

# **PART 9**

## **COMPLEX CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS**

**Summary**

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## COMPLEX CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

### Summary

1. Complex child abuse investigations should not be confused with allegations of abuse made against a person working with children **(Part 7)**. While concerns around complex abuse can be initiated by a singular 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 a context of **organised or multiple abuse**.
2. Complex abuse is therefore defined as ***“abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related 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.”***
3. Complexities arise from the number of people involved, often exacerbated by an 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. Each investigation of organised or multiple abuse will be different.

### Inter-Agency Cooperation

4. Complex investigations require particular commitment from all contributing agencies at a senior and executive level in overcoming these challenges. Circumstances in which this procedure is invoked should be reported to the Safeguarding Children Board which should be kept informed of developments though the Board itself should not take any direct role in the management of enquiries.
5. Complex child abuse investigations should be undertaken as a joint operation involving the police and children’s social care (social services), with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) being involved at an early stage, as appropriate. As soon as it becomes apparent that an organised or multiple context of abuse is evident, police officers and social workers should immediately alert line-managers.
6. Incorporating necessary independent elements to such enquiries however is extremely important. This can extend to involving an independent agency such as NSPCC. In any event, there should be continuous advice and interaction between contributing agencies throughout the investigation and any resulting prosecution. A strategic

management group (SMG) should be convened for this purpose in overseeing the management of enquiries.

### **Strategic Management Group (SMG)**

7. This should be convened as quickly as possible, at least of assistant chief officer level of seniority, and Chaired either by the police or children's social care whose role will be to:
8. Take ownership and strategic leadership of the investigation.
9. Establish its terms of reference, including a schedule of meetings as appropriate.
10. Agree and put in place appropriate resources (including administrative support and legal advice), usually in and around a dedicated team, in conducting necessary enquiries.
11. Agree protocols governing
  - managing media interest
  - sharing information and disclosure
  - staff safety
  - risk management
  - victim support
12. Ensure that the immediate welfare of any identified children is safeguarded
13. Ensure appropriate management of subsequent claims for negligence and in ensuring that no such discussion is instigated by members of the investigative team.
14. Ensure the appropriate gathering and recording of material, including criminal evidence.
15. Acting upon lessons learned from the enquiry, including via the invoking of a serious case review as appropriate.
16. Maintain appropriate links with other organisations, including the voluntary sector and any agencies based in other local authority areas.
17. Maintain consistent membership throughout the investigation via core representatives that should include;
  - Assistant Director for Partnership and Service Development (or otherwise as directed by the Deputy Corporate Director for Vulnerable Children), of Children's Social Care
  - Detective Superintendent
  - Police Senior Investigating Officer (S0)

- Children’s Social Care Lead Operational Manager
- Local Authority Solicitor
- Press officer(s)
- Senior Health Adviser

and other individuals/agencies would be co-opted as necessary.

18. 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.

### **Detailed Guidance**

19. 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 the Dept of Health.

20. ([www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicy/AndGuidance/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicy/AndGuidance/fs/en)).

21. This includes reference 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

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