



Brighton & Hove Community Safety Partnership

Cuckooing briefing (revised November 2019)

What is County Lines?

County Lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas. This is usually from urban areas to rural areas or seaside towns. It can also be referred to as **'going country'**. The gangs use a dedicated **'deal line'** (mobile phone) to take orders. The gangs exploit children and vulnerable adults to deal, move and / or store drugs and / or money. They will use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons in order to control the people working for them.

What is cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a process whereby County Lines / criminal gangs target vulnerable people in order to use their homes to deal drugs from. Cuckooing allows criminals to work from a property rather than the street because it is out of sight from the police and therefore less risky to them. This is difficult for the police to monitor because they often will only stay for a short period of time. Drugs, money and weapons may also be stored at the property. Children and young people – sometimes who have gone missing from home or care - have been found in "cuckooed" properties.

The vulnerable people in the cuckooed property are often coerced into allowing their property to be used for this purpose through the offer of **'free' drugs** and threats of violence. Once a gang has gained control of the property, the cuckooed person may then be forced to deal drugs in order to pay off the free drugs they were initially given. This is known as **'debt bondage'**.

Gangs may also use accommodation in rural areas. This can include serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks.

'Cuckooing' continues to be a problem in Brighton and Hove, putting vulnerable people at risk of harm.

Who may be coerced into cuckooing?

Children and other vulnerable adults are often used as drug runners. This significantly increases the risk of criminal and / or sexual exploitation and increased violence. We consider this form of exploitation to be **modern slavery**.

Some vulnerable adults have been forced to leave their homes which can lead to homelessness. This also leaves the gangs free to sell drugs in their absence.

Drug users and adults with other vulnerabilities such as **mental health issues** and **learning difficulties** are particularly vulnerable to being cuckooed. They may often be reluctant to raise concerns for fear of repercussions or violence.



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What can cuckooing look like?

- an increase in the number of visitors to the property through the day and night, often visiting for only short periods of time
- an increased number of vehicles visiting the property including pedal cycles, taxis or hire cars
- the usual occupier of the property having new people staying at the property including extra bags of clothing bedding in the property
- evidence of drug use and drug litter such as discarded syringes, foil and cling film in and around the property and evidence of drug dealing such as scales and deal bags
- The increase in local crime and anti-social behaviour, including the accumulation and storage of stolen pedal cycles.
- A sudden decrease in support workers and other professionals visiting the address. Victims of cuckooing may disengage with support services, and be unwilling to discuss what is happening at their property when the subject is raised with them.

What to do if you suspect that a property has been cuckooed

Brighton & Hove City Council and Sussex Police have implemented a multi-agency response to cuckooing. Any person who is concerned that a property has been cuckooed should send an email to Sussex Police 101@sussex.pnn.police.uk titled 'OP CUCKOO'. You must always call 999 if there is an emergency.

The information that is required is:

- Address of the property
- Names and dates of birth of usual occupants of the property
- Any known vulnerabilities of the usual occupants
- Description of the concerning behaviour including dates and times
- Description of any visitors to the property including names and other details if known
- Registration / description of any suspicious vehicles



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What will happen when a report is received by Sussex Police?

Where cuckooing has been identified:

Sussex Police will coordinate an immediate multi-agency response involving Brighton & Hove City Council (social care, community safety), the housing provider and relevant support services.

These agencies will work together to ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded and appropriate enforcement action is taken against the offenders. The aim would be to protect the tenancy of the usual occupants in the cuckooed property.

Not all reports received are cuckooing:

Sometimes we receive reports about people who, our initial investigation shows, are not cuckooed but may have complex needs and multiple vulnerabilities such as mental health, substance misuse, isolation, learning disabilities, frailty, etc. In these circumstances the concerns are passed to Children's and Adult Social Services for those services to assess whether the occupants of the property are at risk of harm and therefore eligible for help under the Children's Act 1989 or Care Act 2014.

As these people have **not** been cuckooed the multi-agency cuckooing response would not be used. It does not mean however that they do not receive a service. Sussex Police may undertake a welfare visit which can lead to referrals to other support agencies.

Further information:

This cuckooing briefing is reviewed regularly by the multi-agency cuckooing group in the city. Further information about this briefing and the city's response to cuckooing can be obtained from either:

Sgt. James Ward – Brighton & Hove Prevention Team, Sussex Police

or

Peter Wileman – Safer Communities Manager, Brighton & Hove City Council