



NORFOLK COMMUNITY
SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Multi-agency Cuckooing (Home Takeover) Guidance



October 2026

Overview

Who is the guidance for?

This guidance is intended to support frontline agencies in Norfolk who work with individuals that may be at risk of Cuckooing.

What is this guidance for?

This guidance is designed to raise awareness of:

- Individuals who may be at risk of Cuckooing
- Signs of Cuckooing
- What to do if a concern is identified
- Resources available

Why was it developed?

This guidance was developed by the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership, to respond to increasingly recognised and reported Cuckooing across the UK.

New legislation is expected in early 2027, to respond to increasing incidences of exploitation of adults in their own homes, and new legislation that will make exercising control over another person's dwelling (without their consent), for specified criminal offences, an offence in its own right, under the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

What is Cuckooing?

Norfolk Community Safety Partnership has agreed the following definition for Norfolk:

Cuckooing (Home Takeover) is a form of criminal exploitation where an individual(s) coerces, forces or intimidates a person into sharing, providing or giving up their accommodation to the individual(s), who then use it as a base for their criminal, or other exploitative activity without their consent; or consent that may not have been given freely, where it is obtained by coercion, deception and other forms of abusive and/or violent behaviour.

Such activity may include using the property:

- To deal, store, grow, make or take drugs
- As a place to stay, live or house others
- To store cash, weapons, valuables or other items

For any forms of abuse / exploitation, for example physical, sexual, financial, coercive control – including domestic abuse and modern slavery.

Cuckooing can also be associated with anti-social behaviour and other forms of exploitation of children and adults. Safeguarding processes should be followed for those who are experiencing or are at risk of Cuckooing.

Cuckooing can be and is often linked to County Lines activities. "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 at increased risk, to move and store the drugs and money; they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. (*Home Office definition*)

Legislation

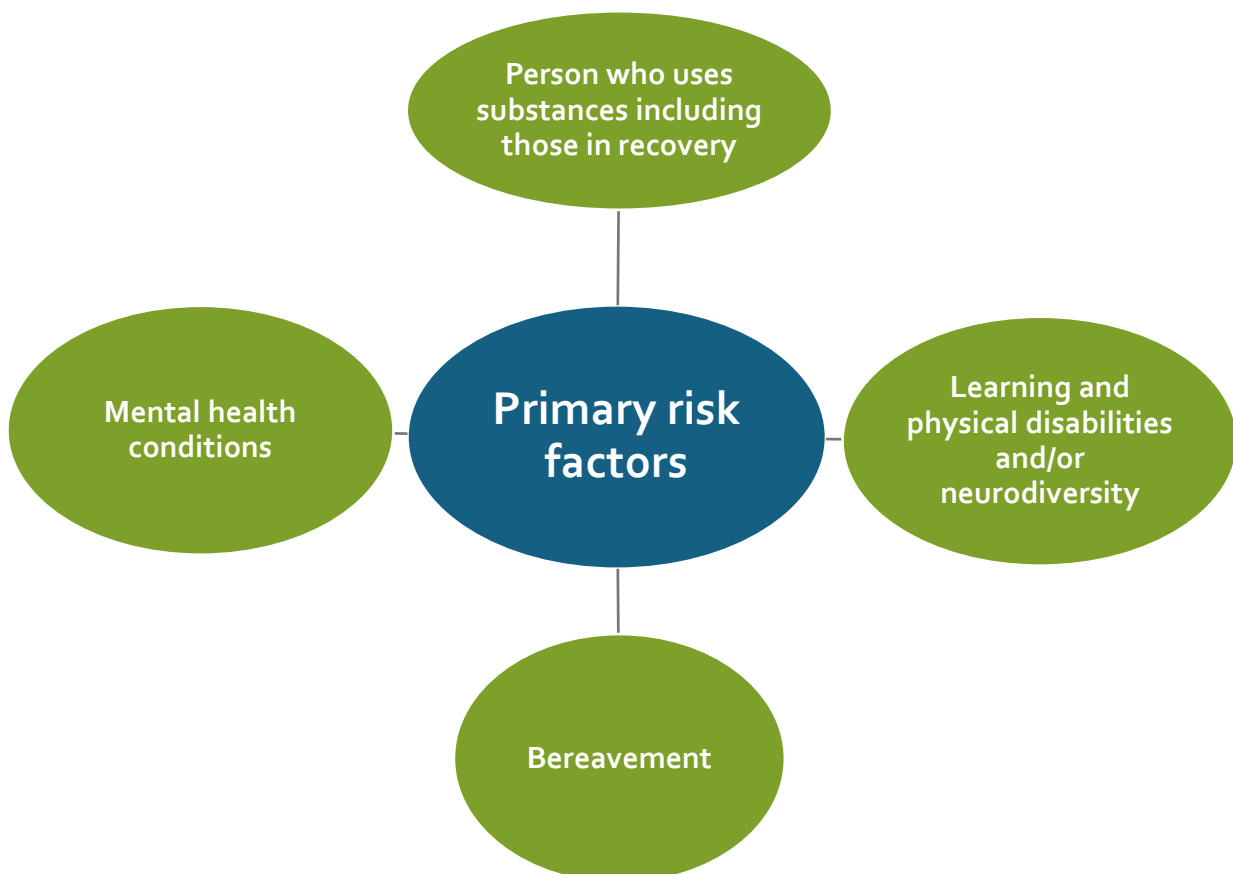
Pending new legislation, the link to the legislation will be added.

