

Chapter Fifteen

Investigating Complex (Organised or Multiple) Abuse

Complex or multiple abuse may be defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children and young people. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse. The abuse involved is most likely to be sexual, but extensive and repeated physical abuse may also be involved.

This procedure should also be used for cases of multiple but unrelated incidents such as use of the Internet to attract children or to use, share or publish indecent images of children.

Principles

15.0 The principles are:

- both the police and children's social care will need to work for a planned, co-ordinated and properly resourced response to enquiries involving complex abuse and recognise that this commitment will be significant and on a scale much greater than usual
- in all organised and complex abuse enquiries the safety and well being of the child or children will be the paramount consideration, when their identity is known or can be identified
- all parties support a balanced approach to the protection of individual children, the need to protect other children, the need to gather evidence and the effects of the investigation on other individuals and the community
- the need for strict confidentiality will be assessed at the outset of the enquiry and reviewed in order to prevent the alerting of suspected offenders
- parties agree to consult and openly share information subject to legal and agency restrictions at all stages of the enquiry
- parties agree to contribute to the legal process which may be criminal or civil or both
- parties agree to keep accurate written records of the entire enquiry process
- parties agree to a formal review at the conclusion of the enquiry to identify lessons learned and good working practices

Process of Enquiry

15.1 Elements of Recognition

In determining whether a complex abuse enquiry is necessary the following elements will be beneficial in determining the nature of the enquiry. This is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list and is not a substitute for professional judgement:

- multiple alleged victims
- multiple alleged offenders

- volume of alleged offences
- alleged institutional abuse
- duration of alleged abuse
- significant cross-boundary or other geographical considerations
- public interest issues

15.2 Referral

In cases where there is a suspicion of organised abuse or it appears that there is a complex situation, a referral must be made immediately to one of the following post holders:

- Service Manager Child Protection and Independent Review Service or Duty and Assessment Service Manager Leicester City children's social care.
- Service Manager Child Protection and Review Unit, or the Access Service Manager Leicestershire children's social care.
- Head of Service, Children and Families, Rutland children's social care and Housing
- Detective Inspector, Child Abuse Investigation Unit, or Detective Chief Inspector, Crime Support Department, Leicestershire Constabulary

15.3 On receipt of the referral the designated post holders for the relevant children's social care services and the police will meet or confer to analyse the nature of the referral and determine whether there is a need to follow this procedure.

15.4 If so a strategy meeting of the senior management group must be called **within 3 working days**.

15.5 The senior management group will consist of the following:

- Assistant Director children's social care, Leicestershire, Head of service, Leicester City, or Head of Service Children and Families, Rutland children's social care
- Assistant Chief Constable - Operations
- Detective Chief Superintendent, Crime Support Department
- Detective Superintendent, Crime Support Department
- Service Manager(s) Child Protection
- Detective Inspector Child Abuse Investigation Unit
- Assistant Head of Legal Services Leicester City/Leicestershire children's social care, Head of Legal Services Rutland
- Senior Health Representative
- other individuals or agencies as appropriate to the case
- Chair of the LSCBs to be notified

15.6 Role of Senior Management Group

The role of the Senior Management Group will be to:

- determine on the information available whether a complex abuse investigation is warranted under these procedures

- determine whether a dedicated operational group should be established
- agree all aspects of policy that the operational group will work to including:
 - the appropriate level of resources, including administrative support to investigate the allegations
 - appoint a co-ordinator who will liase between the Senior Management Group and the Operational Group. The co-ordinator will head the Operational Group
 - devise a media strategy and identify media representatives
 - determine the terms of reference, scale of the enquiry, and processes for gathering evidence
 - determine the constitution and membership of the Operational Group
 - determine whether the incident should be managed on the HOLMES (police computer) major incident system, or whether a stand-alone computer, or a manual paper system should be used
 - ensure that protocols are in place to ensure the safety of staff involved in the investigation; and the availability of appropriate support and counselling for staff
 - recognise that institutional abuse that involves investigating agency staff will require an essential degree of independence and objectivity to ensure an impartial investigation (Refer to Chapter 13: Allegations against a person who works with, or is in contact with, children in a work or care setting, including volunteers
 - consideration may also be given to using another Local Authority or the NSPCC Specialist Investigation Service
 - facilitate access to expert legal advice
 - take immediate steps to secure, protect and store relevant records and information
 - liase with the LSCB and keep the LSCB informed of progress of the investigation
 - facilitate contact and involvement of other organisations that may be involved, such as voluntary organisations
 - to determine arrangements for providing information to children, parents and families involved
 - to ensure that relevant registering bodies are kept informed of the progress of the investigation and involved as appropriate
 - agree a schedule of future meetings and arrangements for review

15.7 Operational Group

Membership of the Operational Group will consist of the following:

- Nominated Operational Group Leader
- Police Representatives
 - Detective Superintendent Crime Support Department
 - Deputy, Crime Support Department

- Children's social care representatives
 - Service Manager(s), Leicestershire children's social care services
 - Service Manager Child Protection, Leicester City children's social care services
 - Head of Children's Services, Rutland children's social care services and housing
- Legal Services Representative

Additional Membership will consist of the following, if appropriate:

- police surgeon
- community paediatrician
- consultant psychiatrist
- health representative
- education representative
- crown prosecution service representative
- probation service representative
- victim support representative

Responsibilities of the Operational Group:

- to investigate the abuse in accordance with the policy decisions of the Senior Management Group
- to determine whether any children need active safeguarding and in particular when and how this should be done
- to determine the appropriate staff selection in response to the nature of the abuse in order to form a trusted and vetted team from the police and children's social care services who have expertise in conducting investigations, child protection processes and children's welfare
- to ensure that staff involved are fully briefed on such issues as evidence gathering, data protection, information sharing and risk management
- to ensure that witness information is gathered in accordance with 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings'
- to identify suitable accommodation and other resources for the Investigation Team
- to plan investigative interviews with victims
- to give consideration to medical assessments
- to determine action to gather other evidence including forensic, witnesses, corroboration and PACE interviews
- to make a thorough assessment of the needs of the victims and to provide services to meet those needs
- the co-ordination and timing of input of therapeutic services in accordance with **Chapter 20: Managing Pre-Trial Therapy**.
- Child Protection Conferences: timing, chairing, purpose and attendance
- to keep accurate records and minutes of meetings and strategy discussions
- to consider the need to provide confidential and independent counselling for victims and families

- to keep the Senior Management Group informed of resource issues

15.8 **Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006), pages 67, 68 and 69, and the Home Office /DOH Guidance: Complex Child Abuse Investigations: Inter-Agency Issues (2002) provide supplementary advice for the investigation of organised abuse. The latter contains detailed additional advice on:**

- access to records
- information sharing
- disclosure of information to third parties
- support for victims, witnesses and staff
- media handling
- closure and review of the investigation
- obtaining relevant records

15.9 **Problem Resolution**

All agencies agree that where practitioners encounter disagreements in joint investigations the appropriate form of resolution will be for the practitioners to highlight the disagreements to their immediate Line Managers. The Line Manager will then assume responsibility for resolution by contacting their counterpart in the other agency.

In the event that the issues cannot be resolved at this level the problems will be progressed in the first instance to the Operational Group and finally to the Senior Management Group.

Please refer to Chapter 23: Resolution of Professional Disagreements in Work Relating to the Safety of Children.