

Cuckooing: understanding and intervention for people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health

March 2026

1 Executive Summary

Cuckooing — sometimes described as home takeover — involves taking control of someone’s home, often to use it for criminal purposes. Cuckooing causes serious harm to individuals, communities and services. People with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs face particular risks, often linked to overlapping personal, social and structural vulnerabilities. The impact extends beyond the individual, creating risks for neighbours, placing intense pressure on housing and social care staff, and enabling wider offending and anti-social behaviour. Despite this, responses remain inconsistent and fragmented. With new legislation recognising cuckooing as a criminal offence, there is an opportunity to strengthen awareness, prevention and coordinated multi-agency action.

People supported by FitzRoy and KeyRing and staff who work with them have experienced cuckooing’s impact first-hand. We are committed to working in partnership with the people we support, communities and partner organisations to increase our ability to prevent cuckooing and to support people effectively when it does occur.

Drawing on existing literature on cuckooing, a community of practice with people with learning disabilities and/or autism who were victims of cuckooing, our professional experience and a Round Table discussion with organisations who encounter cuckooing, we have identified ten challenges that hinder our collective ability to tackle cuckooing.

Challenges in effective responses to cuckooing of people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health issues



Challenges in awareness and understanding of cuckooing

1. Variable professional awareness of cuckooing
2. Limited robust evidence on scale, impact and affected groups
3. Limited understanding of how people experience cuckooing
4. Few tailored resources for people at risk of cuckooing



Challenges in ability of agencies and partnerships to respond effectively

5. Variation in local resources to tackle cuckooing
6. Limited professional awareness of local structures and pathways
7. Limited confidence in adapting responses for diverse needs
8. Common challenges to multi-agency working
9. Gaps in evidence and guidance on “what works”
10. Reactive focus rather than prevention

We have also identified eight strategies which can help us to address these challenges and improve understanding and practice on cuckooing. We are focused on further developing and implementing these strategies through a network that can take action and engage communities.

Proposed solutions for effective responses to cuckooing of people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health issues



Strategies to improve understanding and practice on cuckooing

1. Training and awareness raising for professionals
2. Awareness raising and education for people at risk
3. Engage individuals and communities to understand experiences and co-develop responses
4. Understand, codify and bolster existing specialist teams and partnerships
5. Change organisational processes to support better identification and intervention
6. Develop, evaluate and roll out specialist roles and interventions
7. Tap into place-based programmes and networks
8. Recognise and advocate for national-level improvements



Next steps

1. Build a knowledge sharing network
2. Raise awareness and grow network membership
3. Collaborate on resource development
4. Engage communities

We know that finding ways to tackle cuckooing more effectively is a growing concern for organisations like ours and the providers, commissioners and policy makers we work alongside. The impact for people with learning disabilities autism and/or mental health needs is significant and has lasting (if not lifelong) consequences. We urge leaders to consider their influence in improving responses to improve responses to cuckooing and to lead on the implementation of these proposed solutions

We believe that we can have more impact by joining forces. We are therefore establishing a cuckooing network to take forward this work in partnership. **If you would like to join our network, please contact:**

Diane Mee, Executive Director of Business Development and Partnerships, FitzRoy
Email: diane.mee@fitzroy.org

Tracy Hammond, Research and Innovation Director, KeyRing Living Support Networks
Email: tracy.hammond@keyring.org

2 Introduction

Audience and purpose

This white paper is intended for leaders of organisations whose workforce may encounter cuckooing or support people at risk, specifically people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs. It is particularly relevant to social care support providers and registered housing providers. It provides insight to improve professional understanding and practice. FitzRoy and KeyRing support people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs. We have lived experience of supporting people who have been cuckooed.

2.1 Cuckooing definition

Cuckooing might also be referred to as “home takeover”, or “home invasion”. It involves criminals taking control of another person’s home in order to use it for criminal activity. This criminal activity could involve offences relating to drugs, sexual abuse, and weapons. Criminals might also use the property to store money or stolen goods, or simply as a place to sleep. Ann Craft Trust, 2026

2.2 Why cuckooing matters for providers and partners

As social care support providers, FitzRoy and KeyRing aim to be ready and able to protect people and communities by preventing the cuckooing of people we support. When cuckooing does occur, we need to ensure people receive expert help. We know that this is also a concern for other organisations like ours and for the service providers, commissioners and policy-makers we work alongside.