Cuckooing is now a Criminal Offence after Royal Assent of the Crime and Policing Act 2026, although a date for relevant provisions to commence has not yet been set and it is not yet in force.

Who is at risk?

Perpetrators target children and adults at increased risk, often selecting those who are less able to protect themselves and/or their properties. Victims are frequently isolated and living in environments that enable exploitation.

Primary risk factors:



Other risk factors

Social and personal circumstances:

- Loneliness, social isolation, or lack of a support network
- History of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Being a care leaver or having experience in the care system
- Unaccompanied young adults (16–18) living independently
- Older adults
- Lone parents (especially females) facing emotional or financial hardship
- Involvement in sex work

Economic and housing vulnerabilities:

- Poverty, debt, or poor financial management
- Housing insecurity or homelessness
- Living alone, particularly in flats or properties with discreet access (e.g. alleyways)
- Accommodation managed by social or private landlords

Environmental and situational risks:

- Living in areas of social deprivation with gang or violent crime activity
- Connections to individuals involved in gangs, county lines, or other vulnerabilities
- Being known to police or having a criminal record



Barriers to reporting or recognising Cuckooing

Victims of Cuckooing may be reluctant or not disclose that their home is being exploited and could refuse initial support or safeguarding due to a number of fears, including:

- Not recognising that they are being Cuckooed and at risk of harm
- Loss of perceived “friendship”
- Fear of being evicted from their home
- Distrust of the Police and or Statutory Services (such as Adult Social Care or Children’s Services)
- Arrest or prosecution for drug-related offences
- Losing access to money, substances, or relationships provided by perpetrators
- Retaliation or further harm from those exploiting them
- Being labelled as disloyal or a “grass”
- Shame and embarrassment that their home is being used in this way

Signs of Cuckooing



The presence of multiple indicators increases the likelihood of and risks of cuckooing.

- An increase in anti-social behaviour
- The outside of the property possibly becomes unkept/untidy with an increase in litter
- An increase in cars or bikes outside the property
- A decrease of the usual visitors
- An increase in people entering or leaving the property
- Not seeing a neighbour as often or they are distancing themselves
- A neighbour suddenly driving people around

Environmental context:

- Typically occurs in social housing or multi-occupancy settings such as blocks of flats (but not exclusively)
- More common in deprived areas linked to crime and gang / county lines activity

Property and housing indicators:

- Unusual or frequent visitors, often at irregular hours
- Unknown individuals attempting to access the building (e.g. buzzing entry systems)
- Increased noise, anti-social behaviour, or reports of drug activity
- Door damage, propped entrances, or frequent lock changes



- New or unfamiliar vehicles, bikes, or visitors
- Excessive rubbish, takeaway containers, or makeshift sleeping areas
- Sparse personal belongings, unused kitchen, or lack of food
- Evidence of drug use or supply (e.g. packaging, needles)

Changes in individual's behaviour:

- Appearing fearful, controlled, or withdrawn
- Spending long periods away from home or sleeping elsewhere
- Declining physical health or emotional wellbeing



- Disengagement from support services
- Being accompanied by others who speak on their behalf
- Unexplained injuries or suspected assault
- Carrying weapons
- Withdrawal from family and social networks

Financial and lifestyle changes:

- Sudden debt or unusual rent account activity
- Unexplained money, gifts, clothing, or mobile phones
- Increased emergency service attendance

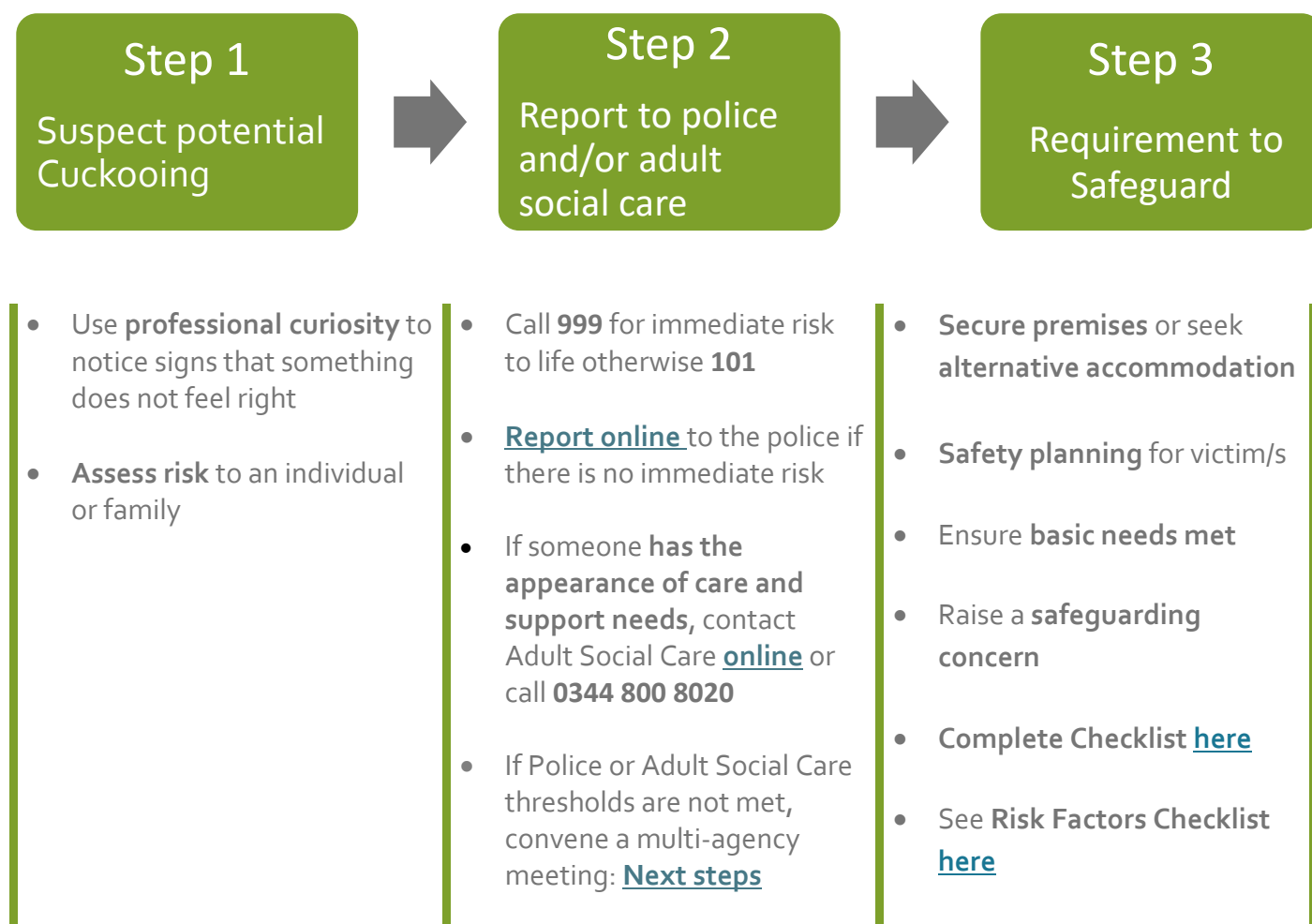
Responding to risk indicators of Cuckooing

