



South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Cuckooing – Fact Sheet

County Lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas (within the UK), using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and adults to move (and store) the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

Cuckooing is a form of crime in which drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use it as a base for drug dealing.

Cuckooing is becoming an increasingly common problem in the South of England.

Criminal gangs are targeting the homes of vulnerable people to be used for drug dealing – a process known as “cuckooing” (after the bird that invades other bird’s nests) and victims are often left with little choice but to cooperate.

Dealers often approach the vulnerable person offering free drugs to use their home for dealing or in some instances after providing ‘free’ drugs, will then force the person to deal for them in order to ‘re-pay’ their drug debts.

These criminals are selective about who they target, a lot of the time victims are lonely, isolated, frequently drug users themselves and are already known to the police. Victims can include older people, those suffering from mental or physical health problems, female sex workers, single mums and those living in poverty. Victims may suffer from other forms of addiction, such as alcoholism.



Once they gain control, gangs move in with the risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence. Children as well as adults are used as drug runners.

It's common for gangs to have access to several addresses. They move quickly between vulnerable people's homes for just a few hours, a couple of days or sometimes longer. "Cuckooing" means the criminals can operate from a property rather than the street, which is out of sight from the police making it an attractive option. They can then use the premises to deal drugs from, which is difficult for the police to monitor because they often will only stay for a short period of time.

These gangs may use accommodation in rural areas, including serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks.

Some vulnerable adults may be forced to leave their homes, making themselves homeless and leaving the gangs free to sell drugs in their absence.



What are the signs of cuckooing?

Signs that 'cuckooing' may be going on at a property include:

- An increase in people entering and leaving
- An increase in cars or bikes outside
- Possible increase in anti-social behaviour
- Increasing litter outside
- Signs of drugs use
- Lack of healthcare visitors

If you are concerned about cuckooing please contact Avon & Somerset Police on 101, or 999 in an emergency

If you are worried about a child in South Gloucestershire contact Access and Response (ART) on 01454 866000

If you are worried about an adult in South Gloucestershire contact the CSO desk on 01454 868007

Further information:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741194/HOCountyLinesGuidanceSept2018.pdf

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/news/2018/09/what-is-a-county-line/>