A large number of people who previously received a service now sit below Care Act eligibility for support (Bancalari and Zaranko, 2024). At the same time, preventative services have been cut (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2025). This means that many people have no one to help them to recognise grooming or early cuckooing activity. This increases their vulnerability and places additional pressure on public services if they do lose control of their property.

Case study: Nelson¹ has a learning disability and was diagnosed as being autistic in his 50s. Although known to social services in his younger days, he received no formal support. On moving into his own tenancy, he faced multiple distressing situations, including burglary involvement and cuckooing. Initially, he sought companionship, unknowingly funding criminals who later used his flat for storing stolen goods. Manipulated into acting as a lookout, he was arrested and narrowly escaped prison.

Later, drug dealers took over his home, coercing him into drug delivery. Without support, there was no one to notice that he was being targeted. Weapons were used as tools of intimidation and fear prevented him from seeking help. Eventually, police raided his home, but by this time his tenancy was unsustainable. In the longer term, his criminal justice involvement has meant a lifetime of difficulty with employment, travel and even insuring his home contents.

¹ We respect the privacy of the people we support. Nelson wanted to remain anonymous, so his name has been changed.

2.3 The importance of a multi-agency response

Cuckooing victims are often targeted because of individual, structural and societal vulnerabilities (Macdonald et al., 2024; Bainbridge and Loughery, 2024). These can include learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs (Gardner et al., 2024; University of Nottingham Rights Lab, no date). A single cuckooed property can generate significant harm, offending and anti-social behaviour, affecting not only the direct victim but also neighbours and the wider community. Supporting people who have been cuckooed can also place staff at risk and under intense pressure. This includes housing providers and social care workers involved with affected properties.

A strong, coordinated and sustained multi-agency response is essential to intervene effectively. A wide range of agencies, alongside communities, also have an important role in preventing cuckooing before it happens. At present, our collective ability to tackle cuckooing is hindered by variable awareness of what cuckooing looks like for different groups, inconsistent availability and effectiveness of local multi-agency responses and limited evidence and guidance on what works to reduce risk and intervene effectively.

2.4 Changing legislation as an opportunity

The inclusion of cuckooing as an offence in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill recognises the need for a legislative response and presents an opportunity to catalyse improvements in policy and practice.

Thank you to all contributors

This report draws heavily on insights from a multi-agency Round Table in Manchester (November 2025) with 20 representatives from ten organisations spanning Greater Manchester, Nottingham and/or Nottinghamshire. Contributors included FitzRoy, KeyRing, Dimensions UK, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, National Autistic Society, Nottingham Community Housing Association, Pankhurst Trust incorporating Manchester Women's Aid, and Power2. These insights were supplemented by desktop research and learning from prior experience supporting people who have been cuckooed.

3 Challenges to our ability to tackle cuckooing

3.1 Summary

We have identified ten main challenges that hinder our collective ability to tackle cuckooing. Some of them are specific to cuckooing or to groups of people who might be affected by it, particularly people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs. Others are common challenges in tackling exploitation more broadly or relate to underlying challenges with partnerships and multi-agency working.

3.2 Challenges in awareness and understanding of cuckooing



Challenge 1: Variable professional awareness of cuckooing

Awareness varies across professionals who may need to identify and respond to cuckooing, or risk of it. The relatively low incidence of cuckooing (or reporting of it) means that most professionals outside of those in specialist roles rarely encounter it directly. While awareness is growing, many are less familiar with how cuckooing unfolds and how to recognise additional vulnerabilities, making early identification and intervention difficult.

More recently, some partnerships and organisations have produced workforce development resources and case work tools (Bainbridge et al. 2024; College of Policing, 2026; Kent and Medway VRU, 2024). As yet, awareness and uptake of these resources is not widespread.



