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Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board

PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

COMPLEX ABUSE (Organised or Multiple)

Section D 04

Version 2
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You can scroll through the document or use the links in the contents list below.

CONTENTS

- 01 [Definition](#)**
- 02 [Investigation](#)**
- 03 [The Child](#)**
- 04 [Referral](#)**
- 05 [Strategy Meeting](#)**
- 06 [The Strategic Management Group \(SMG\)](#)**
- 07 [Investigation Management Group \(IMG\)](#)**
- 08 [End of enquiry](#)**
- 09 [Detailed Guidance](#)**
- 10 [Summary](#)**

**The circumstances in which this procedure is invoked
should always be reported to the
Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board Manager**

01 **Definition**

Complex abuse is defined as:

‘Abuse which involves one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related children and young people; where the abusers concerned may be:

- Acting in concert to abuse children;
- Acting in isolation, on occasion; or
- Are using an institutional framework or a position of authority to recruit children for abuse

Such abuse occurs both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community and within institutions such as residential settings, in day care and in other provisions such as youth services, sports clubs and voluntary groups. There may also be cases of children being abused through the use of the Internet. Such abuse is profoundly traumatic for the children who become involved. Its investigation is time-consuming and demanding work requiring specialist skills from both police and social work staff

Complexities arise from the number of people involved, often exacerbated by the historical nature of concerns and whereby alleged victims and perpetrators can be widely dispersed. These generate inherent resource implications and often require mechanisms being put in place that significantly fall outside of routine arrangements for safeguarding children from maltreatment.

02 Investigation

Complex investigations require particular commitment from all contributing agencies at a senior and executive level in overcoming these challenges. Whilst the SCB Manager must be informed, they will not take any direct role in the management of enquires.

Each investigation of organised or multiple abuse will be different, according to the characteristics of each situation and the scale and complexity of the investigation. However, all will require thorough planning, effective inter-agency working and attention to the welfare needs of the child victim or adult survivor involved.

As soon as it becomes apparent that an organised or multiple context of abuse is evident, police officers and social workers must immediately alert their line managers. Complex child abuse investigations should be undertaken as a joint operation involving police, children's social care, with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) being involved at an early stage.

Incorporating necessary independent elements to such enquiries however is extremely important. This can extend to involving an independent agency such as the NSPCC. In any event, there should be continuous advice and interaction between contributing agencies throughout the investigation and any resulting prosecution.

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](#) (06) as well as a specialist [Investigation Management Group](#) (07) may be set up.

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 factors will all need to be taken into consideration when working with a child.

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.

03 The Child

The single and most important consideration is the safety and well-being of the child or children.

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.

04 Referral

When receiving information, which may indicate, organised or multiple abuse, the recipient should immediately refer the matter to the police and a manager in the People Directorate, Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting Division.

If there is any suspicion that any managers currently employed by a social care agency or a member of the police are implicated, the matter should be referred to the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board and the Safeguarding

Head of Community Safety within the police.

05 Strategy Meeting

A Strategy meeting should then be arranged to take place as a matter of urgency to assess the need for future action to be taken under this procedure and, in particular, whether a criminal investigation should take place.

Nominated senior staff from People Directorate (VCCP), Health, Police, Education and other agencies as required and, where necessary, ensure coordination across local authority boundaries as well as police force boundaries.

The Strategy Meeting needs to be carefully recorded and should include:

- 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
- Witnesses to be interviewed prior to the interviews of children
- Multiple and simultaneous interviews
- Map the process for the investigation
- Senior managers from the involved agencies must make a strategic decision whether the social work input into the enquiries and investigation can be

managed in the conventional way, or whether a specialist approach is required for example from a dedicated team outside the service, e.g. the NSPCC.

This will usually depend on the number of possible victims, the geographical spread and age range of potential interviewees, as well as whether those implicated are employees of any member agency.

Where the Strategy Meeting confirms that the investigation will relate to organised or multiple abuse it will appoint a multi-agency Strategic Management Group to oversee the process.

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.

06 The Strategic Management Group

This should be convened as quickly as possible by either the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC Staffordshire Police) or the Stoke-on-Trent People Directorate, Assistant Director, (VCCP).

