

## ORGANISED AND COMPLEX ABUSE January 2008

### 1. DEFINITION

- 1.1. Organised or complex abuse covers circumstances, which may involve a number of abusers and/or a number of children. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse a child or children.
- 1.2. One or more of the adults involved may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse
- 1.3. It reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, an element of organisation on the part of the adult/s involved and **may** involve:
  - Aspects of ritual to aid or conceal the abuse of children
  - Child sexual abuse networks where adults plan and develop social contacts with children for the purpose of gaining access to them in order to abuse them
  - Abusive images of children or abuse of children through prostitution
  - Abuse in residential homes, boarding schools or other institutions
  - Adult/s who seek contact with children for improper reasons through leisure or welfare organisations
  - Adults seeking to contact children via electronic means such as internet or mobile telephones
- 1.4. It is not unusual for complex abuse to emerge from a case already under investigation, which was initially perceived as a non-complex case. These procedures will need to be applied as soon as the potential complex nature of a case is recognised.
- 1.5. An investigation of organised abuse will be carried out under the auspices of the BSCB, which should be kept informed of its progress. It should be the role of the strategic management group to liaise regularly with the BSCB. However, the BSCB should not take any direct role in the management of the inquiry.

### 2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. Cases of organised abuse are often complicated because of the number of children involved, the serious nature of the allegations of abuse, the need for therapeutic input and the complex and time consuming nature of any consequent legal proceedings.
- 2.2. Such cases usually require the formation of dedicated teams of professionals from both the Police and Children's Social Care for the purpose of the investigation.
- 2.3. It is recognised that those who commit sex offences against children often operate across geographical and operational boundaries and the procedure takes into account the involvement of more than one local authority.

- 2.4. Where an allegation involves a post holder who has a specified role within these procedures, the referral must be reported to an alternative (more senior) manager.
- 2.5. In all investigations of organised abuse, it is essential that staff involved maintain a high level of confidentiality in relation to the information in their possession without jeopardising the investigation or the welfare of the children involved.
- 2.6. Subsequent information generated throughout the investigation should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis.
- 2.7. These procedures must be implemented in conjunction with the procedures on abuse by staff, carers and volunteers where appropriate.
- 2.8. For further guidance see also *Complex Child Abuse Investigation: Inter-Agency Issues, HO & DH 2002*  
[http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/child\\_abuse\\_guidance.pdf](http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/child_abuse_guidance.pdf).

### **3. INITIAL STRATEGY DISCUSSION / MEETING**

- 3.1. Where there is a suspicion of a 'complex case', the relevant Team Manager of the Special Investigation and Assessment Team, or of the Referral and Assessment Team and the Police CAIU Inspector must be informed immediately. In the identified manager's absence, the normal deputising arrangements must be followed.
- 3.2. These should hold a strategy discussion/meeting within the **working day** that the referral is received. This discussion/meeting should also include senior managers from the relevant agencies involved.
- 3.3. The strategy discussion / meeting must:
  - Assess the information known to date
  - Decide what further information is required at this stage and arrange for its gathering
  - Establish whether and to what extent complex abuse has been uncovered
  - Undertake an initial mapping exercise to determine the scale of the investigation and possible individuals implicated
  - Consider a plan for the investigation to be presented to the Senior Management Group, including resource implications
  - Consider any immediate protective action required
- 3.4. This strategy discussion may include the referrer, if appropriate, a legal adviser and anyone else relevant to the discussion.
- 3.5. Having considered and discussed the information those persons must, if in their view the suspicion is confirmed, pass the information on to the Head of Children's Social Care and the strategic Lead for Child Protection in Thames Valley Police.

### **4. PROFESSIONALS WHO NEED TO BE INFORMED**

- 4.1. The Chair of the Strategic and Serious Cases Review Sub Committee must inform the BSCB Chair, Children's Services Director, Head of the media / press office and senior managers of relevant agencies e.g. designated child protection professions.

- 4.2. The Strategic and Serious Case Review Sub Committee must be notified immediately. This Committee will identify initial members for a Strategic Management Group.

## 5. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP (SMG)

- 5.1. To ensure a co-ordinated response, a SMG meeting chaired by either Children's Social Care or the Police must be convened within **5 working days** of the case being identified as a potential complex abuse case.
- 5.2. The membership of the group should comprise senior staff able to commit resources and will normally include the following as consistent core membership (additional members may be added as required as the investigation progresses):
- Divisional Director of Safeguarding
  - Assistant Chief Police Officer (or in his/her absence the Local Basic Command Unit Commander)
  - Police senior investigating officer (usually CAIU DI)
  - Children's Social care lead manager (usually Divisional Manager)
  - Senior legal adviser (local authority)
  - Senior health representative, supported as necessary by designated professional
  - Press officer
  - Other individuals and agencies as appropriate
- 5.3. Where it cannot be avoided that some members of the Strategic and Serious Case Review Sub Committee also become members of the Strategic Management Group, these members must be clear about the distinct roles they hold within each group. This clarity is necessary to prevent confusion around the function of both groups.
- 5.4. Immediate line managers of any staff implicated in the allegations of abuse must not be included in the SMG.
- 5.5. The terms of reference of the SMG must be set up as specified in the HO and DH guidance.
- 5.6. The SMG meeting must agree a plan that includes:
- A decision on the scale of the investigation and the staff required for a joint investigation group
  - Consideration of any cross boundary issues and planning of appropriate liaison and sharing of resources
  - Identification of staff in both Children's Social care and the police of sufficient seniority and experience to manage the investigative process (usually the CPU DI and Children's Social Care Service Manager)
  - Identification of sufficient trained staff for the investigation (must be independent of those being investigated)
  - Organisation of adequate accommodation including a dedicated incident room, where possible, and facilities for interviewing and recording interviews
  - Arrangements for medical staff to conduct assessments
  - Arrangements for sufficient administrative staff and information technology resources to support the investigation
  - Legal advice including consultation with the CPS
  - Sufficient resources to ensure that children are protected from further abuse and that their welfare remains paramount (this should include appropriate

foster, day-care or residential placements, medical, SARC services, therapeutic, educational and practical services)