Challenge 2: Limited robust evidence on scale, impact and affected groups

There is no central dataset or standardised way to collect intelligence on cuckooing across agencies. Even if recording itself were improved, cuckooing would likely be under-reported because professionals might not identify it and victims might fear repercussions. This makes it difficult to estimate prevalence or explore any common characteristics of victims and perpetrators. This challenge is common to exploitation more broadly, and is not limited to cuckooing (Abubkar et al., 2024).

This exacerbates limitations in professional awareness, because the evidence base from which professionals can build their understanding is still emerging. It also means there is a risk that our understanding of cuckooing is skewed towards the most dominant narratives about it, such as its link to county lines activity (Rive, 2024).

Evidence on the full extent of cuckooing's impact in terms of costs to individuals, communities and the public purse is limited. A better understanding of these effects could inform future legislation and policy decisions.



Challenge 3: Limited understanding of how people experience cuckooing

Insights on how people experience cuckooing exist from academic research partnerships (Bainbridge et al., 2024; Ioannou, Synnott & Lewin, 2023; Macdonald et al., 2024); safeguarding reviews (e.g. Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board, 2024) and support service providers (e.g. Learning Disability Network London. 2023). These are often based on small numbers of cases or specific localities and communities. This means we must be

cautious about extrapolating to draw firm conclusions about how people generally experience cuckooing.

We also lack a nuanced understanding of how cuckooing experiences might differ by characteristics and prior experiences. For example, for some people with learning disabilities and/or autism understanding and questioning others' motivations can be difficult and impact on their perceptions of friendship and ability to recognise exploitation (Forster and Pearson, 2020). This might affect the specific ways in which they are groomed for cuckooing and/or how they might interpret the actions of someone who has cuckooed them. We need to know more about this in order to ensure that approaches to preventing and intervening in cuckooing meet the needs and preferences of different people who might experience it.

Case study: Ellen² moved into supported independent accommodation in her 30s. She had psychosis, challenges with substance use and a history of exploitation. When she moved into the accommodation, she remained connected to abusive networks. She was likely targeted through sex work and became exploited by a local gang, with her flat increasingly taken over by others, used for drug use and sex work, and becoming unsafe for both her and staff.

It became increasingly difficult for staff to engage Ellen in support, her health deteriorated, and she did not recognise her exploitation despite referrals to safeguarding and modern slavery services. Staff faced significant risks and limited police support at times, restricting their ability to intervene. Despite ongoing multi-agency efforts, she continued to be controlled and fearful, eventually experiencing a serious sexual and physical assault requiring hospital care. Her tenancy ended, and she was transferred to other services for further support.



Challenge 4: Few tailored resources for people at risk of cuckooing

There are currently only limited resources to build understanding and awareness of cuckooing amongst people who may be at risk. In addition, resources need tailoring to different needs and experiences, such as to people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs. Some resources have been developed with specific audiences in mind. For example, Talkback UK have developed a video and training booklet with and for people with learning disabilities and/or autism (Talkback, 2024). However, professional awareness of these resources is limited, meaning that they are not able to draw on them in their work with people they support.

3.3 Challenges in ability of agencies and partnerships to respond effectively



Challenge 5: Variation in local resources to tackle cuckooing

There is significant variation across local areas in the resources available to tackle cuckooing. Some local areas have designated teams or multi-agency partnerships which coordinate responses to cuckooing, often alongside other types of exploitation. However, not all local areas have these, which means access to specialist input varies by local area.

² We respect the privacy of the people we support. Ellen wanted to remain anonymous, so her name has been changed.

For those areas without specialist teams, any strategic and operational response is likely to be governed by Safeguarding Adults Boards and the local police force.

The precise make-up, remit, functions and resources available to specialist teams and partnerships also varies by area. For instance, some are local authority led and some are criminal justice led. And the relative emphasis they place on different functions varies, with some more operationally focused and some also responsible for strategic activity.

Examples of specialist teams and partnerships:

Salford Connect.

Nottingham City Slavery and Exploitation Team and Slavery and Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference.

