

Multiagency Procedure for Organised and Complex Abuse

Scope of this Chapter

This chapter provides a procedure for agencies about the investigation of complex and organised abuse and information about what action they should take if they suspect such abuse. All agencies, including those from the voluntary and community sector, who may be asked to contribute to complex abuse investigations, need to ensure that they follow this procedure. Registration authorities should also adhere to this procedure in cases where continuing registration of a setting may be affected by the investigation.

These procedures, where appropriate, must be implemented in conjunction with the procedures on abuse by those who work with children/ young people, see: Allegations against professionals, carers and volunteers.

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1 Definition

- 1.1 Complex and organised abuse may be defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children and may take place in any setting. The adults concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority such as a teacher, coach, faith group leader or celebrity position to access and recruit children for abuse.
- 1.2 Such abuse can occur both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community and within institutions such as residential settings, boarding schools, in day care and in other provisions such as youth services, sports clubs, faith groups and voluntary groups. There will also be cases of children being abused via the use of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, computers, games consoles etcetera which all access the Internet.
- 1.3 Although in most cases of complex and organised abuse the abuser(s) is an adult, it is also possible for children / young people to be the perpetrators of such harm, with or without adult abusers. In these cases this procedure should be used alongside the procedure for children/ young people who sexually harm ([Procedure for responding to Children who sexually harm](#))

2 Investigation

- 2.1 Each investigation of complex and organised abuse will be different, according to the characteristics of each situation and the scale and complexity of the investigation. But all will require thorough planning, collaborative inter-agency working and attention to the needs of the child victim/s involved.
- 2.2 The investigation of complex abuse requires specialist skills from both police and social work staff which usually involves the formation of dedicated teams of professionals and will need consideration of the needs for victims for therapeutic services. The consequent legal proceedings may add to the timescales of such investigations.
- 2.3 Some investigations become extremely complex because of the number of places and people involved, and the timescale over which abuse is alleged to have occurred. In these circumstances a Strategic Management Group (SMG) will be set up.
- 2.4 The complexity is heightened where, as in historical cases, the alleged victims are no longer living in the setting where the incidents occurred or where the alleged perpetrators are also no longer linked to the setting or employment role. These will all need to be taken into consideration when working with a child or adult victim. When the victim is vulnerable and unable to provide a full statement careful consideration should be given to how to proceed to ensure that other children, now in contact with the alleged perpetrator, are also protected.

- 2.5 The confidentiality of the information relevant to any Section 47 Enquiry and criminal investigation must be strictly maintained by those involved and must not be disclosed to others, including others within the agency, unless absolutely necessary.

3 The Child

- 3.1 The single and most important consideration is the safety and well-being of the child or children.
- 3.2 In reconciling the difference between the standard of evidence required for child protection purposes and the standard required for criminal proceedings, emphasis must be given to the protection of the children as the prime consideration.
- 3.3 The investigation and enquiries must also address the racial, religious, cultural, language, sexual orientation and gender needs of the child, together with any special needs of the child arising from illness or disability.
- 3.4 Victim support strategy and protocol should be established at the outset. Support will be required in pre-trial, trial and post-trial periods if the case/s proceed to court. Minimum periods for contact should be established. It is clear from experience in research about complex investigations that many victims and families feel strongly that it is important that they remain in contact with the same staff throughout the investigative process.
- 3.5 Many of the issues facing young victims and witnesses are addressed in the 'CPS Policy on prosecuting cases involving children and young people as victims and witnesses' (2006).

4 Referral

- 4.1 When receiving information or a referral, which may indicate complex and organised abuse, the recipient should immediately refer the matter to the police and a service manager in children's social care services. Where appropriate the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) should be informed, see: Allegations against professionals, carers or volunteers.
- 4.2 If there is any suspicion that any managers currently employed by a social care agency are implicated or a member of the police, the matter should be referred to a senior manager and the LADO.

5 The Strategy Meeting

- 5.1 A strategy meeting should be arranged to take place as a matter of urgency to assess the need for future action to be taken and, in particular, whether a criminal investigation should take place.
- 5.2 The strategy meeting, chaired by a senior manager of children's social care, must take place within one working day of the receipt of the referral and be formally recorded.
- 5.3 The nominated senior staff of children's social care and the police should attend the meeting. The meeting will involve senior staff from health, education and other agencies as required and, where necessary, must ensure coordination across local authority boundaries.
- 5.4 The strategy discussion/meeting must carefully note:
- An assessment of the information known to date:
 - The children named;
 - The children who may be in current contact with possible abusers;
 - Children who were, but no longer are, in contact with possible abusers;
 - Possible victims who are now adults.
 - Decide what further information is required at this stage;
 - Arrange for its gathering;
 - Establish if / to what extent complex abuse has been uncovered;
 - Undertake an initial mapping exercise to determine the scale of the investigation and possible individuals implicated as well as prepare:
 - Witnesses to be interviewed prior to the interviews of children;
 - Multiple and simultaneous interviews.
 - Consider a plan including resource implications, for investigation to be presented to the management and resources strategy group;
 - Consider any immediate protective action required.
- 5.5 A strategic decision will need to be made by senior managers from the involved agencies as to whether the enquiries/investigation can be managed in the conventional way or whether a specialist approach is required for example from a dedicated team outside the service.

