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## Background

### Cuckooing is a form of criminal exploitation.

Cuckooing is when an individual or gang take over the home of a vulnerable person or persons and use it for criminal purposes such as storing firearms, dealing drugs or other criminal activity. The term cuckooing comes from the behaviour of cuckoo birds who take over the nests of other birds. Criminals use a range of methods to gain people's trust, often befriending someone and providing them with drugs or alcohol to use their house or flat. It can be difficult for people to see they are being exploited and they may believe they are helping a friend. Violence and intimidation can be used if they try to get out.

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## Why it matters

People exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked as part of the gang's drug dealing business. ([NCA](#)). Victims of cuckooing are often drug users, but can include older people, those with a learning disability or mental or physical health issue, female sex workers, single mums and people living in poverty ([Programme Challenger](#)). Victims of cuckooing may be identified and targeted by the individual or gang due to a known addiction to drugs or alcohol.

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## Information

Individuals or gangs use the property out of sight of police from which to conduct their criminal activity. They will use a range of tactics to control the victim. It is common for gangs to have access to several addresses and children may be victims of abuse if present in the household. Gangs may occupy more than one property and may move between vulnerable people's homes for just a few hours,

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a couple of days or sometimes longer. Cuckooing occurs in both urban and rural areas using any type of accommodation such as private homes and rental properties, holiday lets, hotels and caravan parks. Some vulnerable adults may be forced to leave their homes, making themselves homeless ([Crimestoppers](#)). The vulnerable person may be debt bonded to the gang

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or individual taking over their home and may not be able to report their situation. **Spotting the Signs** - The vulnerable person may present with unexplained injuries, a change in engagement with services, misusing substances, appear withdrawn and fearful, have new or unidentified associates coming and going from the property day and night, increased anti-social behaviour/ drug dealing at the property and have a change in appearance. Partnership working is essential in effectively tackling cuckooing and identifying abuse as early as possible.

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## What to do

If you have concerns that a person may be a victim of cuckooing, you can contact Lancashire Police on 101 or 999 in an emergency. You can also make a referral for a safeguarding enquiry or contact Adult Social Care for [Blackburn with Darwen](#) 01254 585 949 [Blackpool](#) 01253 477592 and [Lancashire](#) 0300 123 6721. If you have concerns about the welfare of a child contact [Blackburn with Darwen](#), [Blackpool](#) or [Lancashire](#) Children's Social Care.

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## Questions to consider

Am I familiar with the signs that a person may be a victim of cuckooing?

Am I familiar with our organisations individual policy and procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults?

Am I familiar with Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Safeguarding Adults Boards [Pan Lancashire Guidance](#) for identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns?

Did you know cuckooing can be a form of [modern slavery](#)?