- Consideration of the therapeutic needs of children and adults
  - Sufficient support, supervision and de-briefing of staff involved
  - Availability of expert advice where necessary
  - Liaison arrangements for inter-agency working
  - Times scales for the stages of the investigation
  - Allocation of specific tasks to personnel involved in the investigation together with line management responsibilities
  - Management of public relations and media interest in the case
  - Witness support, if relevant
- 5.7. An individual must be designated to act as co-ordinator between the SMG and the joint investigative group identified in the plan, usually the police senior investigating officer or the Children's Social Care lead manager.
- 5.8. The responsibility of the co-ordinator is to ensure the flow of relevant information between the operational and strategic groups.
- 5.9. The SMG must make arrangements to convene regularly during the investigation to:
- Monitor the progress, quality and integrity of the investigation
  - Review risk indicators for the children involved
  - Consider resource requirements
  - Consider the appropriate timing of the termination of the investigation
  - Plan a de-brief meeting with the joint investigation group to identify lessons learnt
- 5.10. A dedicated team of police officers may be formed to deal with a cross boundary enquiry.
- 5.11. The SMG should remain in existence at least until the court or the CPS has made a decision about the alleged perpetrators
- 5.12. The SMG must report in writing to the SSCR Sub Committee, so that the Committee can consider at the first available opportunity, whether a serious case review should be initiated and make a recommendation to the Chair of the BSCB.

## **6. JOINT INVESTIGATION GROUP**

### **Membership**

- 6.1. This group led by the CAIU senior investigating officer or the Children's Social Care lead manager, should consist of experienced personnel from CAIU and Children's Social Care – the latter may choose to use independent/agency/outside organisation social workers.
- 6.2. The size of the group will depend on the scale of the investigation, but in the majority of cases both CAIU and Children's Social Care should provide a line manager and two staff / officer experienced in interviewing children and trained in *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings*.
- 6.3. Membership may also be drawn as necessary from the appropriate health professionals, in particular forensic medical examiners (FME), paediatricians,

psychiatrists, health visitors, education, CPS, legal services, probation, victim support services.

- 6.4. In selecting staff, consideration should be given to requirements arising from the individual needs of relevant child/ren i.e. gender, culture, race, language, and where relevant, disability/special needs.

### **Practical arrangements**

- 6.5. The location of the group must take account, both geographically and organisationally, of the need to maintain confidentiality, especially crucial where the investigation concerns staff or carers.
- 6.6. Appropriate facilities must be available for video interviews and paediatric assessment
- 6.7. Administrative support, information technology and accommodation requirements must be addressed at the outset, including the storage of confidential records.

### **Responsibilities**

- 6.8. The joint investigation group will be responsible for:
- Planning the overall investigation involving record checking, evidence gathering, planning and undertaking a series of interrelated interviews and any surveillance required
  - Considering the implications of crossing geographical boundaries (see below)
  - Maintenance of written record of regular strategy and operational meetings
  - Holding planning meetings for individual pieces of work e.g. video interview of a child and/or action to protect a child
  - Gathering other evidence including forensic evidence, interviews with alleged abusers, witnesses and other corroborative evidence
  - Communication and liaison with other agencies on a need to know basis
  - Convening interagency meetings and/or child protection conferences as appropriate
  - Co-ordination and timing of therapeutic services
  - Regularly updating the SMG on the progress made and recommending when to close the investigation
  - Consideration of arrangements for court hearings and support to children and families
  - Recommendations as to the placement of children and any contact involving children and their siblings, relatives or other adults

## **7. CROSSING GEOGRAPHICAL & OPERATIONAL BOUNDARIES**

- 7.1. It may be recognised at the outset or during the investigation that there are suspected or potential victims in more than one geographical area.
- 7.2. At the outset, the responsibility for managing the investigation lies with Police in the area where the abuse is alleged to have occurred – where the alleged perpetrator/s are alleged to operate, who will make necessary contact with other affected areas through the SMG.

- 7.3. Once it is recognised that there are suspected or potential victims in other areas, the SMG must approach the relevant CAIU and Children's Social Care for those areas.
- 7.4. The original joint investigation team should undertake the investigation on behalf of the other geographical areas. Other LA Children's Social Care Services must consider the funding of this service covering children in its area. A senior manager from each area should join the initiating SMG to discuss this and agree any resource implications involved.
- 7.5. If the number of victims outside the geographical boundaries of the original joint investigative team increases to the extent that it cannot respond, then negotiations should take place for a joint investigative team with police and Social Care in the new geographic area.
- 7.6. It is essential that there is a joint SMG to provide overall planning. If it is necessary to have more than one joint investigative team, there must be close working between co-ordinators and processes for full information sharing.