

Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB)

Cuckooing practitioner's guide

1. Introduction

This guidance will provide front line professionals with a multi-agency framework to facilitate effective working with adults who they suspect are at risk of being Cuckooed, or may be a victim of Cuckooing.

This guidance should be used flexibly and in a way that achieves best outcomes for adults at risk. It does not, for example, specify which agencies need to be involved in the process, or prescribe any specific actions that may need to be taken as this will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

2. Making safeguarding personal

Any intervention involving Cuckooing should be addressed alongside the practitioner's guide to [Making Safeguarding Personal](#).

Ask, listen, offer choice, work together.

3. What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a practice where people take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate exploitation. It takes the name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds.

Cuckooing is becoming an increasingly common problem within Lincolnshire. Cuckooing is the term used to describe the situation where a person's home is used by other people for criminal activities, or to exploit the person, or they have become unwanted and overstaying guests.

Cuckooing can include:

- Criminal gangs targeting homes of vulnerable people to deal drugs and victims are often left with little choice but to cooperate. Dealers will approach the vulnerable person offering free drugs to use their home for dealing or in some instances after providing 'free' drugs, and they will then force the person to deal for them to 're-pay' their drug debts. 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. Once they gain control, gangs move into the property, which usually increases the risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence. Children as well as adults are used as drug runners.

Or

- Cuckooing can also include one person forming a 'friendship' and, or, sexual relationship with an individual who they specifically target, perhaps because the individual is lonely, vulnerable, they may use drugs, or have alcohol related problems, they are perhaps experiencing mental health difficulties, or are recently bereaved. The 'befriender' will be charming and manipulative in order to quickly build rapport and they will then move into their home, take their money, involve other friends who may also move in, they may sell the person's possessions and all the time they will make the victim believe that they are a close friend who cares about them.

Cuckooing can happen to anyone. There is no typical household type, it can be anyone regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion, or belief, sex or sexual orientation, and can also manifest itself in specific ways within different communities. The victim(s) may live on their own or be in a relationship.

People with a learning disability, or who lack capacity are particularly vulnerable to cuckooing.

4. Cuckooing is a type of exploitation

'Exploitation is the deliberate manipulation or abuse of power used to have control over another person, usually for some form of gain. Exploitation comes in many forms including [Modern Slavery](#) which includes:

- human trafficking
- forced labour
- domestic servitude
- criminal exploitation including County Lines
- sexual exploitation including escort work, prostitution and pornography
- debt bondage – being forced to work to pay off debts that realistically they never will be able to.

Cuckooing can be used in any type of exploitation, but is not always a factor.

5. Some of the factors that heighten a person's risk of Cuckooing could include:

- Having prior experience of neglect, physical and, or sexual abuse
- Lack of a safe or stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic abuse or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example)
- Social isolation or social difficulties
- Economic deprivation
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status
- Connections with other people involved in gangs
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Having mental ill health
- Substance misuse issues
- History of being in the care of the local authority
- having prior experience of neglect, physical and, or sexual abuse.
- lack of a safe or stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic abuse or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality)
- social isolation or social difficulties
- economic deprivation
- homelessness or insecure accommodation
- connections with other people involved in gangs
- having a physical or learning disability
- having mental ill health
- substance misuse issues
- history of being in the care of the local authority
- recently bereaved

- lonely and isolated
- no robust support networks
- a support network that is of concern

6. Signs that Cuckooing may be taking place at a property may include but is not limited to:

- An increase in people entering and leaving
- An increase in cars or bikes outside
- An increase in anti-social behaviour
- People coming and going at strange times
- Damage to the door or the door propped open
- Unknown people pressing buzzers to gain access to the building
- The person who lives there has not been seen recently or, when they have, they have been anxious or distracted
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts, phone calls and, or having multiple handsets
- Relationships with controlling or older individuals or groups
- Leaving home or care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault or unexplained injuries
- Carrying weapons
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- Lack of healthcare visitors
- Presence of young people frequenting the property
- Increased visitors to an address
- Evidence of drug use, multiple mobile phones
- Increase in anti-social behaviour
- Significant decline in mental health and general appearance
- Disclosure that 'friends' are staying at their address
- May apply for housing, but may be unable or unwilling to say why they wish to move
- May offer a full disclosure what is happening to them...

