roles. Some individuals reported that cuckooing is very prevalent and/or is increasing:

*“Very prevalent”.*

*“Fairly prevalent in the Congleton area in Cheshire East, numbers of complaints suggesting cuckooing in Alsager are increasing. We have also had a few cases in Sandbach and a major one in Middlewich about 6 years ago involving a Supported Housing accommodation of approx 10 flats”.*

*“Very and increasing – it is also evolving and targeting different vulnerable groups with a worry that this could ultimately become more acceptable within some parts of society”.*

*“Cuckooing is very widespread. It forms part of the CL business model and is on the rise”*

*“Most prevalent amongst people with drug misuse issues, but also affects people with a range of vulnerabilities. Official statistics suggest around 24% of county lines teams use this method of operation, however this is based on the known intelligence picture and the reality is very likely to be higher”.*

While others emphasised the fact that it is more prevalent than thought or identified and issues with prosecution and underreporting.

*“Common place but not easily identified so more prevalent than we may imagine”.*

*“Cuckooing across Liverpool is very prevalent, especially in areas where there is a higher level of social and economic deprivation”.*

*“I understand it is very prevalent for vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults”.*

*“It is quite prevalent in my experience and tends to be the same people moving on to the next person when services start getting involved. Generally, I find that those that have been cuckooed refuse to assist in a prosecution”.*

*“Very – it’s just not always recognised and many victims refer to the person living with them as a friend or family member who is just staying for a bit”.*

*“It is increasing as a proportion of identified exploitation and is present across all geographic areas I work across. It is likely that a huge amount is not recognised”.*

*“Anecdotally more than the data suggests”.*

*“Very, I think it is under reported”.*

*“In my opinion, Cuckooing is severely underreported”.*

A few participants mentioned the impacts and the pressures on various services.

*“I think that there is alot more discovery of this to be made but as the community are getting more informed and undertand better the risks and the impacts we will start to see the results of this. Cuckooing is extremely key for the business modal of SOC”.*

*“In Cheshire East the issue is a focus all partners and leading to pressures being placed on services”.*

## Cuckooing Risk Factors

Participants were asked to indicate which factors they thought make individuals vulnerable to cuckooing. The results are presented in Table 1 below. It can be observed that the overwhelming majority mentioned substance abuse issues, mental health problems, social isolation, financial difficulties, lack of family and community support as the main factors contributed to cuckooing vulnerability. A number of other factors were also identified but in lower frequencies, including peer pressure, initial benefits (i.e. free drugs, friendship) they may get, age, learning disabilities, neurodiversity, poverty, unemployment, low cognitive functioning, high counts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), geographical location, family members involved with criminality

Table 1. Cuckooing Risk Factors

Risk Factor	Percentage	Frequency
Substance abuse issues	97	38
Mental health problems	97	38
Social isolation	90	35
Financial difficulties	87	34
Lack of family support	85	33
Lack of community support	77	30
Homelessness	56	22

## Signs and Indicators of Cuckooing

In relation to typical signs or indicators that suggest that a property may be subject to cuckooing responses were as follows (Table 2). Most participants reported (in order of high to low frequency): frequent visitors especially at odd hours; Unusual amounts of vehicle or foot traffic to and from the property; Sudden changes in the tenant’s behaviour or lifestyle; Presence of new or unknown individuals in the area; Unexplained overnight stays or multiple people residing in a property not associated with the tenant; Increased levels of anti-social behaviour in the vicinity.

Table 2. Signs and Indicators of Cuckooing

Signs/Indicators	Percentage	Frequency
Frequent visitors, especially at odd hours	95	37
Unusual amounts of vehicle or foot traffic to and from the property	95	37
Sudden changes in the tenant's behaviour or lifestyle	90	35
Presence of new or unknown individuals in the area	85	33
Unexplained overnight stays or multiple people residing in a property not associated with the tenant	85	33
Increased levels of anti-social behaviour in the vicinity	82	32
Homelessness	56	22

Some other sign and indicators include lack of engagement with professional services, damage to property, takeaway boxes and rubbish, unexpected visitors.

*"Individual's increased request for food bank support".*

*"Another sign is a sudden lack of engagement and the person just not answering the door or phone".*

*"Unexpected visitors to address - i.e., younger".*

*"Property in a state of disrepair, increase in substance use, windows closed, and curtains drawn".*

*"All of the above could be indicators however in my experience so can the less obvious, for instance tenants who are usually in rent arrears settling that debt, bringing less attention to themselves and their property could equally be an indicator of someone being cuckooed. Those wanting to store large amounts of drugs need someone who isn't going to be bring attention to themselves or the property and I think it is important that we are aware and look out for those signs also".*

*"Clients not engaging with professionals".*

*"Damage to doors/windows; blinds/curtains always closed".*

*"Change in people's behaviour, not allowing access to address".*

*"Lack of engagement with services".*

*"Takeaway boxes outside of the address, reluctance to tenant to engage with services / attend appointments / reluctance of tenant to return to their property".*

*"Tenant contacting police for assistance, then denying calling once police are in attendance (perpetrators hiding in address)".*

*"Increased takeaway food delivery/ related rubbish outside the property, presence of banned breed type dogs suddenly being present, vulnerable tenant ceases engagement with support professionals".*

# Awareness of Cuckooing Initiatives

Almost three quarters (72%, n=28) of the participants reported that they were aware of initiatives (including police response) at their organisation or elsewhere that address the issue of cuckooing. Eleven participants (28%) responded negatively to this question reporting lack of awareness. Some of the specific initiatives that were indicated were as follows:

*“Cheshire Police actively investigate cuckooing. SOC Cheshire East multiagency meetings. Cheshire Police Neighbourhood policing teams actively work alongside PlusDane to support our tenants who may be at risk/involved in cuckooing”.*

*“Operation Lamprey is a police and partnership response to reports of cuckooing, these partners include social housing Adult social Care, and organisations like change grow live who help with substance abuse”.*

