

Report to Crime and Safety Scrutiny

Identifying “cuckooing” at the addresses of vulnerable people.

Because we know that one of the unintended consequences of on street enforcement can be to drive criminal activity out of sight, we must be alert to the risk that vulnerable people might be exploited for use of their address by criminals. The risk to criminal exploiters is minimised as they are able to implicate the legitimate resident in any criminal or anti-social behaviour.

We work with a number of partners and Council officers to identify and protect vulnerable people at their addresses.

The Council's Environmental Protection Team have undertaken work on properties which have untidy front gardens, and which may pose a risk to occupants who might be vulnerable to cuckooing.

The EPT is made up of 5 officers and a team leader and are a council resource which has been augmented with external funding to allow for a more proactive response. (The team are responsible for a range of issues of which the standard response represents between 10-20% of their work. Other elements include tackling noise nuisance and drainage).

Referrals for this element are generally related to properties that have front gardens/yards that might be overgrown with vegetation or rubbish dumped or littering in them, giving an outward signal of potential vulnerability of the residents.

The Safer and Stronger Communities Board receive funding from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and allocate an element of this to a new project which allows for additional focussed work to be carried out by the EPT at high risk addresses without recharge.

The aim of the project is:

To deter burglars and cuckooing of vulnerable people's addresses - providing a speedy service to reduce vulnerability through improving the appearance of vulnerability at at least 20 high risk addresses in order to reduce crime and abuse of the resident by exploiting criminals.

The project is proceeding well. In Quarter 3, we have visited addresses that were identified as potentially vulnerable as they had a build-up of rubbish and poorly maintained front gardens.

So far, 8 addresses have found to have issues with rubbish and accumulations outside (and sometime inside) the properties and have vulnerable occupants. The vulnerabilities relate to mental health conditions (some are hoarding) and vulnerable due to age also. 4 of the addresses were jointly visited with colleagues from social services due to the vulnerability of the occupants in order to for support and follow up, and also referred for colleagues to follow up on security measures.

The referrals are received from a variety of sources including the police and social care.

In addition to this project the Council's Community Safety Unit may be alerted to or come across addresses where there is a potential or evidence of cuckooing.

The team are currently dealing with 4 cases.

There are similarities in many of these cases. The tenants are likely to have drug, alcohol and/ or mental health issues and some of them owe money to criminals for a drug debt or have been "befriended" by drug dealers who have then effectively taken over the addresses to use to deal drugs from. The tenant themselves are often confined to one room of the property at this stage. They may also be victim to physical and other abuse by the exploiters.

We have been able to secure or are seeking tenancy moves, provide additional support and improve security at addresses.

The police and the Council's ASB officers are often alerted to these addresses when neighbours report Anti-Social Behaviour linked to drug dealing.

These factors may include noise, a large number of visitors at all hours and the apparent sudden degradation of the property.

The Environment Protection Team can be contacted at: enviro.crime@enfield.gov.uk

The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team can be contacted at: asbu@enfield.gov.uk

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