It is important to remember that not all of these issues will necessarily be a sign of Cuckooing, they may indicate other support needs.

7. Recognising patterns and themes

Any response to Cuckooing concerns needs to be person centred and in line with Making Safeguarding Personal. However, it is also really important to recognise patterns and themes within a particular geographical area, as this may indicate the concerns are more widespread and more people are at risk from the same perpetrators.

Agencies working with people with different needs, such as older people, people with learning difficulties and people with mental health needs must:

- ensure that they have an awareness of the indicators of Cuckooing
- discuss whether there are any known concerns within the area in forums such as team meetings

- share relevant information about what they know about the situation, as this can help inform the response needed

Many victims of Cuckooing and other forms of exploitation may be prevented from engaging with services because of coercion and control.

8. Situations which may involve some form of exploitation

Exploitation	Information	Action
Cuckooing	<p>Where there is no evidence, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demeanour of the victim indicates that they are experiencing problems. • There are rumours about people exploiting the victim. • The person is considered vulnerable. 	<p>There is no criminal evidence therefore share intelligence with the police.</p> <p>Circumstances where the practitioner can reasonably override such a decision.</p> <p>Complete Operation Insignia referral form</p>
Cuckooing	<p>There are grounds to consider the victim is vulnerable and there are signs to indicate Cuckooing is taking place.</p> <p>In some situations, an individual may be controlled and coerced to the extent that they believe they are making choices. In these situations, consideration will be given to circumstances where the practitioner can reasonably override such a decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report the matter to the police dial 101 • If there is an immediate threat to life, in an emergency dial 999. • Establish a multi-agency planning meeting.
Domestic Abuse	<p>Domestic abuse includes an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and, or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, often by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse can affect anyone, regardless of age, disability, gender identity, gender reassignment, race, religion, or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Domestic abuse can also manifest itself in specific ways within different communities.</p> <p>Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:</p>	<p>Complete the Lincolnshire DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment) with the victim where possible.</p> <p>Complete the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) referral form.</p> <p>(Where a case is visible high risk (14 ticks) or based on your professional judgement that you have serious concerns about a victim's situation you must make a referral into MARAC).</p>