*“Op Lamprey - other ops in other areas of the force”.*

*“In Blackpool have Op Fosston but it has its limitations regarding recording on-going work and outcomes. This is why i am writing a process for the force which will give clear instruction on recording and dealing with cuckooing whilst also educating officers about different types of cuckooing MO’s”.*

*“Op Adder in parts of the northwest are looking at drugs and links to cuckooing”.*

*“Victim Navigator support across area; University of Manchester applied research work to identify victim pathways; Stockport Exploitation worker; Salford Exploitation Group and partnership; Specific Salford research into pathways; Neighbourhood Partnership response in North Manchester; Train the Trainer inputs to Housing Providers, particularly Great Places Housing”.*

*“Operation Cuckoo”.*

*“Joint partnership visits and Police ops such as Catch a cuckoo”.*

*“Operation Expel Cheshire Police”.*

*“Op Guardian - NPT’s identifying and visiting potential victims for reassurance”.*

Others provided more general responses.

*“PIP, Safeguarding referrals, Housing referrals, Safer Kirklees referrals”.*

*“Support from social housing providers / housing solutions”.*

*“Flagging and multi-agency approach”.*

*“The only thing I am aware of is the police Vulnerable adults meeting (VAAM) where these issues/ concerns are discussed, and action plans created”.*

*“CLPD officer making visits to persons likely to be cuckooed”.*

*“Contacting xxxx who is the Safeguarding Partnerships Officer, sharing information through the WYP Partnership Intelligence Portal. Calling Police on 101”.*

*“Multi agency approach, good partnership working”.*

*“Continuous awareness raising and sharing of key statistics”.*

*“Various policing operations intended to provide a proactive response”.*

# Effectiveness of Cuckooing Initiatives

In relation to the effectiveness of the current initiatives in combating cuckooing responses varied. A number of participants thought that the initiatives are effective in general, or effective in particular areas or under certain conditions, i.e., victim cooperation.

*“Massively effective. SOC meeting lots of information shared by multiply agencies to improve partnership working to tackle the issue, and to support the police with their investigations and prosecutions related to”.*

*“Fairly effective if the victim complies”.*

*“These are effective in safeguarding individuals who are at risk of harm and need to support either with rehousing with their financial situation or substance misuse”.*

*“Effective in that they can tackle it at one address, however I think the suspects to just move on to another address as we struggle to identify substantive offences”.*

*“They are effective but need more co-ordination, recording, analysis and consistency across the Force”.*

*“Most initiatives developed are to better identify, respond to and support potential victims of cuckooing. They can be extremely effective in supporting individuals who are experiencing it, but not necessarily at addressing the use of cuckooing more widely - as an MO, it remains very common”.*

*“When they are done regularly, I think they can be effective, however, the intel picture needs to remain current or perpetrators just move on to new targets”.*

*“These initiatives have had some success but are often reliant on engagement from the cuckooing victim. Often drug addiction and other means of control can be a significant blocker to this”.*

*“Raising awareness will hopefully help colleagues identify signs of cuckooing and report to the relevant authority”.*

*“Good - agencies working together to help the individual - however not so good if the individual is happy to be involve and needs to be treated as a perpetrator rather than victim”.*

Other participants were less positive about the effectiveness of the interventions or had mixed feelings.

*“Mixed, as they still require the engagement of the individual being cuckooed. This is usually a blocker, due to an underlying distrust in the police”.*

*“Moderately”.*

*“I think it depends on the policies in places and how vigorously they are followed. I think you need officers in the first instance who are capable of inquisitive questioning”.*

*“The police respond to reports, but we need to be able to record revisits and continued action hence me looking at the approach in Lancashire”.*

*“Reasonably but more education needed within the community”.*

*“Not at all”.*

*“Not effective - Only solution offered is to move the client, which does not necessarily solve the issue, just transfers it to another area”.*

*“Some areas more impactful than others but need to consider long term such as use of risk orders and changes in legislation”.*

*“Minimal effectiveness”.*

## Community Protection of Vulnerable Individuals

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on ways that communities can better protect vulnerable individuals from cuckooing. Awareness and education on cuckooing featured in many responses.

*“Awareness of cuckooing (what it is and signs)”.*

*“By being better informed of the signs of cuckooing the risks that comes with it impact that this has on the wider community”.*

*“Education on recognising cuckooing, knowing who they can contact and what actions can be taken”.*

*“Educate the community with what to look for and to feel empowered to report the issues to the police and partners”.*

*“Better awareness of how to report concerns and signs to look out for”.*

*“General public being made aware of signs and indicators, knowing what to do to help”.*

*“Having an awareness to be able to recognise and know where to report such”.*

*“To raise awareness of cuckooing and to be more vigilant”.*

*“I think there needs to be more awareness raising, in the community and a specific support”.*

Reporting is another way for communities to protect vulnerable individuals.

*“By reporting concerns to relevant services”.*

*“Speak up more and report effectively to the right service at the right time. People are afraid to ring the police or report for fear of reprisals”.*

*“Having faith in the police/partners that if they report something it will be followed up and not just ignored”.*

*“Intel reports to police”.*

*“By reporting concerns about vulnerable people within their community”.*

*“Report immediately when they have any concerns despite how minor they may appear to be”.*

*“Better reporting of issues/intel - checks is concerns”.*

*“Better understanding of cuckooing and more reporting”.*

The importance of general and specific ways to support vulnerable individuals but also the importance of community hubs, cohesion and partnerships were the focus of many responses.

*“Support the individual, have a presence, help them seem the necessary support, Notify the LA who can put in additional measures to support them”.*



*“Appropriate support; looking out for neighbours /knowing your neighbours; community led mental health and substance misuse support”.*

*“More support available for those at risk”.*

*“By providing better support to the most vulnerable. Easier referral process and addressing the underlying issues”.*

*“Having residents’ groups, building local support networks”.*

*“Community hubs. Kirklees council working closely with Third sector organisation”.*

*“Community hubs to avoid isolation of vulnerable people, more education and feeling safe to report concerns, increased presence of and eye on community policing, PCSO’s building community relationships on the ground”.*

*“Community cohesion, effective community safety partnerships, effective communication channels between agencies, awareness raising internally and externally, clear reporting pathways”.*

Lastly, a number of respondents provided multiple support mechanisms.