Identification of cuckooing is key, when working with individuals who may be at risk of cuckooing, it is important to:

- Be alert to signs that an individual has lost control of their home.
- Apply professional curiosity - do not rely on assumptions.
- Recognise that information may come from neighbours, contractors, or partner agencies.
- Adopting a collaborative approach to obtaining, sharing, and using information appropriately.
- Make prompt and appropriate referrals to enable agencies to have a full picture to support the individual, including raising safeguarding concerns where relevant.

What to do if you suspect someone is being Cuckooed

Raise concerns with your line manager, to follow your organisations policy and record. The following flow chart supports this process:



The identifying agency **MUST** retain responsibility of the initial safeguarding steps, including the facilitation of a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT), following their own agencies pathways for Cuckooing Victims.

Note: Each organisation is responsible for establishing a pathway to support and respond to victims of cuckooing or utilise an existing pathway where one is already in place.

Further guidance is provided below relating to the different steps.

Step 1: Suspect potential Cuckooing

It is important that frontline staff apply [professional curiosity](#) to explore and understand what is happening, rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. It is essential that appropriate referrals are made if there are suspicions, as this will help to build up the full picture of what is actually happening and ultimately help to safeguard the victim and the wider community.

Identify [risks](#).

Step 2: Reporting to police and/or social care

Option 1 – Contacting the Police:

Call **999** if there is an immediate risk to you or a victim's safety, or a crime is happening now.

Call **101** if there is no immediate risk but you believe cuckooing is occurring or has occurred [report online](#).

Provide as much information as possible about the address, victim(s), suspected offender(s), vehicles, weapons and any known risks.

Option 2 – Contacting Adult Social Care:

If there is no immediate risk to you or the victim's safety and the person appears to have care and support needs - [report to Adult Social Care to raise a concern](#). Where possible, obtain the person's consent before making a referral unless doing so would increase risk. Concerns should still be raised where the person lacks capacity, is at risk of abuse or neglect, or others may be at risk.

For information on care and support needs and how to raise a concern see: [Care and support needs | Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board](#).

Option 3 – where neither of the above apply: Convene a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting:

Where an adult is believed to be at risk of Cuckooing but does not have care and support needs that meet the threshold for a Section 42 Care Act (2014) Safeguarding Enquiry, agencies must not regard the matter as requiring no further action.

The practitioner raising the concern is responsible for arranging an MDT meeting or refer the case to an appropriate multi-agency forum. This will enable agencies to share information lawfully, assess risk, and agree a coordinated response.

Consideration should also be given to issues such as exploitation, community safety, housing, crime prevention, disruption activity, victim support, and safeguarding risks. Relevant agencies, including the Police, Adult Social Care, should be invited to contribute, recognising that any intervention must be within their respective legal powers and duties.

The case should remain under review. If care and support needs become apparent, a referral for a Care Act assessment and/or a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry should be considered.

Step 3: Requirement to Safeguard

A full Cuckooing Checklist setting out actions to safeguard a person experiencing Cuckooing is available, see [Appendix 1](#).

Safeguarding concerns may be raised by any agency, including the Police.

- a) Where a concern is identified by the Police and meets the threshold for a criminal investigation, risk information will be recorded on an Adult Protection Investigation (API) and shared via the Police Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with the Social Care Community Engagement (SCCE) Team. The SCCE Team will refer the concern to Adult Social Care for consideration of safeguarding risks and any required assessment.
- b) Adult Social Care is responsible for determining whether the criteria for a **Section 42 Care Act (2014) Safeguarding Enquiry** are met. This applies to referrals received from any agency.

Where a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry is initiated, relevant partner agencies may be invited to a **Strategy Meeting** and information will be shared with Police MASH as appropriate.

Where Cuckooing is identified and a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry is undertaken, a **Planning Meeting** will be convened to coordinate actions, manage risk, and agree responsibilities.

If a child is living in, or regularly visiting the property, a child safeguarding referral **MUST** also be made [Report child safety concerns - Norfolk County Council](#).