West Yorkshire Anti-Slavery Partnership and Force Precision Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Team.



Challenge 6: Limited professional awareness of local structures and pathways

Professionals often lack clarity on how to access local structures and referral mechanisms. Information is not always readily available online or via existing networks. Even where teams and partnerships produce online resources (e.g. Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board, no date), ensuring that these reach professionals requires promotional work that may sit outside current roles. Organisations working in more than one location face the added challenge of keeping information on multiple areas current as local responses evolve.



Challenge 7: Limited confidence in adapting responses for diverse needs

Key professionals leading responses (e.g., police officers or specialist exploitation teams) may have limited experience and/or confidence working with people with experiences and characteristics which might make them vulnerable to cuckooing, such as those with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs. This affects these professionals' understanding of complexities around capacity and consent and accurate identification of coercion/exploitation. Similarly, they lack awareness of effective engagement techniques and the best approach to support people.



Challenge 8: Common challenges to multi-agency working

Some persistent barriers limit effective multi-agency responses to cuckooing. These mirror wider challenges seen in partnership working and include (Department for Education, 2021; Home Office, 2014; Stevens, 2013):

- Limited understanding between organisations about each other's roles, responsibilities and constraints.
- Variable engagement from key partners due to resource pressures, competing priorities or limited strategic commitment to the issue.

- Gaps and inconsistencies in information sharing, linked to governance restrictions, unclear processes or workforce confidence.
- Absence of clear communication channels and agreed ways of working, often exacerbated by staff turnover and differing organisational cultures.
- Unclear leadership and coordination responsibilities within multi-agency arrangements.



Challenge 9: Gaps in evidence and guidance on “what works”

There are gaps in understanding of how to prevent cuckooing and how to intervene effectively when it takes place, especially when supporting people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs.

Specialist teams and multi-agency partnerships have a strong applied understanding of how to develop and use the structures and tools available to respond to exploitation and organised crime in order to tackle cuckooing. There are also a small number of examples of innovative interventions which have been piloted or which are currently being evaluated (Government Events, 2022; Government Contracts Finder Service, 2025).

However, there is no centrally produced or endorsed good practice guidance and limited evaluation evidence, making it hard to know which steps to take and how to build on prior learning.



Challenge 10: Reactive focus rather than prevention

Responses remain largely focused on intervening once cuckooing has happened – typically centred on safeguarding individual victim/survivors. Policing responses which focus on disrupting and prosecuting Organised Crime Groups, county lines activity or prolific offenders may have an impact at a community level. But so far, there has been less focus on developing and implementing preventative approaches with individuals, or on either preventative or safeguarding responses at a community level.

Case study: Gary³ has a learning disability and mental health needs. When he came to be supported by FitzRoy, his social worker was aware that he’d been targeted by criminals and cuckooed in the past, but this was not passed on to KeyRing. Had we known of Gary’s past experiences we could have proactively put in place extra measures to protect him. However, while at our specialist supported mental health service, Gary was befriended by members of a criminal gang who gave him drugs which led to addiction and dependency. Once indebted to the gang, Gary’s flat was used as a base for storing drugs and weapons. FitzRoy’s team reacted decisively to keep Gary safe by enlisting private security, making reports to the police and providing support for his substance addiction. As a result, Gary has retained his tenancy and disengaged significantly from the gang. There are now few visitors to his flat and no evidence of ongoing cuckooing.

³ We respect the privacy of the people we support. Gary wanted to remain anonymous, so his name has been changed.

4 Proposed solutions

4.1 Summary

Through multi-agency discussion at the Round Table, we identified eight strategies to improve understanding and practice on cuckooing. Each addresses one or more of the challenges above. Five principles cut across all of these strategies. These are:

- **Principle 1:** Work in partnership: develop/implement strategies collaboratively across similar organisations and multi-agency systems.
- **Principle 2:** Make the most of existing knowledge and materials: pool expertise and resources to develop better responses efficiently.
- **Principle 3:** Account for structural factors alongside individual experiences: recognise poverty, limited local investment, and negative prior experiences of services as risk drivers; ensure responsibility sits with policy makers, commissioners and service providers.
- **Principle 4:** Consider strategic/commissioning levers alongside frontline practice: structural drivers require policy/commissioning solutions, not just frontline change.
- **Principle 5:** Focus on both victim/survivors and perpetrators: protect/support victim/survivors and intervene with perpetrators (including those themselves vulnerable or groomed) to reduce incidence.