*“Better identification of vulnerabilities. Routine neurodiversity screening throughout compulsory education. Raised awareness of the exploitative nature of county lines activity, and promotion of services such as Crimestoppers. Increased public health involvement in the county lines response (potential for collaboration with the NCLCC or extension of the NCLCC remit to encompass multi-agency secondments/response”.*

*“Referring to the police and council, housing agencies straight away. Neighbourhood watch groups, presence of substance misuse groups in the area, increased police patrols and safer Kirklees patrols”.*

*“Greater social support for substance dependent individuals living alone, more drives to improve community within high-risk areas, information about recognising cuckooing and how to report it safely if it happens to you, a neighbour or an acquaintance to be made available to vulnerable individuals who may not have a high level of computer literacy”.*

## Actions When Encountering Cuckooing

Table 3 below lists in order from highest to lowest frequency the steps that respondents take when encountering a potential cuckooing situation. One-third of the participants mentioned that they liaise with partner agencies; some gather information about the property and its occupants or interview the property owners and neighbours and only one said that they gather intelligence from local residents and neighbours.

Table 3. Actions when encountering cuckooing

Action	Percentage	Frequency
Liaise with partner agencies	33	13
Gather information about the property and its occupants	18	7
Interview the property owner and neighbours	15	6
Gather intelligence from local residents or informants	3	1

As one participant put it

*“The key ones would be gather information about the property and occupants, liaise with partner agencies and gather intelligence. it may be best placed for partner agencies to take the lead on initial victim interviews”.*

## Challenges Faced by Investigators

Several different challenges that investigators face when dealing with cuckooing cases were reported. One of the major challenges relates to victim engagement due to several reasons such as fear, not knowing they are a victim and a general reluctance to cooperate.

*“Engaging with victims”.*

*“Engagement of victim”.*

*“Getting the victim to cooperate, getting other witnesses to come forward and testify”.*

*“Victims not cooperating, potentially due to fear from perpetrators or knowledge/ understanding for what is happening”.*

*“Ascertaining whether it is cuckooing, victim none cooperation. Risk of just moving the problem rather than addressing It”.*

*“The victims are vulnerable and not willing to support investigations due to fear”.*

*“Victims not accepting that they are a victim of cuckooing”.*

*“Lack of cooperation from victim as afraid for their own safety; victim reluctance to identify perpetrators”.*

*“The main challenges are getting the victim to state what is occurring as they are fearful of repercussions. Have adopted the approach of giving the victims CPW notices that they can use to keep people out of their flat as then the police or the council are seen as the “bad guys” and not the victim”.*

*“Competence of victims to give evidence, reluctance of victims to pursue prosecutions based on a number of factors”.*

*“Victims not engaging / denying/unaware that they are being exploited, therefore limited evidence”.*

Other challenges relate to legal complexities, legislation not fit for purpose and difficulties prosecuting cuckooing mainly due to lack of evidence.

*“Proving the property has been cuckooed, providing evidence of this”.*

*“Pursuing the offenders. Victims want to be safe and free from the lifestyle but are often too scared to provide evidence for prosecutions”.*

*“Legislation is not fit for purpose. Exploitation not largely recognised.”*

*“Mainly limited evidence - the victims are often too scared to cooperate with police, and without their testimony it is hard to prove”.*

*“Identification of perpetrators and information gathering”.*

*“Limited evidence, limited action against prep, long term work with victim if moves from area”.*

*“Limited evidence/ victims in fear of being blamed”.*

*“Relying on victims’ statements to prosecute and effectively safeguard victim; fear of repercussion from witnesses (usually neighbours who continue to live in the area and therefore do not want to risk their and their own families’ wellbeing and safety)”.*

*“There is little / no law re ‘cuckooing’ and therefore people don’t take it seriously”.*

*“Limitations in the modern slavery legislation and the delays in obtaining conclusive grounds decisions from NRM submissions. The lack of engagement from victims is also a significant barrier. Evidence of exploitation can often be limited due to the offence taking place in a private space”.*

*“Limited legislative options to deal with the issue, unless an offence is obvious, limited powers of entry, limited powers of removal, not identified as cuckooing, lack of engagement from victims or witnesses / unreliable victims / witnesses, fine line between victim and offender status”.*

*“The cuckooed person in my experience will not assist in a prosecution and will want moving elsewhere to get away from the perpetrator/s”.*

*“Identification of perpetrators and information gathering”.*

*“Cuckooing not being a specific offence, limited powers to deal. Officers fully understanding what powers/policies and processes there are to deal”.*

Distrust towards the police and the need to gain the victims trust were also mentioned.

*“Distrust in the police, leading to disengagement. Also fear of reprisals from offenders and/or, removal of benefits such as access to drugs”.*

*“Anti-police attitudes hindering intelligence development”.*

*“Engagement and trust to resolve the issue”.*

## Partnerships

Participants were asked to indicate how they establish and maintain partnerships with other agencies/ organisations to combat cuckooing. Communication via email and regular meetings and engagement events were reported by a number of the individuals who took part in the study.

*“Regular meetings, email correspondence.*

*“Email”.*

*“Meetings are held every 3 weeks to work collaborative in order to tackle the issue. Good working relationships are maintained by ensure that all agencies are getting what they need from the meetings”.*

*“Through regular multi-agency meetings / key contacts”.*

*“Regular partnership engagement events and meetings, sharing intelligence and information”.*

*“Regular problem-solving groups”.*

*“Group meetings”.*

*“Multi agency meeting to establish right partner involvement and delegated responsibilities to establish and implement planning process”.*

*“Regular meetings, info sharing”.*

*“Attend multi-agency meetings, build relationships and trusted partnerships”.*

*“Cuckooing is an agenda item at the Blackpool Risk management meeting which is chaired weekly and attended by multiple partners including housing and the council”.*

Sharing information and communication is a key component in the maintenance of partnerships.