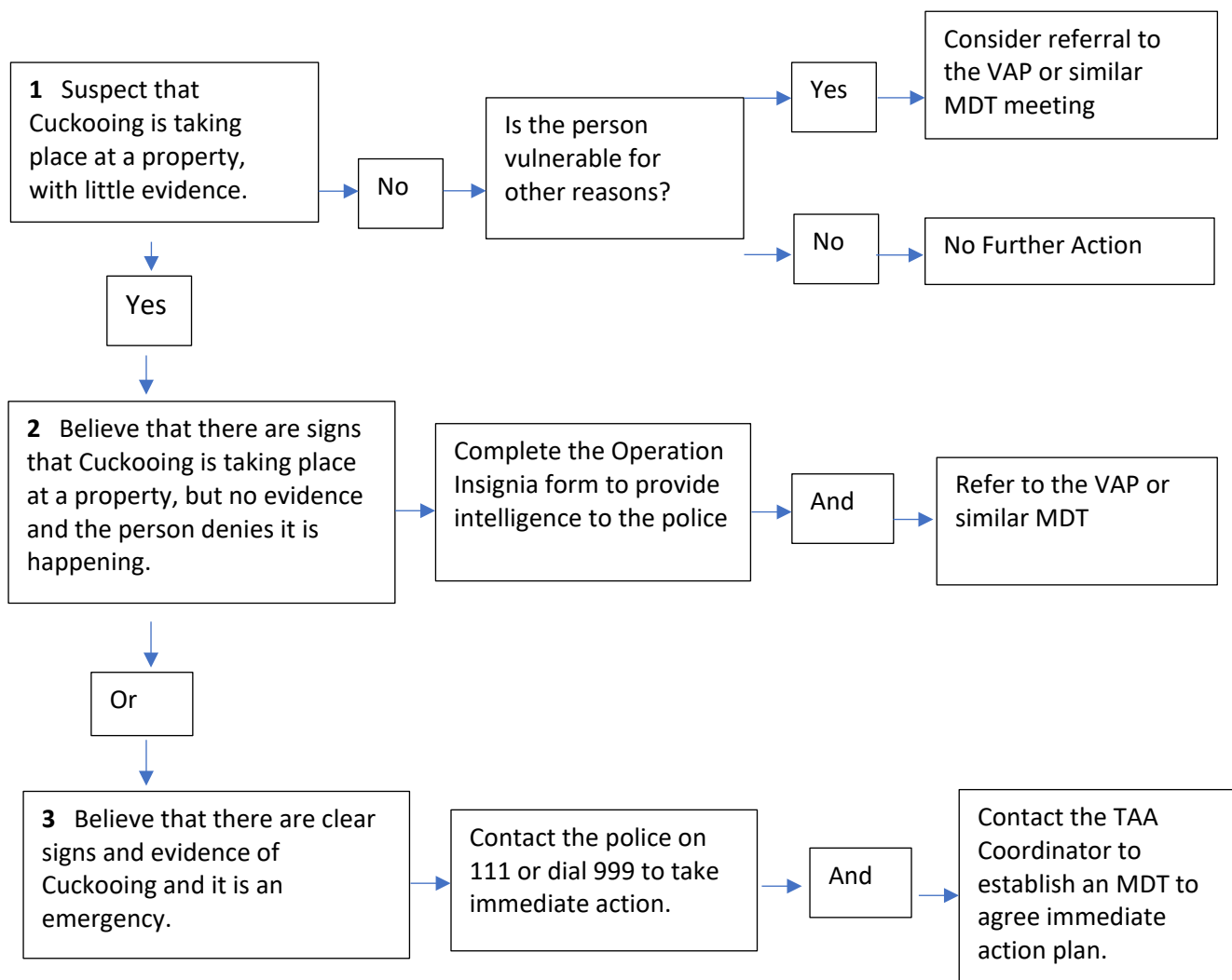
Exploitation	Information	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence) • Psychological and, or emotional abuse • Physical or sexual abuse • Financial or economic abuse • Harassment and stalking • Online or digital abuse 	
Cases where children are involved	<p>A child is aged between 0 to 18 years. Child Exploitation is a form of abuse that is covered by legislation and multi-agency procedural guidance.</p> <p>They are likely to be at risk of, or suffering significant harm,</p>	<p>If you have concerns you should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow your individual agency responsibility, or • Complete LSAB procedures: Report a safeguarding concern • or • Telephone Children’s Services on 01522 782111 If you feel the child is at immediate risk of harm, you should contact the police for them to take action to ensure immediate protection.
Cases where children are involved and Child Exploitation is suspected.	<p>This occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into a sexual or criminal activity, in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and, or the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse.</p> <p>The key factor that distinguishes cases of exploitation from other forms of abuse or harm is the presence of some form of exchange for the victim and, or perpetrator or facilitator.</p>	<p>In addition to the above actions the MACE (Multi Agency Child Exploitation Meeting) screening tool helps to gather information that is needed to decide what to do next. Completion of a screening tool does not constitute a referral to the MACE.</p> <p>You should make a referral to MACE if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child has links to a known or suspected perpetrator of either sexual or criminal exploitation: • There is a significant risk of exploitation to the child from an unknown perpetrator.

Exploitation	Information	Action
		MACE screening tool
Safeguarding Adults Referral	<p>Where the victim is an adult at risk as defined by the care act 2014:</p> <p>An adult aged 18 years or over, who has care and support needs (whether or not those needs are being met) and as a result of those needs is unable to protect him or herself against the abuse or neglect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow your individual agency safeguarding process. Or • Complete 'LSAB procedures: Report a safeguarding concern

9. Report intelligence to the police

If a practitioner has information that makes them concerned about a person that they support, for instance they have heard rumours that the individual is mixing with a person known to exploit vulnerable people, or who has been known to have previously Cuckooed a vulnerable person, or it has been heard that unknown people are frequenting the address, they should make an 'intelligence' report to the police using [Operation Insignia](#)

10. Flowchart for actions where Cuckooing is suspected or believed to be taking place



10.1 Suspect that Cuckooing is taking place

There are some signs and indicators (see notes at 3). However, on further exploration, the practitioner recognises the individual is vulnerable but does not appear to be a victim of Cuckooing.

Steps:

- Consider a referral to the VAP or similar Multi-Disciplinary Meeting to establish the needs of the person, what they want and what actions could be put into place to help them.

