

PRESS RELEASE
CAUSEWAY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Make cuckooing a modern slavery offence

Causeway are supporting calls for cuckooing to be included in the list of modern slavery offences.

Cuckooing is when the home of a vulnerable person is taken over by criminals in order to use it as a base for crimes such as drug dealing or the storing of illegal items such as weapons, drugs or stolen goods. It is often linked to 'county lines' crime, which is where young people are used or coerced into delivering drugs around the country.

The occupant of the home is controlled through violence, fear, and intimidation, and has little control over what is happening under their roof. Targets are usually chosen due to a vulnerability such as addiction, learning difficulties, disability, or old age. Exploiting someone and taking over their home in this way is not currently a criminal offence.

The recent '[Slavery at Home](#)' report from The Centre for Social Justice, and Justice and Care, is calling on the government to make cuckooing a specific modern slavery offence under a new Modern Slavery Bill announced last spring.

The report states that:

'Police reports suggest there are many hundreds of vulnerable victims currently suffering as a result of 'cuckooing'. During a national week of police enforcement action on 'county lines' drug dealing during 7-13 March 2022, 799 cuckooed addresses were visited. During a similar week of action in October 2021, 894 cuckooed addresses were visited. Our polling found that one in eight people have seen signs of cuckooing in their community....

'Cuckooing is out of reach of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 as there is no movement and no other 'labour' is involved. Other offences such as drugs crimes or generic organised crime offences do not address the exploitation of the victim. The Home Secretary should use the forthcoming Modern Slavery Bill to protect vulnerable people at risk of cuckooing and adequately prosecute the perpetrators by making it a specific modern slavery criminal offence.'

The call to make cuckooing a form of modern slavery is being supported by Labour MP Jess Phillips, who said: "Cuckooing seems to be a growing form of modern slavery. We must outlaw this exploitation of vulnerable people, threatened and manipulated by drugs gangs who take over their home. We cannot leave them any longer to suffer behind closed doors at risk of being prosecuted themselves."

Causeway staff working in our modern slavery services have supported numerous victims of cuckooing, both in our safe houses and in our community outreach programmes.

David* was a British man in his 50s with learning difficulties, a history of alcohol abuse, and addicted to painkillers.

David was known to local drug dealers, and when they found out where he lived, they offered him drugs in return for storing their belongings in his house.

Following an accident that required him to be in hospital for a week, David returned home to find the locks on his doors had been changed. Once allowed in, he found the drug dealers had taken over his property to grow drugs. He was given the small bedroom and locked in there each day while they went about their business.

After a few months a neighbour complained about a smell, and the local authority came to evict him. He ran away in panic, and refused to deal with the police, until out of desperation he attended a homelessness support centre who referred him into Causeway.

South Yorkshire Modern Slavery Accommodation Manager Kyle France, said: "While he was with us, David was persistently chased by his local authority who blamed him for the issues with the house, and tried to pursue prosecution for missed rent and damage to the property.

"I am fully behind making cuckooing a modern slavery offence. It's a disgraceful act that takes advantage of the most vulnerable in our society and uses what should be their safest place as a tool to control, coerce and abuse them into doing what they want. We have seen many people come into our service who found themselves in this position through very little fault of their own, and I believe a lot of these situations would have been avoided through intervention services, addiction support, and better community support."

Sara Stone, Causeway's South Yorkshire Male and Family Coordinator, supported a victim of cuckooing in the community.

"Eli* was born with a learning disability and a visual impairment during the civil war in Liberia. When he was a child, he saw his father kill his mother and sisters during a psychotic episode, he then hit Eli over the head with a hammer, which caused a lasting brain injury. Eli was then taken in by a group of rebels who forced him to become a child soldier. He was rescued by the Red Cross who reunited him with his aunt who bought him to the UK.

"During the Covid pandemic, Eli's social worker left, and his support workers stopped visiting, which left him very vulnerable. He started hanging out with some members of a local gang, who soon took over his home. He was not allowed in his room, made to sleep on the floor, and had to do whatever they said. One day, the police found him in possession of class A drugs, which led to his arrest.

Despite his vulnerabilities, the police believed he was leading the gang's drug operation and were trying to prosecute him. However, after two months of telling the police he was innocent, they referred him into the NRM and he entered Causeway's services.

When he came into our service, he was living in the area frequented by the gang, he did not have a social worker, or control over his finances. We supported him by connecting him to social services and support workers, and helped him to challenge the council's decision not to rehouse him. That support meant he was soon made a priority, and allowed to move into safe accommodation that suited his needs. He had been unable to get a bank account so we were able to set up a survivors' bank account that has enabled him to manage his finances independently with the support of a social worker.

I believe that people with trauma and disabilities who do not have anyone to advocate for them are left incredibly vulnerable to exploitation and cuckooing. Whilst Eli is able to live an independent life, his visual impairment and brain injury means that he will always need other people to help safeguard him from future exploitation."

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Notes to Editor

- Causeway's social media handle is @CausewayCharity and social channels can be found here: [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Twitter](#) / [LinkedIn](#)
- Causeway is a national charity that exists to create lasting change for marginalised and vulnerable people. This includes survivors of modern slavery and those caught in the cycle of exploitation and crime.
- Causeway has been supporting thousands of survivors and service users to make progress and thrive for nearly 20 years. We work to prevent, protect and support them, and free them to live their lives.
- Causeway provides services including, but not limited to: safe houses, one-to-one specialist support, holistic crisis support interventions and community connection groups. We also signpost service users into: counselling, training courses and volunteering or employment opportunities.
- Causeway is committed to raising awareness of modern slavery, human trafficking and criminal reduction across the UK, as we advocate for a fairer and more understanding society. We do this through: investing in research, national campaigning, strategic partnerships, community and corporate fundraising, training courses, and collaborating with local authorities, government officials, media and influencers.