*“Communication, sharing information in terms of time and efficiency”.*

*“Regular info sharing via the police portal, regular monthly meeting to discuss community issues”.*

*“Sharing intelligence, working in partnership”.*

*“Regular professional information sharing forums”.*

*“Regular information sharing and training”.*

*“We work with many partners, to raise awareness of loan sharks and share concerns and information with them. We also sit on many partnership groups and will also share relevant information”.*

*“Share information, share ideas and encourage victims to come forward and assist the police with their investigations which can lead to an order”.*

*“As a priority identified in the Community Safety Plan, regular communication and information sharing with partners. Subgroups or task and finish groups to look at specific problem areas individual or properties”.*

Others mentioned existing strong partnerships as well the development of new ones.

*“By mapping existing partnerships and reaching out to new partners involved in the providing support”.*

*“Sustained relationships with multi-agencies and information sharing where appropriate”.*

*“We already have strong partnership working and ISA’S in place”.*

The importance of training was also raised.

*“Training sessions, newsletters, in-person support and attendance at multi-agency meetings, SME advice to investigators”.*

*“Exploitation working group and upskilling events”.*

*“Training is key”.*

*“Currently each Local Policing area has relationships with Housing Partners. We are looking at how we can improve this across Merseyside. We have trained over a 1000 individual partners from housing,*

GPS, pharmacies, Drug Treatment Providers, Probation, Merseycare to recognise cuckooing and how to report. I discuss this with our Combating Drug Partners, and it is on the agenda. I am working with numerous agencies to ensure they all understand, and I am continuing a training programme to support this. I am working with Wirral Multicultural Organisation to support multi language leaflets to highlight this with Non-English-speaking residents”.

## Support & Training Requirements

In relation to what support or training is required in the area collaborative working and multi-agency approach were mentioned by a few participants.

*“For law enforcement to adopt better joined approach and referral process to non-statutory organisations to provide follow up support to the potential victims”.*

*“More professional curiosity and professionals (police, social care, mental health) sharing info better”.*

*“Collaborative working and the use of risk management tools that need information sharing”.*

Existing practices including international examples were also identified.

*“The SOC group meeting I feel are invaluable. These should be replicated across all areas if not currently in place”.*

*“Ideally funding to implement something similar to the Colorado model. This was set up in the USA to engage with the rough sleeping community. It involved integration of services including police, mental health services, physical health and social care”.*

The importance of the role of the public in engagement, support, awareness and reporting was also raised.

*“Reporting concerns”.*

*“Broader public awareness and a shift in perception around the traditional enforcement response in relation to people with drug misuse issues. A larger role for training and innovation in the drug treatment response”.*

*“Awareness raising, posters in public places - advising the public there are specialist Teams within the Police Force to support”.*

Most respondents focused on the training needs of professionals in various areas such as evidence gathering, interviewing techniques, what is cuckooing, how to spot the signs of cuckooing, available agencies that deal with cuckooing, what steps to take when dealing with cuckooing, how and where to report, referring victims.

*“Evidence gathering training so partners external to the police know what to look for and how this can be used as evidence. Questioning techniques when speaking to alleged victims and neighbours”.*

*“Identifying what Cuckooing is and what steps to take if someone in the community has concerns of this nature about themselves or another”.*

*“What is cuckooing, and legislation around it. How to recognise and report cuckooing. Prevention and early interventions”.*

*“All professionals should be made aware”.*

*“Understanding the links between Modern slavery offences and cuckooing, non-criminal responses to the cuckooing – i.e., closure orders”.*

*“Greater awareness/ professional training”.*

*“Ongoing awareness raising internally and externally like Hydra and Look Closer”.*

*“Often, children’s services aren’t dealing with the vulnerable person who is cuckooed (unless a parent of children we work with). Our main role would be working with children involved so training in a) identifying cuckooing and b) identifying and responding to young people who have been involved”.*

*“Further training specifically around what agencies are available and what best first steps are to take”.*

*“Training needed of ALL professional agencies (schools, health) who are regularly completing home visits and are out and about in the local community and may be visiting neighbouring/ close by addresses”.*

*“Awareness of Cuckooing, its meaning and signs to look out for. How to deal with these issues and what agencies / support is available, Reporting process”.*

*“Sustained awareness so that professionals remain vigilant”.*

*“I think more training is required to show the real dangers around victims of cuckooing”.*

*“There needs to be a continued regular training programme, a consistent approach, built in processes and procedures in each organisation and in each Local Policing area”.*

*“Need to educate officers about the different types of cuckooing and how initial consent can be withdrawn. I am forever reading on police logs that when visits are conducted the occupant as allowed the persons in their address and that they are not the victim of cuckooing. This is at odds with reports we are getting from partners”.*

*“General training around cuckooing and how it starts and spotting signs and the impact it has on victims and communities”.*

*“Full training and awareness needed “.*

*“All partners should be trained in terms of the signs of cuckooing”.*

*“Refresher on where to refer victims”.*

*“Front line officers need educating so they can identify whether someone is being exploited and help support the victim / identify the offenders”.*

## Assessment of Effectiveness of Investigations and Interventions

When asked to indicate how participants measure the effectiveness of investigations or interventions in cuckooing cases in their organisations several of them reported that they don’t. Those who mentioned how they were assessed responses focused on safeguarding victims, prosecuting and convicting offenders, reducing prevalence of cuckooing, disrupting cuckooing.