10.2 Believe that Cuckooing is taking place

- There are signs and indicators to make the practitioner believe that Cuckooing is taking place. However, there is no supporting evidence and the person denies that they are being coerced or controlled by another person(s).

Steps:

- Complete the Operation Insignia Form [Operation Insignia](#) to provide intelligence to the police.
- Refer to the VAP or similar MDT.

10.3 Believe that Cuckooing is taking place.

There are signs and indicators to make the practitioner believe that Cuckooing is taking place. There is supporting evidence of person(s) taking over the individual's home, and, or there is evidence of criminal activity, and, or there is disclosure of being a victim of Cuckooing.

Steps:

- Contact the police on 111 or dial 999 in an emergency.
- Immediate action will be taken by the police, in tandem with the District Council our housing provider if there is one, to protect the person and take actions against the person(s) invading the individual's home.
- Contact the TAA coordinator to establish an immediate MDT meeting to prepare an immediate action plan.

11. Notes for conducting a multi-agency planning meeting

A multi-agency response is key to working to address concerns around Cuckooing and exploitation. The case will therefore be presented to the Vulnerable Adult Panel (VAP) or equivalent multi-disciplinary meeting such as the Neighbourhood team meeting. If neither of these forums meet on a regular basis a multi-disciplinary meeting will be established to specifically manage the situation.

Where an adult at risk appears to be a victim of Cuckooing, the Chair of the meeting should explore which agencies need to be involved in future planning meetings. This will include those that are involved in meeting the person's care and support needs, and agencies that may hold information connected to the Cuckooing concerns particularly where there are multiple adults at risk.

It is vital that practitioners recognise, and work collaboratively, to identify tactics to disrupt multiple types of exploitation. This will include an understanding of existing legislative opportunities at their disposal and to target specific risks.

Members of the multi-agency network can be drawn from:

- Lincolnshire Police PVP
- Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Trust (LPFT)
- United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust (ULHT)
- Lincolnshire Community Health Service
- We Are With You drug and substance misuse service
- Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) and Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Coordinator
- District Council

- National Probation Service
- Victim Support
- Lincolnshire Support Services (Housing)
- Voluntary agencies
- Care providers

Additional representatives if children and young people are involved may include:

- Lincolnshire Police Safeguarding Hub
- LCC Children's Services
- LCC Children's Health
- Education representative

The current existing arrangements through the Vulnerable Adult Panel (VAP), the Neighbourhood Team Meetings, or meetings arranged by the Team Around the Adult (TAA) coordinator are ideal forums for agencies to get together and decide on the best approach and, or intervention to take.

Consideration will always be given to making a safeguarding referral if the level of risk of significant harm meets the criteria.

It is expected that agencies will prioritise attendance at multi agency planning meetings wherever possible. When agencies are not able to attend the meetings, it is expected they will provide relevant information.

The adult(s) at risk should be advised of the meeting and their views should be sought in advance and be recorded as part of the multi-agency meeting. Careful consideration should be given about what information can be shared especially where there are multiple adults involved based on risks within the situation.

The decision and reasons for this should be clearly documented. If there is uncertainty, then the lead agency should consider seeking legal advice within their agency about whether information can be shared. There are a number of circumstances where the practitioner can reasonably [override such a decision](#).

Capacity or lack of capacity is a vital element in safety planning with, or on behalf of, adults who are at risk of Cuckooing. Therefore, the mental capacity of the adult at risk, in respect of the specific concerns associated with the case, should be discussed at the beginning of each meeting. If there are doubts raised about the person's capacity, then a mental capacity assessment should be undertaken in relation to this decision.

The main purpose of the initial meeting is to agree a plan to try to reduce the level of risk to the person(s) within their situation. Whilst the risk is shared on a multi-agency basis it may be agreed that only one agency will take the lead. This should be the agency that the group agrees will have the best chance of reducing risk to the person(s).

The purpose of subsequent multi-agency meetings is to review whether the plan is working to reduce the level of risk, and if not agree whether the plan needs to change to try another approach. If it is known that a number of people have been affected by Cuckooing concerns in

the area, the meeting should also try to 'map' any common themes and patterns in relation to the perpetrators and ensure that police intelligence is fully aware of what might be taking place.

It is important to agree timescales for each part of the process. This will be different for each case dependent on individual circumstances. Within the plan, it should be clear:

- what the agreed actions are
- who is responsible for carrying out the actions
- the timescales involved
- the date of the next meeting

Disagreements should also be clearly documented.