4.2 Strategies



Strategy 1: Training and awareness raising for professionals

There are already many freely available introductory videos and guidance that can be promoted as an immediate step for organisations, Adult Safeguarding Boards and local partnerships. Training and awareness could be strengthened by:

1. Developing tailored workforce development plans for different agencies and roles that build understanding of cuckooing and good practice in identifying and responding to it.
2. Ensuring professionals know local arrangements for disruption, safeguarding, referrals and support.
3. Reviewing workforce development frameworks (e.g. police, housing, social care) to ensure staff are equipped to recognise and respond to cuckooing involving people with diverse needs, including those with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs.

This addresses challenges 1, 6 and 7.



Strategy 2: Awareness raising and education for people at risk

Greater awareness raising and education for people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs who might be at risk of cuckooing would support a shift towards prevention. It might also increase the likelihood of people who have been cuckooed reporting this to services, in order to access support.

There are a small number of freely available cuckooing awareness resources that services can already use with people they support. Building on this, organisations and partnerships could:

1. Develop specific cuckooing and awareness resources for people with different characteristics and experiences.
2. Adapt existing materials (e.g. about healthy/unhealthy relationships) so they reference cuckooing as a form of exploitation.
3. Strengthen staff skills and confidence to use these resources effectively with the people they support.

Any new resources should be co-developed with people with lived experience and with the intended user groups, linking to Strategy 3.

This addresses challenges 4 and 10.



Strategy 3: Engage individuals and communities to understand experiences and co-develop responses

Co-developing responses with people who receive support is essential to ensure services are meaningful, effective and trusted.

Engaging people with lived experience of cuckooing to understand their experiences can deepen our understanding of the whole process and inform what works at different stages, including prevention, risk identification, intervention and follow-up support after cuckooing has ended. People with direct experience can also act as credible voices in raising awareness and encouraging engagement.

Cuckooing affects communities as well as individuals. Communities have an important role in prevention, including reaching people who do not receive statutory or preventative support, and helping services to tackle it (for example, recognising and reporting concerns). Engaging local communities in conversations about cuckooing will provide more insight into how they are affected by it and can help identify local strengths, assets and strategies which can contribute to more effective responses to cuckooing.

While existing work has involved people with lived experience, there is scope to widen participation. This could include:

1. Individual organisations or partnerships engaging the people they support to co-develop responses.
2. Local partnerships using data to identify areas most affected and involving those communities in co-development activities.
3. Commissioning larger-scale research and co-production where resources allow.

This addresses challenges 2 and 3.



Strategy 4: Understand, codify and bolster existing specialist teams and partnerships

Local specialist teams and multi-agency partnerships whose remit covers cuckooing are not always well-known to wider partners operating in the local area. Or sometimes they are well recognised e.g. Safeguarding Adults Boards and Partnerships, but their specific role in coordinating responses to cuckooing is not well articulated or understood. They are also often under-resourced to meet demand for direct intervention in cuckooing or the crucial work of partnership and awareness-building locally.

Organisations who encounter cuckooing could improve the way they work in partnership with these specialist teams and multi-agency partnerships by:

1. Making sure they understand the remit, referral pathways and service offer of specialist teams and multi-agency partnership in relation to cuckooing.
2. Codifying and clearly articulating this to their own workforces.
3. Exploring ways to work in closer partnership with specialist teams and multi-agency partnerships in order to maximise their reach and impact.

This addresses challenges 6, 7 and 8.



Strategy 5: Change organisational processes to support better identification and intervention

Support service providers and other organisations who should be involved in a multi-agency response to cuckooing can improve their own processes to support better identification and intervention in cuckooing.