*“By ensuring that the victim has been safeguarded and any issues i.e., substance abuse is supported by an outside agency. by dealing with these issues, we can ensure that there are any repeat victims/cases”.*

*“How many individuals have been safe guarded, either by removing the offender or safely relocating the victim”.*

*“For me it would be outcomes for victims, offenders and wider community, with resilience strategy to prevent future incidents”.*

*“Decrease in cuckooing within the area/ victim no longer subject to cuckooing”.*

*“We measure cuckoo disruptions but currently this is difficult, and I am working on a clearer recording process with the creation of a Cuckoo Occurrence which will deal with all reported cuckoo offences. I am waiting another change on our Niche system for a specific Cuckoo intelligence report”.*

*“Support offered and accepted by victims. Referrals to non-statutory organisations. Perpetrators convictions”.*

*“Our only current measure is satisfaction score from those witnesses listed as complainants on our ASB cases. This score is obtained by an external agency and in my opinion is not accurate as it’s carried out by phone call/text to only the initial complainant, who can refuse to answer”.*

*“Prosecution data, safeguarding of any victim, rehousing of alleged victim, any evidence of engagement in substance misuse programmes / community provision”.*

*“Perpetrators no longer go to the property, the victim feels safe and is aware of cuckooing in case this happens in future and has preventative solutions”.*

*“Safeguarding of vulnerable people and prosecution of offenders. Use of civil orders”.*

*“Convictions and safety of victim”.*

*“This is not just on an arrest/prosecution, the real measure is in how the cuckooed person’s lifestyle changes after support put in place”.*

*“Prosecution of perpetrators; cuckooing flags removed from database due to victim no longer being cuckooed”.*

*“Within policing quantitative measures include the monitoring of occurrences linked to an address or individual. A reduction in intelligence reporting would also indicate a positive impact as long as it was sustained. Charges and charge-to-conviction rates also provide insight”.*

*“Safety of vulnerable person, and conviction of offenders”.*

*“Success in terms of prevention of re-victimisation, intelligence reporting regarding change to operating model or availability of drug supply (ie, moving away from cuckooing to store drugs and using hotels). It’s difficult to measure because forces don’t record consistently how they deal with cuckooing, They need a baseline”.*

## Effective Strategies and Best Practice

Participants were asked to indicate specific practises or best practices that they have found to be effective in preventing or disrupting cuckooing activities. Several participants reported that they are not aware of any or there weren’t any. One participant gave an indicative answer and the need for empirical evidence.

*“Nothing currently evidence based”.*

Another mentioned that offenders just move on to new victims after disruption.

*“Most strategies I have seen just disrupt and allow offenders to move on to new victims”.*

Joint approach, robust policing, early targeting of vulnerable individuals, follow up and multiple visits, gaining victims trust, information and intelligence sharing were some of the strategies and best practises mentioned by a number of respondents.

*“Joint interaction with housing associations and the police. Victims tend to open up more to partner organisations but when joint visits are conducted, this can help to breakdown barriers and build trust with the police”.*

*“Joint approach, follow up visits, referrals and additional support for the vulnerable victims. Offer of alternative accommodation and NRM support”.*

*“More robust policing and disruption once a property is identified”.*

*“Targeting vulnerable people earlier to ensure support is in place to prevent them becoming targets”.*

*“Gaining victims trust to help, liaising with police”.*

*“Working with Housing and adult social care to help the victim feel safe enough to communicate what is happening with the police. Trust needs to be built in this area as they often fear prosecution or feel they are being judge due to their lifestyle”.*

*“Issuing of CPW and repeated visits and interventions. Have noticed that many county line teams are now staying in hotels in the resort and that cuckooing is more local in nature”.*

*“Multiple visits to addresses, leaving of Police documentation, making premises too hot for lines to want to sit up at the address”.*

*“Joint partnership visits most effective and dare to share information”.*

*“Intelligence sharing / training”.*

*“Consistent contact with particular individuals from agencies to develop trust, victims being part of a cohort to receive police attention”.*

*“Sharing intel/ info with police partners at the earliest opportunity, engaging creatively to open up professional working with the family and any children”.*

## Local Communities Support in Disrupting Cuckooing

When asked to indicate ways that local communities can assist in efforts to disrupt cuckooing reporting was the most frequent response, followed by becoming aware of the signs of cuckooing.

*“To report to the Police any suspicions around drug related information/reporting ASB associated with. Encouragement and awareness raising to do this in relation specifically around cuckooing may help via media campaigns, highlighting the tools of Crimestoppers, and online reporting services”.*

*“Communication to relevant people (local authority, police on 101)”.*



*“Report their suspicions/concerns to police or partner agencies”.*

*“Reporting and building community networks and resilience”.*

*“Effective reporting of concerns”.*

*“Reporting concerns to relevant places”.*

*“Contact the police or other agencies, when they spot signs of cuckooing”.*

*“Recognising signs of cuckooing and reporting them when they see them”.*

*“Report concerns to the police and partner agencies”.*

*“By being the eyes and ears and knowing how to report concerns”.*

*“Supplying intelligence”.*

*“Reporting to Police if they suspect any concerns”.*

*“By reporting concerns early and by understanding what the signs are”.*

*“Enhancing their understanding of cuckooing as exploitation rather than seeing the tenant as a willing participant, better use of reporting methods”.*

*“Being more aware that this happens - training for communities, sharing intelligence with council services and police, checking in on neighbours, neighbourhood watch groups”.*

*“Recognising signs of cuckooing and reporting them when they see them”.*

*“Know the signs (awareness raising); report signs”.*

*“Reporting suspicions or concerns to Police”.*

*“Being alert, recognising signs, taking action by reporting”.*

*“Having an awareness of what it is, how to spot, what to do”*

*“Have a presence in the area, take an interest in their neighbour, Active reporting to the Police at early stage of cuckooing to reduce impact to victim and resolve asap”.*

## **DISCUSSION**

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The aim of the current study was to gather unique insights and experience of ‘experts’ who routinely deal with Cuckooing Offenders/Victims as part of the normal course of their jobs. To achieve the aim the study utilised a mixed methods methodology, which included quantitative and qualitative responses to a questionnaire. This questionnaire returned responses from thirty-nine individuals drawn from a wide array of professionals, who held various roles across policing, the social care sector as well as NGOs engaged in this area.