The chair of the meeting is responsible for ensuring that the notes and actions from the meeting are sent in a timely manner to:

- all those present at the meeting
- those people or agencies not present, but where actions have been identified for them

Arrangements must be agreed as to how the adult(s) at risk will be updated about the outcome of the meeting.

It is important to remember that perpetrators of Cuckooing and exploitation may have support needs of their own such as around their mental health or substance misuse. Agencies should consider whether offering support or assessment to them may also help to mitigate risks.

12. Agency responsibilities when concerns are raised that Cuckooing may be taking place

- Once a report is made to the police, the police will carry out checks using police systems on the person of concern and also on the address.
- An officer will attend the address as a priority.
- The Housing Provider will attend the property with the police where appropriate.
- If at the time persons who are causing a risk to an individual are at the address positive action will be taken to identify them and enforcement will be taken if required.
- The alleged victim will be spoken to in private and if required safe guarding plans will be implemented.
- If safeguarding plans are implemented consideration will be given to involving Adult Social Care.
- If appropriate the person may be offered temporary safe accommodation by the District Council.
- If the individual remains in residence the traffic light system will be implemented and arrangements made to conduct an initial multi-disciplinary planning meeting via the VAP, Neighbourhood team or TAA coordinator.
- If the individual does not want to meet at the address an alternative venue can be arranged.

13. Notes concerning Legal Orders that can be considered

The District Council and police may work together to obtain closure orders or injunctions on the Cuckooed properties. In some cases where there is immediate risk to an individual it may be necessary to take steps on an urgent basis to support them to move to alternative accommodation to safeguard them.

The Anti-Social Behaviour; Crime and Policing Act (Section 8) allows for closure orders to prohibit access (up to three months) to a property. Injunctions can also restrict who can enter a property.

Breaking a closure order is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment, meaning police can immediately arrest unwanted people found in a home with a closure order on it.

Further legislation can also be used, such as CAWN's (Child Abduction Warning Notices) can be used for adults in certain situations, Serious Crime Act (specifically Section 34 (gang injunctions)) as well as Modern Slavery Act 2015 (specifically Part 2, Slavery and Trafficking Prevention or Risk Orders).

14. Traffic light system for police presence and disruption

Below is a traffic light system which helps professionals recognise, respond and establish robust safeguarding measures to protect the individual in collaboration with partner agencies, to help support victims and break the cycle of return Cuckooing. This will offer a framework in conjunction with the multi-disciplinary meeting.

Red

When an address has been Cuckooed and immediate safeguarding is required.

- Contact the police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.
- Make a safeguarding referral to Adult Social Care
- Alert the housing provider.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary meeting via the Vulnerable Adult Panel, Neighbourhood Team or the TAA coordinator.

Police Officers will attend the address daily and engage with partners. Following two weeks and no further concerns the address will go to Amber and Green when suitable.

Amber

When there is information to suggest that an address has been Cuckooed:

- Contact the police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.
- Alert the housing provider.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary meeting via the Vulnerable Adult Panel, Neighbourhood Team or the Team Around the Adult coordinator.

Police will undertake regular patrols to ensure safety of occupants. Visits will be three times a week to deter any activity.

Green

The multi-disciplinary group to continue to meet until satisfied that there is no further risk of Cuckooing to the individual. The Police will make follow up visits for reassurance. This will continue for a month before being removed if there are no further concerns.

Appendices

County Lines

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 vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

County Lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Professional disputes and escalations

It is recognised that at times there will be disagreements over the handling of concerns. These disagreements typically occur when:

- the adult at risk is not considered to meet criteria for safeguarding process
- the person’s capacity to make decisions about their risk within their situation is disputed
- professionals feel that meeting the needs of the adult at risk sits outside of their work remit
- partner agencies are consistently not providing input to the process, or following up on their actions
- professionals are in dispute about aspects of information sharing and, or, confidentiality

Professionals involved in this process should always try to work out their differences and put the adult’s needs at the centre of the process. Where there are irreconcilable and significant differences between professionals it may also be necessary to consider escalating the case to more senior decision makers within organisations and ultimately the Local Safeguarding Adults Board.

