

7. Organised and complex abuse

7.1 Understanding organised and complex abuse

This abuse is defined as the abuse of children involving one or more abuser and a number of children. 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 term also refers to the abuse of children over long periods of time, and can include historical cases.

There are groups of young people who are particularly vulnerable such as those living away from home, possibly in institutional settings, and children who may have been caught up in pornography, prostitution or child trafficking. Such cases are different from the 'typical' familial abuse case as they can be very complex and will require a different form of response from the WSCB partner agencies.

7.2 Planning the strategy

Any concerns relating to abuse, regardless of their source, which suggest:

- multiple abusers, children or locations;
- an element of organisation by the alleged abusers; and/or
- elements which are clearly more likely to be complex in nature such as
- those described above

should immediately trigger a strategy meeting/discussion between a senior Children's Services Manager and their equivalent within the GMP Service. No action should be taken by any member of staff, of any partner agency, prior to this meeting being held. Investigations into allegations relating to a member of social care own staff (or foster carers) should involve an independent person from outside the authority, for example another authority or the NSPCC. The meeting/discussion should take place the same day as the allegation is brought to their attention and it should:

- analyse the known information
- identify what else needs to be known at this stage and where and how it might be found;
- decide whether this potentially is a case of organised or complex abuse;
- if so, develop an outline plan for the investigation and identify resource implications; and
- consider any immediate protective actions required.

If they believe the allegation may be confirmed, the results of this strategy meeting/discussion should be brought to the attention of the Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Chair of WSCB who will convene an inter-agency Strategic Management Group in accordance with the government guidance 'Complex Child Abuse Investigations: Inter-Agency Issues.'

7.3 Investigation process

7.3.1 Membership

Once a decision has been reached to initiate an investigation into the allegations, “the Strategic Management Group” should identify those People from within and outside their organisations who have the required expertise for dealing with a complex abuse investigation.”

7.3.2 Management

The Senior Investigating Officer or his/her deputy will establish and chair an Investigation Management Group which will include representatives from Children’s Services, Education, Health and Wigan Council Legal Services. Other agencies may be invited to join as appropriate.

The function of the Investigation Management Group will be “to:

- provide a forum where professionals can meet, exchange information and devise tactics
- ensure a consistent strategy for interviewing victims
- keep the Strategic Management Group informed of any resource shortages
- ensure a consistent and appropriate inter-agency approach to practical and emotional support for victims and their families
- co-ordinate inter-agency response to families and provide consistent information
- ensure all staff working on the investigation are given support
- ensure that issues which need to be shared by other agencies not represented are communicated to those agencies and addressed;
- ensure that all staff involved in the investigation are clear about the parameters of shared information, data protection and confidentiality and
- ensure that relevant intelligence has passed between agencies and to the Police Major Incident Room

Additional Guidance

The guidance *Complex Child Abuse Investigations: Inter-agency issues* (Home Office and Department of Health, 2002)

<http://www.proceduresonline.com/berks/pdfs/Complex%20Child%20Abuse%20Investigations%20Guidance.pdf>

Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have also recently issued revised guidance on *Investigating Child Abuse and Safeguarding Children*¹⁰².

http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/operationalPolicing/child_abuse_guidanCefb94.html?view=standard&pubID=184109102 Available from www.ceop.police.uk