- 5.6 This will usually depend on the number, geographical spread and age range of potential interviewees, as well as whether those implicated are foster carers or employees of any member agency.
- 5.7 Where the strategy discussion confirms that the investigation will relate to complex and organised abuse, it will appoint a multi-agency Strategic Management Group to oversee the process.
- 5.8 Where a member of staff of any agency is implicated in the investigation, his or her line manager must not be a member of the Strategic Management Group.

6 The Strategic Management Group

- 6.1 The Strategic Management Group will be chaired by a senior officer in children's social care and will:
- Complete the mapping process started by the strategy discussion
 - Establish ownership of the strategic lead in the investigation;
 - Decide the terms of reference and accountability for the investigating team, including the parameters and timescales of their enquiries/investigation;
 - Bring together a team of people with the necessary training, expertise and objectivity to manage and conduct the criminal investigation and/or Section 47 Enquiry on a day to day basis. NB: Line managers or colleagues of any person implicated in the investigation must not be involved and the involvement of any person from the work place under investigation must be considered with particular care;
 - Decide whether there is a need for an independent team to investigate the allegations;
 - In cases of greater scale and complexity, appoint an Investigation Management Group (IMG);
 - Ensure that appropriate resources are deployed to the investigation including access to legal and other specialist advice, resources and information;
 - Ensure that appropriate resources are available to meet the needs of the children and families or adult survivors, including any specific health issues arising from the abuse;
 - Ensure the investigating team are themselves supported with personal counselling if necessary and that issues of staff safety are addressed;
 - Ensure that suitable accommodation and administrative support are available for the investigation;
 - Ensure that an appropriate venue is available for interviews and the interviews are conducted in accordance with Achieving Best Evidence Guidance;

- Liaise as necessary with the Crown Prosecution Service at an early stage before arranging services for a child in need of counselling or therapeutic help so that the help can be given in a way which is consistent with the conduct of the criminal investigation;
- Agree a communications strategy including the handling of political and media issues, and communication as necessary with the Regulatory Authority;
- Ensure that records are kept safely and securely stored and a high level of confidentiality maintained at all times;
- Hold regular strategic meetings and reviews, which must be recorded, to consider progress, including the effectiveness of the joint working, the need for additional resources and next steps.

7 The Investigation Management Group

- 7.1 In cases of considerable complexity and scale, an Investigation Management Group will be appointed.
- 7.2 Membership of this group should include representatives from City of York children's social care, the police, designated health professionals and the local authority's legal services, with other agencies being invited to participate as appropriate.
- 7.3 The tasks and functions of the Group will be subject to the terms of reference agreed by the Strategic Management Group (SMG), and will include the following:
- To provide a forum where professionals can meet, exchange information and discuss the implementation of the agreed investigation strategy;
 - To ensure a consistent strategy for interviewing victims within and outside the councils area;
 - To keep the SMG informed of resources and any shortfalls;
 - To ensure a consistent and appropriate inter-agency approach to support victims and their families;
 - To co-ordinate the inter-agency response to families and provide consistent information;
 - To ensure information is shared appropriately with other agencies not represented on the SMG or the IMG;
 - To ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities for staff involved in the investigation. Investigators will have full access to all records and key information;
 - To ensure that relevant intelligence is passed between agencies and to the police.

8 End of Enquiry/Investigation Meeting and Report

- 8.1 At the conclusion of the enquiry/investigation, the Strategic Management Group must evaluate the investigation, identify the lessons learned and prepare an

Overview Report with recommendations and an action plan, highlighting any practices, procedures or policies which may need further attention and require either multi-agency or individual agency action plan.

9 Media Handling

- 9.1 No agency should underestimate the level of media interest in organised abuse. The main task of handling the media should be assigned to a senior manager in each agency who is in close contact with the detail of the investigation. The Senior Investigating Officer should have an operational media strategy in place from the commencement of the investigation. It is vital that all statements to the media are cleared, via the SIO, in association with strategic partners and that consistency is maintained throughout.
- 9.2 It is essential that victims and their families are protected from the potential trauma that may be associated with media interest in their cases. All press releases should avoid identifying victims so that they may be shielded from medial attention unless and until they need to attend court.
- 9.3 The SIO must be made aware of all pre sentence communications to ensure that the integrity of the prosecution is maintained.