Findings from the questionnaire identified a number of important challenges and issues in relation to Cuckooing. The results are broken down into the following 13 themes Prevalence of Cuckooing, Cuckooing Risk Factors, Signs and Indicators of Cuckooing, Awareness of Cuckooing Initiatives, Effectiveness of

Cuckooing Initiatives, Community, Protection of Vulnerable Individuals, Actions When Encountering Cuckooing, Challenges Faced by Investigators, Partnerships, Support & Training Requirements, Assessment, Effectiveness of Investigations and Interventions, Effective Strategies and Best Practice, Local Communities Support in Disrupting Cuckooing. Some of the main findings associated to the above themes are presented below.

The majority of participants identified that Cuckooing is a very prevalent crime. In addition, almost all participants stated that cuckooing is underreported and the main reasons for underreporting were that there is a lack of awareness around what Cuckooing is and its signs. Risk factors associated to Cuckooing were drug use and mental health issues and that signs of Cuckooing are frequent visitors at odd hours as well as a lack of engagement, a property being in disrepair and take away food boxes/regular fast-food deliveries. In respect of the expert group's awareness of initiatives around cuckooing over half stated that there were various initiatives taking place with a number of respondents highlighting individual force run, and in some cases multiagency, led operations. With respect to the effectiveness of these operations, it was mixed between reports of there being great success and then reports of little to no success. This is an interesting finding that probably reflects the various advanced nature initiatives in some parts of the country over others in respect of managing and developing a response to cuckooing. When the issue of community protection came up the key issues highlighted again were awareness raising and general education on the issue. What actions are taken when dealing with a cuckooing incident included involving other agencies and information gathering in general.

When discussing the challenges faced by investigators a number of key issues were raised such as how to better engage with victims, how the law provides barriers to effective enforcement and victims who are scared. The theme of support and training highlighted a broad range of support for increased training, information on what to do and who to go too, but also specific training in related competencies such as basic interviewing skills and information gathering techniques for all stakeholders. How effective investigations and interventions are showcases some potential areas of improvement, in that there was a clear indication that what success looks like isn't something that is activity measurable, individuals' reference to reduced intelligence reports and convictions were offered up as evidence of how effectiveness can be assessed. With respect to the theme of effective strategies and best practice in relation to cuckooing the impression given in the responses was that it wasn't evidenced based and that what exists its mostly disruption which leads to displacement as opposed to any long-term best practice indicators, however, there was strong support for information sharing across agencies. Finally, in order to get support from the local community to combat the issue of cuckooing, better reporting challenges/options, increased awareness raising and education around stopping the signs where put forward.

## Recommendations

The section below contains recommendations (R) put forward as a result of this study drawing on the analysis of expert responses gathered from the questionnaire, as well as professional judgement and interpretation of these findings by the authors of this report.

The recommendations have been broken down into the following 6 key areas: **Education & Training, Data, Reporting, Legislation, Enforcement/Initiatives, Research.**

### R1 Education & Training

The overarching response from the participants of this study related to training requirements across a full spectrum of areas and people. In addition to, the training needs that have been identified because of this report. They are as follows:

#### R1.1 Training on the Role of Enforcement

Data collected from the cuckooing experts strongly advocate for additional training. Based on our interpretation of this the recommendation put forward here is for regular training days to be organised for all officers and statutory bodies, about what enforcement looks like in respect of dealing with an incident of Cuckooing. While the police, for instance, will likely be well versed on enforcement procedures and

legislation in general, specific training around enforcement for cuckooing incidents will be beneficial. Therefore, it would be beneficial in having all police staff, who as a function of their role may deal with incidents of cuckooing either directly or indirectly, upskilled in what enforcement options are at their disposal, when they can be used and what the process looks like if they are needed. It might seem like a simple point of information, but it will likely put confidence in place within an individual who encounters an incident of cuckooing about what to do and how to tackle it.

## R1.2 Building Awareness

One of the reasons this study was conducted was due to the lack of information that exists into this subject matter, from both an academic perspective but also from an intelligence and policing perspective. To address this issue, the recommendation is for the development of both a local awareness campaign (in Kirklees) but also a national campaign, specifically highlighting the real issues of this type of crime for those it affects. This can then lend itself to other recommendations made below, specifically around reporting.

## R1.2 Publicising Success

Getting the message out there about what Kirklees Council is doing to tackle Cuckooing is key. It is recommended that avenues to publicise any successful work that is taking place is done once it arises. This can be through local regional or national media. This serves two purposes; it promotes the good work that is taking place, and it also further raises awareness amongst the public around the issue of Cuckooing.

## R1.3 Spotting the signs of Cuckooing Campaign

In addition to the above awareness building, the recommendation is for some specific multimedia content that could be developed which showcases how to spot the signs of cuckooing. This can be for both the general public and professionals. These links can be used as direct reporting streams (e.g., text this number of report an incident via this button) which will increase potential safeguarding of vulnerable people.

## R1.4 Who Does What

From our experience of researching modern slavery and human trafficking some of the issues that we identified in that work was that those who are dealing with these issues on the ground often don't know who to turn to or what support structures are in place for safeguarding vulnerable people they encounter. The recommendation here is for documentation to be developed that outlines in detail, the various roles involved in multiagency response to cuckooing, what responsibilities lies with which organisation, how to contact them, what to say when you contact them and how they can and will respond. This simple approach can provide confidence in the decision-making process of a PC for instance or a social worker who comes across or is suspicious of someone being a victim of or being vulnerable to Cuckooing. In sum, a step-by-step simple document that can be distributed across multiple agencies outlining who does what etc.

# R 2 Data

## R 2.1 Local Data

As noted above, one of the reasons this study was conducted was to provide some insight and understand the issue of cuckooing due to the lack of information that exists into it. The reason there is little known about cuckooing in general is because of the poor data that is recorded on it. However, this is to be expected for offences that are novel and effects should be made to provide flags on both policing systems

but all relevant stakeholder agencies to be able to directly signal and signpost cuckooing incidents. Data quality improvements will then give us a greater understanding of the scale of the issue leading to better resource allocation and better outcomes for vulnerable victims.