If the threshold for a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry is not met, SCCE will provide feedback to the referrer.

The following meetings may be arranged as part of the safeguarding process:

- **Strategy Meeting** – to consider the safeguarding concern, share information and address immediate risks.
- **Planning Meeting** – to coordinate actions, allocate responsibilities and agree timescales.
- **Safeguarding Meeting** – to review outcomes, assess ongoing risk, and agree longer term safeguarding arrangements.
- **Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting** - where Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry is not required, consideration should be given to an MDT meeting to assess risk, share information, and coordinate an appropriate response. This would be initiated by the referring agency. Further information is provided in Next Steps.

Next steps

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting

A coordinated multi-agency response is essential for effective safeguarding and risk management. The agency identifying the concern should arrange and facilitate the MDT meeting, ensuring all relevant agencies are invited to participate.

The purpose of the MDT meeting is to:

- Build a comprehensive understanding of the case, including relevant history and current risks
- Assess the impact on the individual and, where relevant, the wider community
- Agree appropriate interventions and safeguarding measures
- Coordinate actions across agencies to avoid duplication and maximise effectiveness
- Develop a person-centred action plan with clear responsibilities and timescales
- Support efforts to reduce harm, safeguard victims, and disrupt perpetrators

This multi-agency approach promotes timely information-sharing, co-ordinated safeguarding response and decision making, and the effective use of resources to manage risk and improve outcomes.

Each agency is responsible for progressing and reporting on its agreed actions. A nominated lead should coordinate the action plan and arrange review meetings, as required to monitor progress, address emerging risks and ensure the plan remains responsive to the individual's needs and circumstances.

Appendix 1: Norfolk Cuckooing (Home Takeover) checklist

This guidance is primarily aimed at frontline staff who may suspect that an individual is experiencing cuckooing and outlines key considerations for supporting those affected.

The document provides a framework for agencies to follow when responding to cuckooing cases, with the aim of ensuring an effective multi-agency approach. This includes identifying risk, safeguarding victims, and taking coordinated action to prevent, disrupt, and reduce cuckooing.

The following section outlines a range of suggested actions. Each situation should be considered on a case-by-case basis, with the victim placed at the centre of the decision. In all cases, staff should notify their line manager at the earliest opportunity and adhere to local safeguarding policies and procedures.

Immediate risk to safety/ safeguarding	
☐	Emergency: Call 999 if there is an immediate risk to you or your client's safety, or a crime is happening now. Be ready to provide any information you have about the address, victims, offenders, weapons, and vehicles.
☐	Housing: It may be necessary to arrange out-of-area emergency accommodation for the person via Housing Options or a Housing Association. Support your client to approach their district council.
☐	Adult Social Care: Contact Adult Social Care to raise a safeguarding concern if you think the person has care and support needs (call 0344 800 8020 or online) and/or to discuss any care and support needs . Adult Social Care may provide care and support following assessment of the person's needs.
☐	If children are living at the property, contact Children's Social Care (call 0344 800 8020 or online). Consider sharing information with other agencies as they may have additional intelligence / concerns.
Intervention	
☐	Ensure that your client's basic needs are met (food, water, energy, healthcare and trusted support such as family).
☐	If there are capacity concerns under the Mental Capacity Act (2005), an assessment should be completed by the relevant agency. For Mental Health Act (2007) assessments, follow the standard mental health route.
☐	Refer the client to appropriate support services , including substance misuse treatment if needed.
☐	Provide your client with Shelter's emergency helpline for legal advice (call 0808 800 4444).
☐	Arrange for all locks to be changed at the property and for windows to be secured .

☐	Where possible, offer safety tools (e.g. personal safety device , Hollie Guard, Silent Solution and Life360, mobile phone, and/or a new SIM card).
☐	Agree on a safety word with your client to signal urgent police assistance if needed.
☐	Support your client with safety planning including reviewing changing routines and travel routes.
☐	If relocation is desired, explore whether short term or permanent options are appropriate.
☐	If your client has been coerced into servitude, criminality, sexual activity or drugs activity, they may qualify as a victim of modern slavery and could be supported via the National Referral Mechanism . For advice call the 24/7 Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 0121 700.