They will:

- Take ownership and strategic leadership of the investigation;
- Decide the terms of reference and accountability for the investigating team, including the parameters and timescales for their enquiries/investigation
- Agree and put in place appropriate resources (including administrative support and legal advice), usually in and around a dedicated team in conducting necessary enquiries

Agree protocols governing –

- Managing media interest
- Sharing information and disclosure
- Staff safety
- Risk management
- Victim support

- Ensure that the immediate welfare of any identified children is safeguarded
- Decide whether there is a need for an independent team to investigate the allegations, for example, the NSPCC, particularly where the alleged perpetrators are foster carers, prospective adopters or members of staff employed by a member agency of the Safeguarding Children Board.
- Ensure appropriate management of subsequent claims for negligence and ensuring that no such discussion is instigated by members of the investigative team
- Ensure the appropriate gathering and recording of material including criminal evidence

- Act upon lessons learned from the enquiry, including via the invoking of a serious case review as appropriate
- Bring together a vetted 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.
- Maintain appropriate links with other organisations including the voluntary sector
- Maintain consistent membership throughout the investigation via core representatives that should include:
 - People Directorate, Assistant Director (VCCP)
 - Police - Assistant Chief Constable
 - Detective Superintendent
 - Police - Senior Investigating Officer (SIO)
 - Children's Services Lead Operational Manager
 - Local Authority Solicitor
 - Press Officer
 - Senior Health Representatives
 - Other agencies as appropriate
 - SCB Manager
- Determine the need to establish an Investigation Management Group, of direct managers of investigative staff, in maintaining a strategy for determining operational priorities and in ensuring appropriate sharing of information between agencies.
- Bring together a vetted 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. The involvement of any person from the workplace under investigation must be considered with particular care.

- Ensure the investigating team are themselves supported with personal counselling if necessary and that issues of staff safety are addressed
- 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.
- At an early stage it is advisable to liaise with the Crown Prosecution Service before arranging services for a child in need of counselling or therapeutic help. This will ensure that 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 OFSTED
- 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.

07 Investigation Management Group

In cases of considerable complexity and scale, an Investigation Management Group (IMG) will be appointed.

Membership of this group should include representatives from VCCP, Health, local authority legal services, with other agencies being invited to participate as appropriate.

The tasks and functions of the IMG will be subject to the terms of reference agreed by the [Strategic Management Group](#) (SMG), and will include:

- Providing a forum where professionals can meet, exchange information and discuss the implementation of the agreed investigation strategy
- Ensuring a consistent strategy for interviewing victims within and outside the council's area
- Keeping the SMG informed of resources and any shortfalls
- Ensuring a consistent and appropriate inter-agency approach to support victims and their families
- Coordinating the inter-agency response to families and provide consistent information
- Ensuring information is shared appropriately with other agencies not represented on the SMG or the IMG
- Ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities for staff involved in the investigation. Investigators will have full access to all records and key information.
- Ensuring that relevant intelligence is passed between agencies and to the police Major Incident Room (MIR).

08 End of Enquiry

End of Enquiry or Investigation Meeting and Report

The Strategic Management Group will evaluate the investigation, identify the lessons learned and prepare an overview report for the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board, highlighting any practices, procedures or policies which may need further attention and require either inter-agency or individual agency action plans.

09 Detailed Guidance

More detailed guidance governing the management of complex abuse investigations is contained in 'Complex Child Abuse Investigations: Inter-agency Issues' (2002) published by the Home Office and Department of Health. This includes references to:

- Resources: staff selection and accommodation
- Access to records
- Information sharing
- Disclosure of information to third parties

- Support for victims and witnesses
- Media handling
- Closure and review

Access to this detailed guidance will be necessary in managing any individual investigation in these circumstances.

10 Summary

Complex child abuse investigations should not be confused with allegations of abuse made against a person working with children and young people. While concerns about complex abuse can be initiated by a single allegation, or a complaint on behalf of an individual child, complexities specifically arise when allegations rather occur within a network of abuse across a family, an institution or a wider community. They are thereby sometimes seen in the context of organised or multiple abuse.

VCCP = Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting

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