Greater engagement with specialist teams and multi-agency partnerships will help organisations to identify the most important improvements they can make.

For example, at our Round Table, multi-agency discussions identified several areas for improvement for social care support service providers and housing associations, including:

1. Changes to case work tools such as referral forms and risk assessments to elicit better information about cuckooing risk factors and prior experience of cuckooing.
2. Increasing reporting to the police and understanding this as a means of supporting wider contextual safeguarding as well as case building in investigations.

This addresses challenge 8.



Strategy 6: Develop, evaluate and roll out specialist roles and interventions

Our shared experience of responding to cuckooing and supporting victim/survivors with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs shows that investing in the development, evaluation and roll-out of specialist roles and interventions is important. This would improve the evidence base on which policy-makers, commissioners and service

providers can draw. Whilst additional funding would be required to do this, it could bring about substantial benefit. To make the most of additional funding, intervention developers and commissioners should:

1. Put in place robust evaluation of interventions to explain the theory behind the intervention, the delivery model used and its impact.
2. Identify the most effective routes of dissemination of learning to a wider audience to support the further development of best practice.
3. Build sustainability beyond the pilot to reduce the risk that interventions with potential are discontinued after the initial funding period.

This addresses challenges 5 and 9.



Strategy 7: Tap into place-based programmes and networks

Place-based approaches to improving resources and outcomes for local communities are increasingly common. Often these are focused on public health, health or community safety. As well as discrete actions on cuckooing, local organisations and partnerships could aim to tap into these existing place-based initiatives and find opportunities to introduce cuckooing (or broader exploitation) onto agendas. This will avoid duplication of effort and may also provide a way to make resources go further by pooling time and funding to deliver complementary strategies and actions to engage and support communities.

This addresses challenges 8 and 10.



Strategy 8: Recognise and advocate for national-level improvements

This report mostly considers strategies to address cuckooing of people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs which can be developed and implemented at a local level, because this is the level at which FitzRoy, KeyRing and other similar organisations have the most scope to influence things. However, improvements in understanding and practice on cuckooing could also be centrally driven through oversight, policy, funding, development of national programmes and guidance and changes to statutory processes. In addition, wider structural issues which might contribute to cuckooing or to people's vulnerability to it are best addressed at a national level.

To increase the likelihood of national level improvements, partner organisations working at a local level can jointly recognise improvement areas that could be driven by national level changes and advocate for these to central government departments and local MPs.

This contributes to addressing all of the challenges highlighted above.

5 Next steps

Join our network

FitzRoy and KeyRing are establishing a cuckooing network to improve understanding and practice on cuckooing. In partnership with members of this network and as far as funding permits, we will take the next steps outlined below.

If you would like to join the network, please contact Diane Mee, Executive Director of Business Development and Partnerships, FitzRoy, on diane.mee@fitzroy.org or Tracy Hammond, Research and Innovation Director, KeyRing Living Support Networks, on tracy.hammond@keyring.org.

5.1 Next steps for FitzRoy, KeyRing and cuckooing network partners



Step 1: Build a knowledge sharing network

Aim: Create a network which allows a range of professionals to share valuable information and work in partnership to address cuckooing in a time and cost-effective way.

Actions:

- Create a cross-organisation network to share learning and good practice.
- Share existing resources within the network.

Share evaluation findings from pilots and interventions to strengthen the evidence base.



Step 2: Raise awareness and grow network membership

Aim: Publicise the network, its activities and the learning it generates on strategies to improve responses to cuckooing. Gain the buy-in and involvement of new organisations as network members.

Actions:

- Actively seek and accept invitations to sector conferences and multi-agency forums.
- Publish on digital platforms and in newsletters and sector media to reach housing, social care, and commissioning audiences.



Step 3: Collaborate on resource development

Aim: Ensure that resources about the cuckooing of people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs are available and that they are appropriate to all relevant audiences and of sufficient detail to be of practical help in real-life situations.