Submit intelligence

☐	Contact the Police on 101 or access to 101 online , or through the local Operational Partnership Team (OPT). Call 999 if there is a risk to life and / or the situation requires an immediate response.
☐	If you suspect cuckooing is taking place but there is no known immediate risk of harm submit information via Share Community Partnership Intelligence
☐	Members of the public can submit information via online reporting or anonymously via Crimestoppers (0800 555 111) or submit a report online. Include the victim's name, address, your concerns, description of the suspected perpetrator, and the date / time of any observations. Where safe and appropriate, report directly to the police, as they are best placed to assess and act.
☐	If reporting intelligence relating to potential cuckooing activity, please explicitly reference that your concerns are in relation to Cuckooing.
☐	Trust your instincts – if something does not feel right, report it.

Multi-agency working

☐	Ask to attend all multi-agency meetings and agree a lead professional to coordinate risk management, support, and updates. This person should be senior enough to approve actions on behalf of their agency and hold partner agencies accountable for delivering agreed actions within set timescales.
☐	Multi-agency responses should be person-centred . Your client should be consulted throughout the safeguarding process, and their views should be reflected in any actions taken as much as is practicable.

Protection and disruption

☐	Consider whether a Closure Order or Partial Closure Order is appropriate, referring to the Housing Authority and / or police as the relevant agencies.
☐	At the cuckooed property, explore the possibility of installing home protection .
☐	Undertake regular welfare checks and request that professionals from other agencies meet with your client regularly.
☐	Request that high-visibility Neighbourhood Policing Teams regularly patrol the local area.
☐	Consider distributing Cuckooing awareness leaflets to surrounding properties and / or displaying cuckooing awareness posters in areas with high footfall.
☐	Where appropriate, ensure that your client has access to adult life skills support and seek to build their resilience. It may be beneficial to talk to them about how to answer the door safely, healthy relationships, asking for assistance, overcoming loneliness and assertiveness.

Appendix 2: Checklist of Cuckooing Risk Factors

This tool has been designed to help frontline practitioners identify those at risk of Cuckooing victimisation, and to consider if further support or safeguarding referrals are required.

For more information you can reference the educational resources: [Preventing and Disrupting Cuckooing Victimisation: Professional Toolkit | School of Law | University of Leeds](#)

Risk is dynamic and can change very quickly. It is good practice to review the checklist at regular intervals.

Please note, this tool is not:

- A full risk assessment for children. If risk towards a child is highlighted you should consider what referrals you need to make to obtain a full assessment of the child's situation.
- A substitute for professional curiosity and judgement. The results from the checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts for further questioning, analysis and safeguarding.

Once completed, this form should be stored securely, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK GDPR:

Client name:	Practitioner name:
Client address:	
Date:	

Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer. It is assumed that your main source of information is your client. If this is not the case, please indicate this in the right-hand column.

	Yes	No	Unknown	Source of information
Has previously been cuckooed				

Housing

Lives in a disadvantaged area				
Lives in an area where County Lines activity is known to be taking place				
Lives in a property rented from a social or private landlord				
Lives in a property that can easily be accessed in the back (e.g. an alleyway)				
Lives in a block of flats				
Lives in an area where cuckooing has been suspected or reported				

Vulnerabilities

Lives alone				
Are elderly				
Suffered a recent bereavement				
Is socially disconnected and / or lonely				
Is a single parent or carer				
Has a history of being in the care system or is a recent care leaver				
Is involved in sex work				
Is currently, or previously been, neglected or abused				
Struggles financially and / or is in debt				

Health

Has a mental health condition				
Has a learning disability and / or is neurodivergent				
Has a physical disability				
Is using prescription and / or non-prescription drugs				
Is dependent on alcohol				
Is in recovery from drug and / or alcohol use				
Regularly collects prescriptions from the pharmacy				

Network

Is involved in sex work				
Has known connections with individuals involved in substance use				
Has known connections to organised crime, including County Lines operatives				
Has known connections to those who are homeless or experiencing housing precarity				
Total 'yes' responses				

National Eligibility Criteria for Adults (Care Act 2014)

This helps determine where the local authority may have a duty to provide services or carry out a Section 42 enquiry. [Care and support needs | Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