Legal considerations

Adults who have capacity to make decisions which may result in them placing themselves at risk of significant harm or death may require further judicial intervention to ensure their safety, through Inherent Jurisdiction of courts. This is most likely to occur if the adult continually fails to engage with risk management strategies and all other options have been exhausted.

There may be occasions when the courts are prepared to intervene in the case of an adult, for example where an adult is receiving undue pressure or coercion from a third party. This process is rarely used due to the implications relating to human rights, and therefore a senior manager and legal advice should always be sought when Inherent Jurisdiction may be a consideration.

Multi agency arrangements across the county

The purpose of the Vulnerable Adult Panel (VAP) is to ensure an integrated and co-ordinated multi agency response to address the needs of individuals with multiple disadvantage and complex needs, and to ensure that they have access to appropriate accommodation, support and assistance.

Each agency, whilst maintaining its independence, is also committed to liaise closely with other member agencies, sharing relevant information, providing the best possible service to each individual identified and ensuring that any gaps in service are identified and addressed.

The current situation involving VAPs and other similar Multi-Disciplinary Meetings (MDT's) across the county is:

District Council	Meeting	Timing
Boston	The VAP has combined with the Neighbourhood team, who chair the meetings. There is a mechanism to refer people who have complex needs, their situation will be discussed and an action plan agreed.	Weekly – every Friday morning. Chaired by the Neighbourhood Team in Boston.
South Holland	An established VAP has been in place for a number of years. It follows on from the ASBRAC. It is chaired by the DC. There is multi agency membership and complex cases are referred to the panel.	Monthly meetings, on the second Thursday of the month
East Lindsey	An established VAP has been in place for a number of years. However, fairly recently this meeting has combined with the Neighbourhood team who chair the meetings on a weekly basis. There is a mechanism to refer people who have complex needs, their situation will be discussed and an action plan agreed.	Weekly, chaired by the Neighbourhood Team Lead. Every Tuesday morning (to be reviewed)
West Lindsey	An established VAP has been in place for a number of years. It is chaired by the Safeguarding lead from the DC.	Monthly, on the last Tuesday of each month.
North Kesteven	A VAP is established by the safeguarding lead when required, as opposed to having a regular monthly meeting.	As and when required
South Kesteven	A VAP was established in February 2021. It is chaired by the DC and has a multi-agency membership.	Monthly, on the last Friday of each month.

District Council	Meeting	Timing
Lincoln	<p>Lincoln DC hosted the VAP on a monthly basis until 2020. Complex cases were referred to the VAP but often did not include any DC officers or housing issues.</p> <p>The decision was therefore taken that the DC housing officers would arrange an internal MD team meeting as and when required.</p>	An internal MD meeting as and when required.

The team around the adult (TAA)

Where there is an established Vulnerable Adults Panel (VAP) or similar multi-disciplinary meeting, support and action plans are agreed for adults with complex needs who are at risk of significant harm, but may not necessarily meet the threshold for s42 Safeguarding intervention.

The TAA coordinator is a member of the VAP, and, or other multi agency meetings such as the neighbourhood team meeting. In order to establish a team around the adult, a request is made through the meeting. This will involve particularly complex cases, usually where a more creative approach is required in order to reach out to the person and 'go to them', especially where they are hard to reach, seldom heard, and, or do not wish to engage with services.

In these circumstances, where more traditional engagement and intervention methods have not been as successful as anticipated, or change may not have been maintained, the TAA coordinator and a small group of agency representatives will work creatively with the person to develop an intervention plan. The case will usually be closed to the VAP or multi agency meeting, and the TAA coordinator will feed back the outcome to members of the group under any other business at a subsequent meeting.

Across the county the TAA coordinators work in collaboration with VAP's as well as other existing organisations and multi-agency forums. It is clearly not intended to replace them.

The governance arrangements for the TAA are firmly established within the LSAB policy and protocols, along with strong links to its Prevention Strategy. The initiative is a foundation stone of the LSAB's Prevention strategy which is supported by other safeguarding and health well-being boards and strategies.

When a request is made via the VAP (or other similar multi agency meeting) for a TAA, the coordinators will 'open' the case to the TAA, and establish a small group of professionals to work together with the person to put in place an action plan and appropriate intervention.

Contact details for the TAA

Please email TAA@lincolnshire.gov.uk and a member of the team will contact you within 48 hours.