Actions:

- Partner with others to co-design tailored resources for people at risk (e.g., accessible guides on healthy relationships and exploitation awareness).
- Work together on training materials for frontline staff, ensuring they cover cuckooing indicators, consent/capacity and referral pathways.
- Involve people with lived experience in resource development to ensure relevance and trust.
- Raise funding to enable further research and resource creation.



Step 4: Engage communities

Aim: Ensure that communities are empowered to address cuckooing.

Actions:

- Run community awareness campaigns in high-risk areas, co-produced with local residents and service users.
- Encourage community reporting and participation in prevention strategies.
- Support and learn from the community-focused work already happening in many areas.

5.2 Areas for further research

The roundtable and discussions with people with lived experience highlighted the following areas as requiring further research:

1. The human, community and financial impact of cuckooing, especially regarding the long-term mental health, criminal justice, practical and cost implications.
2. How people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs experience cuckooing compared with other vulnerable groups.
3. How to prevent cuckooing among people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health needs and how to intervene when it takes place. This includes considering: resources, interventions and partnerships.
4. How best to empower disadvantaged communities to prevent cuckooing, especially amongst autistic people and people with learning disabilities who receive no statutory support.

Evidence should inform both practice and policy, with actions and resources regularly evaluated and updated to match evolving methods used by those who cuckoo others.

6 References

- Abubkar, A., Seymour, R.G., Gardner, A., Lambert, I., Fyson, R. and Wright, N. 2024. Cognitive impairment and exploitation: connecting fragments of a bigger picture through data. *Journal of Public Health*, 46(4), pp 498-505. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11638330/>. Accessed: 03/12/25.
- Ann Craft Trust. 2026. What is Cuckooing? Available at: <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/what-is-cuckooing/>. Accessed 26/01/26
- Bainbridge, L. and Loughery, A. 2024. Small Grant Policy Briefing: Understanding and Preventing 'Cuckooing' Victimisation. Available at: <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/law-research-centre-criminal-justice-studies/dir-record/research-projects/1221/preventing-and-disrupting-county-lines-cuckooing-victimisation>. Accessed 03/12/25.
- Bancalari, A. and Zaranko, B. 2024. Adult Social Care in England: what next? *Institute for Fiscal Studies Report R338*. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/adult-social-care-england-what-next>. Accessed 26/01/26.
- Bainbridge, L., Loughery, A., Midgley, A., Griffiths, J., Ashby, H. and Allen, J. 2024. Preventing and Disrupting Cuckooing Victimisation: Professional Toolkit. Available at: <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/250/preventing-and-disrupting-cuckooing-victimisation-professional-toolkit>. Accessed 03/12/25.
- College of Policing. 2026. Cuckooing toolkit – protecting vulnerable people. Available at: <https://www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices/cuckooing-toolkit-protecting-vulnerable-people>. Accessed 13/02/26.
- College of Policing. 2024. Modern slavery and human trafficking. Authorised professional practice: Consultation. Available at: <https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2024-08/Modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-APP-consultation.pdf>. Accessed 03/12/25.
- Cockbain, E. and Brayley-Morris, H. 2018. Human Trafficking and Labour Exploitation in the Casual Construction Industry: An Analysis of Three Major Investigations in the UK Involving Irish Traveller Offending Groups. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 12 (2), pp129-149.
- Department for Education. 2021. Multi-agency reform: Key behavioural drivers and barriers. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-reform-key-behavioural-drivers-and-barriers>. Accessed 03/12/25.
- Forster, S. and Pearson, A. 2020. "Bullies tend to be obvious": autistic adults perceptions of friendship and the concept of 'mate crime.' *Disability and Society*, 35 (7), pp 485-505. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2019.1680347>. Accessed 03/12/25.
- Gardner, A., Abubkar, A., Lambert, I., Charnock, D., Clawson, R., Fyson, R., Wright, N and Seymour, R. 2024. Exploitation of Adults with Cognitive Impairment in England An investigation into evidence, responses, and policy implications. Available at: https://exploitationandci.org.uk/reports/ExploitationOfAdultsWithCognitiveImpairmentInEngland_report.pdf. Accessed 03/12/25.