## R 2.2 National Database

In addition to the above point with respect to proper recording of Cuckooing incidents, the recommendation is for a national cuckooing database to be established. This should be generated from the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre (NCLCC) and the County Lines Intelligence Collection Matrix (CLICM) which is gathered from the Police National Database (PND). This will help to streamline the national picture of Cuckooing as an offence type within exploitation networks. Further, it will give a broader overview of this type of offending as Organised crime Groups operate nationally across not within jurisdictions and the county lines business model reflects this. Therefore, nationally held data that is updated regularly to monitor trends in incidents would be beneficial to aiding the response to Cuckooing. Furthermore, specific details should be gathered in respect of this, such as the basic information on location of cuckooed residence, but also stuff around residential type (flat house etc), presence of victim one or more, type of specific offending taking place at the property etc. All of these details allow for more in-depth analysis and potential greater understanding of the issues.

## R2.3 Recording of Outcomes

The fact that cuckooing is such a challenging area to tackle, with the potential impacts being on many areas of the criminal justice system, makes it even more challenging to record tangible measures of impact/success. It is recommended that all partners establish measures of success considering both quantitative but also qualitative measures, including social impact. One example would be recording every positive cuckooing case development, for instance, those passed to ROCU or NCA or linked to an OCG as a positive measurable outcome. The research team are happy to work with Kirkless Council to tease these out.

## R2.4 Data sharing

Data sharing agreements should be in place with every relevant organisation who works with victims of or individuals vulnerable to, Cuckooing. Better data sharing has been found to be effective for all issues of Child Criminal Exploitation and Domestic Abuse for instance. There is no reason why great data sharing between partner agencies would not lead to better outcomes for victims.

# R3 Reporting

## R 3.1 Reporting Methods

The lack of reporting, as confirmed within the responses, goes some way towards understanding why there is little knowledge and intelligence concerning the scale and nature of cuckooing. This is a significant issue as a lack of reporting means a lack of understanding of the scale of the problem. The reasons offered for a lack of reporting relate to distrust in the police being able to do anything to help, an individual not realising they are being exploited or fear of repercussions by offenders. One of the outcomes of improvements in reporting relates to improved intelligence streams and thus greater enforcement. Cuckooing is a by-product of serious and organised crime and it should be taken seriously as such. The recommendation made here for improving reporting methods can be in setting up or advertising online reporting options creatively, such as placing adverts in corner shops where victims might visit or partnering up with local fast food venues to market reporting options on food packaging. Furthermore, adverts should use multiple languages to make sure they are potentially capturing all vulnerable people.

## R 3.2 Incentives to Report

While controversial, there is evidence from behavioural science research that incentivising people to act in ways that benefit both themselves and others can be effective. The nature of what that incentive is can

be at the discretion of relevant stakeholders. We therefore recommend that consideration of incentives related to reporting and successful safeguarding be considered. The authors of this report are happy to provide additional details with respect to the evidence behind this and also to help work through what types of incentive could be used.

## R 4 Legislation

### R. Lobby to Legislate for Cuckooing

While there are amendments tabled for the Modern Slavery Act to have Cuckooing uniquely accounted for, this has yet to be passed into law. Cuckooing currently is enforced via the Modern Slavery Act, however, cuckooing falls outside the scope of this legislation when the victim has done nothing more than submit to letting drugs be supplied from their home. The CPS does state that if they are forced into labour, threatened or attacked, charges could be brought under existing laws. The recommendation here is for changes to the legislation and for all stakeholders to lobby government to bring in this change, thus providing the police with greater means with which to tackle this type of offence.

## R 5 Enforcement/Intervention

### R 5.1 Joined Up National Ops

While it was reported that there were a number of effective operations in place to tackle cuckooing (e.g Op Guardian Op Expel, Op Catch a cuckoo, Op Cuckoo, Op adder, Op Fosston, Op Lamprey etc) these are often not dedicated cuckooing operations and form part of wider county lines or exploitations initiatives/operations. The recommendation here is for a joined-up consultation to take place locally across West Yorkshire and then nationally to establish a national cuckooing operation, similar to Operation Makesafe, which targets exploitation specifically across the hospitality sector. Giving cuckooing a specific focus like this enables both local and national identity towards operational enforcement, allows for the benefit of operational branding and it provides clear commitment to tackling this form of criminality. This also is a good opportunity for Kirklees to lead on this both regionally and nationally as best practices provided in the management of Cuckooing.

### R 5.2 Early intervention.

Another recommendation that stems from the responses to the questionnaire is for there to be established proactive engagement of victims, similarly to the work Kirklees did via 'Safer Kirklees' in Huddersfield in June 2022. However, it should be less general and more targeted, by directly and specifically engaging with those who would be at high risk of victimisation. This is followed up by the following recommendation below.

### R 5.3 Relentless follow up

In order for early intervention to be effective it needs relentless follow up. This is for both vulnerable individuals at risk and also vulnerable individuals who have been safeguarded but who still present as vulnerable. Furthermore, this approach can form part of the metrics mentioned in R 2.3, and these individuals touch points can be recorded and published on an open access datadash board. An awful lot of excellent work will already be taking place; our argument here is that this is measuring, and all activity can be analysed measured and tracked for impact.

### R 5.4 Target Hardening.

Making a specific location unattractive to offenders is a long-established way of combatting offending. The recommendation is therefore to work with both the police and external partners to establish ways to make a victim of a location unattractive. This could be something as simple as regular visits/welfare

checks (See R 6.3) or it could be the Cuckooing notices mentioned in the opening of this report. Regardless turning an attractive individual or property unattractive is one obvious way in which to reduce the opportunity of offending.