Nature	Outcome	Wellbeing
The adult's needs arise from or are related to: • A physical illness or disability • A mental impairment • A mental illness	As a result of the needs, the adult is unable to achieve 2 or more of the following: a) managing and maintaining nutrition b) maintaining personal hygiene c) managing toilet needs d) being appropriately clothed e) being able to make use of the adult's home safely f) maintaining a habitable home environment g) developing and maintaining family or other personal relationships h) accessing and engaging in work, training, education or volunteering i) making use of necessary facilities or services in the local community including public transport and recreational facilities or services and j) carrying out any caring responsibilities the adult has for a child.	As a consequence, there is or is likely to be a significant impact on the adult's wellbeing, including the following: • Personal dignity • Physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing • Protection from abuse and neglect • Control by the individual over day-to-day life (including over care and support provided and the way it is provided) • Participation in work, education, training or recreation • Social and economic wellbeing • Domestic, family and personal relationships • Suitability of living accommodation • The individual's contribution to society

Appendix 3: contact details and helplines

ORGANISATION	TELEPHONE NUMBER/EMAIL	WEBSITE
Action Fraud	0300 123 2040 (Mon-Fri 8am to 8pm)	UK's Home for Reporting Cyber Crime & Fraud - Report Fraud
Adult Social Care	0344 800 8020	Contact our adult social care team - Norfolk County Council
Catch 22 (community mediation service)	020 7336 4800	Mediation Service Catch22
Change Grow Live (drug and alcohol service)	01603 514096	Find a Change Grow Live service near you
Child and Young People Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	Central/West Norfolk: 0300 790 0371 East Norfolk, Great Yarmouth and Waveney: 0300 123 1882	Children and young people Norfolk and Suffolk NHS
Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS)	0344 800 8021	Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) Norfolk County Council Norfolk Community Directory
Client Hardship Service (CHS)	0344 800 8020	Online form: Apply Here
Early Childhood and Family Service (ECFS)	Professionals: 01603 561131 Parents/Carers: 0344 800 8020	Early Childhood and Family Service information for professionals - Norfolk County Council
Family Hubs – Early Help Advisors	Great Yarmouth: 01493 448318 earlyhelphub@great-yarmouth.gov.uk West Norfolk: 01553 669651 westnorfolk.helphub@West-Norfolk.gov.uk Norwich: 01603 303359 nehh@norwich.gov.uk Breckland: 01362 654584 community@breckland.gov.uk Broadland: 01603 303360 South Norfolk: 01603 307703 helphub@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk North Norfolk: 01263 739060 Northnorfolk.helphub@north-norfolk.gov.uk	Best Start Family Hubs - Norfolk County Council

Family Network Approach	fna@norfolk.gov.uk	Family Network Approach - Norfolk Schools and Learning Providers - Norfolk County Council
Hourglass Safer Ageing (elder abuse)	0808 808 8141	Hourglass Safer Ageing Norfolk Community Directory
Leeway (domestic abuse)	0300 561 0077	Leeway Domestic Violence and Abuse Services
Mancroft Advice Project (MAP)	0800 0744 454	Here For You MAP Norfolk
Matthew Project (children and young people drug and alcohol service)	01603 626123	Drug and alcohol recovery The Matthew Project England
Modern Slavery Helpline	0800 0121 700	Report
National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)	0800 970 2070	Contact NCDV · Domestic Abuse & Violence Support
NHS 111 (for mental health)	111 – select mental health option	Where to get urgent help for mental health - NHS
Norfolk Community Directory		Home Norfolk Community Directory
Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS)	0300 561 0555	Home - NIDAS
Pathways (multiple needs and rough sleeping)	01604 984694	Pathways Norwich Norfolk Community Directory
Police – non-emergency	101	Contact Us
Purfleet Trust, King's Lynn (homelessness)	01553 767829	The Purfleet Trust West Norfolk's Homelessness Charity
Respect helpline for perpetrators (domestic abuse)	0808 802 4040	Respect Home
Social Care Community Engagement Service (SCCES)	0344 800 8020 or email SCCE@norfolk.gov.uk	Information for local authorities - Norfolk County Council
Shelter (housing issues)	0344 515 1564	Shelter services in Norwich - Shelter England
Victim Care – Norfolk & Suffolk	0300 303 3706	Referral form