Government Contracts Finder Service. 2025. GB-London: Cuckooing Evaluation Project 2025-2026 - MOPAC 1054. Available at:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/notice/c0904105-33e2-4fee-90fa-2f2df6e45330t>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Government Events. 2022. Case Studies. Identifying and Working to Support Victims of Cuckooing. Available at: <https://www.governmentevents.co.uk/identifying-and-working-to-support-victims-of-cuckooing/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Home Office and Ministry of Justice. 2025. Crime and Policing Bill: child criminal exploitation, cuckooing (home takeover) and coerced internal concealment factsheet. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-bill-2025-factsheets/crime-and-policing-bill-child-criminal-exploitation-and-cuckooing-factsheet>. Accessed 03/12/25.

House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee. 2025. Adult Social Care Reform: the cost of inaction. Second Report of Session 2024-25 HC368. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmhealth/368/report.html/>. Accessed 26/01/26.

Hampshire Safeguarding Adults Board. 2024. Cuckooing Thematic Safeguarding Adults Review (Katie, James and Luke). Available at: <https://hampshiresab.org.uk/safeguarding-adult-reviews/hampshires-published-sars/cuckooing-thematic-sar-katie-james-and-luke-july-2024>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Home Office. 2014. Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project Final report. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a750ddb40f0b6360e472fa5/MASH.pdf>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Ioannou, M., Synnott, J. and Lewin, R. 2023. An Examination of the Insights and Experiences of Cuckooing Experts. Report for Kirklees Council. Available at: <https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/publications/an-examination-of-the-insights-and-experiences-of-cuckooing-expert/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Kent and Medway VRU. 2024. Tackling Cuckooing Multi Agency Guidance. Available at: <https://kentandmedwayvru.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Tackling-Cuckooing-Multi-Agency-Guidance.pdf>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Learning Disability Network London. 2023. "I thought he was my friend": How a man with learning disabilities was 'cuckooed' and exploited for thousands of pounds. Available at: <https://www.ldnlondon.org/i-thought-he-was-my-friend-how-a-man-with-learning-disabilities-was-cuckooed-and-exploited-for-thousands-of-pounds/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Macdonald, S.J., Donovan, C., Clayton, J. and Husband, M. 2024. Becoming cuckooed: conceptualising the relationship between disability, home takeovers and criminal exploitation. *Disability and Society*, 39 (2), pp 485-505. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2022.2071680>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Marshall, H. 2024. Child Criminal Exploitation and the Interactional Emergence of Victim Status. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 64 (5), pp 1011–1027. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/64/5/1011/7612775>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board. No date. Home takeover and exploitation. Available at: <https://www.newcastlesafeguarding.org.uk/home-takeover-and-exploitation/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Rive, M. 2024. Cuckooing: Beyond the Line: A Report for the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit. Available at: <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/cuckooing-beyond-the-line-a-report-for-the-north-west-regional-or/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership. 2025. Child Exploitation. Available at: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/professionals/child-exploitation/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Stevens, Emma. 2013. Safeguarding vulnerable adults: exploring the challenges to best practice across multi-agency settings. *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 15 (2), pp85-95. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/jap/article-abstract/15/2/85/197496/Safeguarding-vulnerable-adults-exploring-the?redirectedFrom=fulltext>. Accessed 03/12/25.

Talkback. 2024. Cuckooing training. Available at: <https://talkback-uk.com/cuckooing-training/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

University of Nottingham Rights Lab. No date. The intersection between cognitive impairments and exploitation in Nottingham. Available at: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2022/march/briefing-on-the-intersection-between-cognitive-impairments-and-exploitation-in-nottingham.pdf>

West Bridgford Wire. 2025. £460,000 plan approved to tackle modern slavery across Nottinghamshire. Available at: <https://westbridgfordwire.com/460000-plan-approved-to-tackle-modern-slavery-across-nottinghamshire/>. Accessed 03/12/25.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority. No date. West Yorkshire Anti-slavery Partnership. Available at: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/policing-and-crime/partnership-working/west-yorkshire-anti-slavery-partnership/>. Accessed 03/12/25.