## R6 Further Research

### R6.1 Evaluation and monitor of national interventions

One of the areas that is always lacking across police led interventions is proper and appropriate independent evaluation. A number of the respondents to the questionnaire cited enforcement operations or cuckooing based interventions, however we cannot find a record that any of these have been independently evaluated for its impact/success. Evaluation of an initiative or intervention provides valid evidence on whether and how well it meets its objectives, the outcomes, costs and impact as well as helps determine what works well and what can be improved, adjusted or enhanced. Evaluation based on credible evidence not only benefits the immediate initiative but enhances future initiatives with lessons learned by solving immediate problems, informing decision making, building knowledge. Evaluation tells us not only whether an intervention works, but also why and how allowing us to develop new ones. Evaluation therefore should be essential and regular. There is a severe absence of meaningful evaluation across police led interventions nationally. The model of evidence-based policing which is the hot topic within policing strategies throughout all police forces within the UK will only succeed on the effectiveness of this evidence base. The evaluation process is as essential as any evidence presented which might demonstrate a success or even why something might have failed. Therefore, all and any initiative needs to have robust evaluation before it can be considered effective and absolutely prior to becoming policy. The recommendation here is for local evaluation on the operations currently in place to measure there effectiveness.

### R6.2 Empirical Research Victims and Offenders

Research with both victims and offenders. While we gathered insights on risk factors from those who completed the questionnaire, the actual coercive tactics employed by offenders need careful analysis. This involves work with offenders who have been engaged in Cuckooing to tease how the more subtle ways in which they go about exploitation someone. What is it that they specifically look for, answering this will allow targeted safeguarding responses. What is it that they actually say and do, how much violence is involved if any etc. All of this knowledge feeds into our understanding of the uniqueness of Cuckooing offences and how we can build strategies around how to effectively disrupt it. Also, capturing the experience of victims of this type of offense is equally valid, we can address questions to them about how they were appropriate, did they feel that they could get out of the situation, what support at the time would have helped and how they think them might have been reached if an approach was made by an external agency. In sum, supporting the development of research into Cuckooing only enhances our understanding of this crime and in return offers up ways to reduce it.

## Limitations

Victims of Cuckooing are less likely than any other victims of abuse or violence to call the police because of fear of reprisal, desire to protect the offenders, privacy concerns and not trusting the criminal justice process. Therefore, the estimated number of victims is much higher than the number of incidents and crimes recorded by the police. As a result, caution should be exercised in terms of generalising any findings on cuckooing from this study in relation to the scale of this type of offending.

Another limitation is that the current study did not examine or measure concrete figures of Cuckooing nationally. This is because there currently exists no centrally held data on such figures. This is something that has been acknowledged by the police and they have begun to establish a multiagency database for

where incidents of Cuckooing can be logged recorded and managed. This is one of the recommendations put forward in the above report.

Finally, while we were able to draw on a wide range of views across a number of experts working across an array of different agencies, further expansion on the participant numbers would allow us to have greater insight and understanding of the issues.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gather unique insights and experience of ‘experts’ who routinely deal with Cuckooing Offenders/Victims as part of the normal course of their jobs. In total 39 professionals across a number of relevant agencies were surveyed. The responses of this survey were analysed with a total of 13 themes emerging. Based on the interpretation of these results a number of recommendations were put forward that were broken down into 6 key areas consisting of Education & Training, Data, Reporting, Legislation, Enforcement/Initiatives and Research. One of the main outcomes of this report is that there is a huge need for further research and analysis of the offence of Cuckooing as the full prevalence and scale of this offence type still remains largely unknown. Emerging work around better data recording and data sharing at regional and national level are good steps in the right direction, but much more work is needed on sharing best practices across all relevant agencies.

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# APPENDIX I: QUESTIONS

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
  - Other
3. What is your job title?
4. Which organisation do you work for?
5. Please describe your role in a few words.
6. Have you been involved in investigating or dealing with any cases of cuckooing? If yes please specify
7. In your experience how prevalent is cuckooing?
8. What factors do you believe make individuals vulnerable to cuckooing? (select all that apply)
  - Substance abuse issues
  - Mental health problems
  - Social isolation
  - Lack of family support
  - Lack of community support
  - Financial difficulties
  - Homelessness
  - Other (please specify)
9. What are the typical signs or indicators that suggest a property may be subject to cuckooing? (Select all that apply)
  - Frequent visitors, especially at odd hours
  - Increased levels of anti-social behaviour in the vicinity
  - Unusual amounts of vehicle or foot traffic to and from the property
  - Presence of new or unknown individuals in the area
  - Unexplained overnight stays or multiple people residing in a property not associated with the tenant
  - Sudden changes in the tenant's behaviour or lifestyle
  - Other (please specify)
10. Are you aware of any initiatives (including police response) at your organisation or elsewhere that address the issue of cuckooing?
  - Yes. If yes please specify
  - No
11. How effective do you think are these initiatives in combating cuckooing?
12. How do you think communities can better protect vulnerable individuals from cuckooing?
13. When encountering a potential cuckooing situation what steps do you initially take?
  - Gather information about the property and its occupants
  - Conduct surveillance or monitoring operations



- Gather intelligence from local residents or informants
  - Liaise with partner agencies
  - Interview the property owner and neighbours
  - Other (please specify)
14. What are the primary challenges investigators face when dealing with cuckooing cases? *(These challenges can be in relation to policing; investigation, i.e., limited evidence or witnesses, identification and location of perpetrators, limited resources; protecting victims or victims not cooperating; spreading awareness; persecution/legal complexities and so on)*
  15. How do you establish and maintain partnerships with other agencies/organisations to combat cuckooing?
  16. What support or training do you think is needed in the area?
  17. How do you measure the success or effectiveness of investigations and interventions in cuckooing cases?
  18. Are there any specific strategies or best practices that you have found to be effective in preventing or disrupting cuckooing activities?
  19. How can the local communities assist in efforts to disrupt cuckooing?
  20. Are there any additional comments or thoughts you would like to share about cuckooing?