



# **Complex and Organised Abuse Procedure and Practice Guidance**

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# Complex and Organised Abuse Procedure and Practice Guidance

## 1. Introduction

Organised and multiple abuse is profoundly traumatic for the children who are involved. Investigation can be complicated and time-consuming. For these reasons organised and multiple abuse cases require thorough strategic planning, inter-agency cooperation and there is a need to pay particular attention to the welfare needs of the child victims or adult survivors.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Home Office and Department of Health 2002 Guidance 'Complex Child Abuse Investigations: Inter Agency Issues'.

## 2. Definition

Complex (organised or multiple) abuse may be defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children.

What constitutes “complex” is, to some extent, dependant on the presenting circumstances of the case but can include situations involving:

- Multiple abusers
- Multiple children
- Institutional abuse, for example systematic abuse within a boarding school, residential care home, day care provision, youth services, sports clubs and voluntary groups
- Organised abuse for example, abusing children in order to produce sexually abusive images for distribution amongst a network of child abusers, abuse by the use of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, computers and game consoles, internet sites and social networking websites
- Sexual exploitation/abuse/trafficking of children
- Criminal Exploitation and County Lines.

Some investigations may involve a variety of places or concern abuse that has occurred over a widespread timescale. It may involve agencies across geographical boundaries or other countries.

Cases of particularly sensitivity, for example those involving a high-profile person that is likely to attract publicity.

## 3. Investigating Complex Abuse

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. The investigation of complex abuse is time-consuming and demanding requiring specialist skills from both police and social care staff.

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 specialist Investigation Management Group (see paragraph 7) as well as a Strategic Management Group (see paragraph 6) may be set up.

The complexity is heightened in circumstances 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 will 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.

#### **4. Notification and the Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedure**

When receiving information, which may indicate organised or multiple abuse, the recipient should immediately refer the matter to the Police and a manager in Children's Social Care and follow the [Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures](#).

The single and most important consideration is the safety and wellbeing of the child or children with a clear risk management plan in place for each child which should be regularly updated within agreed timescales of the investigation.

If there is any suspicion that any managers currently employed by a social care agency are implicated or a member of the police, the matter should be referred to the Safeguarding Partnership and a Senior Officer within the Police.

The [Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedure](#) should also be followed with consideration given to informing the Safeguarding Partners.

If there is any suspicion that the individual(s) are currently employed (paid or voluntary) in any agency in the Darlington area in a position of trust, the Designated Officer within the Local Authority (DO) should be informed.

#### **5. The 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.

The Strategy Meeting, chaired by a Service Manager of Children's Social Care, must take place within 5 working days of the receipt of the referral and be formally recorded. The Manager of the Safeguarding Unit will inform the Safeguarding Partnership of the referral.

The appropriate representative from Durham Constabulary, Health and Children's Social Care should attend the meeting. The meeting will also involve senior staff from Health, Education and other agencies as required and, where necessary, ensure coordination across local authority boundaries.

The Strategy Discussion needs to carefully note and map:

- 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.

A strategic decision will need to be made by senior managers from the involved agencies as to whether the social work input into the enquiries/investigation can be managed in the conventional way or whether a specialist approach is required for example from a dedicated team outside the service, for example Barnardo's or NSPCC.

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

Where the Strategy Discussion confirms that the investigation will relate to organised or multiple abuse, it will appoint a multi-agency Strategic Management Group (see **paragraph 6 - The 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.

## **6. The Strategic Management Group**

The Strategic Management Group will be chaired by the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and will:

- Complete the mapping process started by the Strategy Discussion as set out in **paragraph 5 - The Strategy Meeting**
- Specify the terms of reference for the enquiry/investigation
- Establish ownership of the strategic lead in the investigation
- Bring together a 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. Line managers or colleagues of any person implicated in the investigation must not be involved and the involvement of any person from the work place under investigation must be considered with particular care

- Decide whether there is a need for an independent team to investigate the allegations, for example, Barnardo's or the NSPCC, particularly where the alleged perpetrators are foster carers, prospective adopters or members of staff employed by a member agency of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership
- Decide the terms of reference and accountability for the investigating team, including the parameters and timescales of their enquiries/investigation
- In cases of greater scale and complexity, appoint an Investigation Management Group (IMG) (see **paragraph 7 - The Investigation Management Group**)
- Ensure that appropriate resources are deployed to the investigation including access to legal and other specialist advice, resources and information
- 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
- Ensure the investigating team are themselves supported with personal counselling if necessary and that issues of staff safety are addressed
- Ensure that suitable accommodation and administrative support are available for the investigation
- Ensure that an appropriate venue is available for interviews and the interviews are conducted in accordance with **Achieving Best Evidence** Guidance
- Liaise as necessary with the Crown Prosecution Service at an early stage before arranging services for a child in need of counselling or therapeutic help so that the 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 the **Regulatory Authority**
- 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.

## 7. The Investigation Management Group

In cases of considerable complexity and scale, an Investigation Management Group will be appointed. This will be chaired by a Strategic Lead.

Membership of this group should include representatives from Children's Social Care, the Police, Health and the Local Authority's Legal Services, with other agencies being invited to participate as appropriate.

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

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

## **8. End of Enquiry/Investigation Meeting and Report**

At the conclusion of the enquiry/investigation, the Strategic Management Group will evaluate the investigation, identify the lessons learned and prepare an overview report for the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership, highlighting any practices, procedures or policies which may need further attention and require either inter-agency or individual agency action plans.

If a suspected abuser is working with children in a child care position, or in the education service, evidence and information should be shared to support disciplinary proceedings and to enable, where appropriate, the referral of suspected abusers to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the relevant professional regulatory bodies.

## **9. Further Guidance and References**

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership – [Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Multi-agency Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership – [Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedure and Practice Guidance](#)

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership - [Procedure for managing allegations and concerns against staff, carers or volunteers](#)

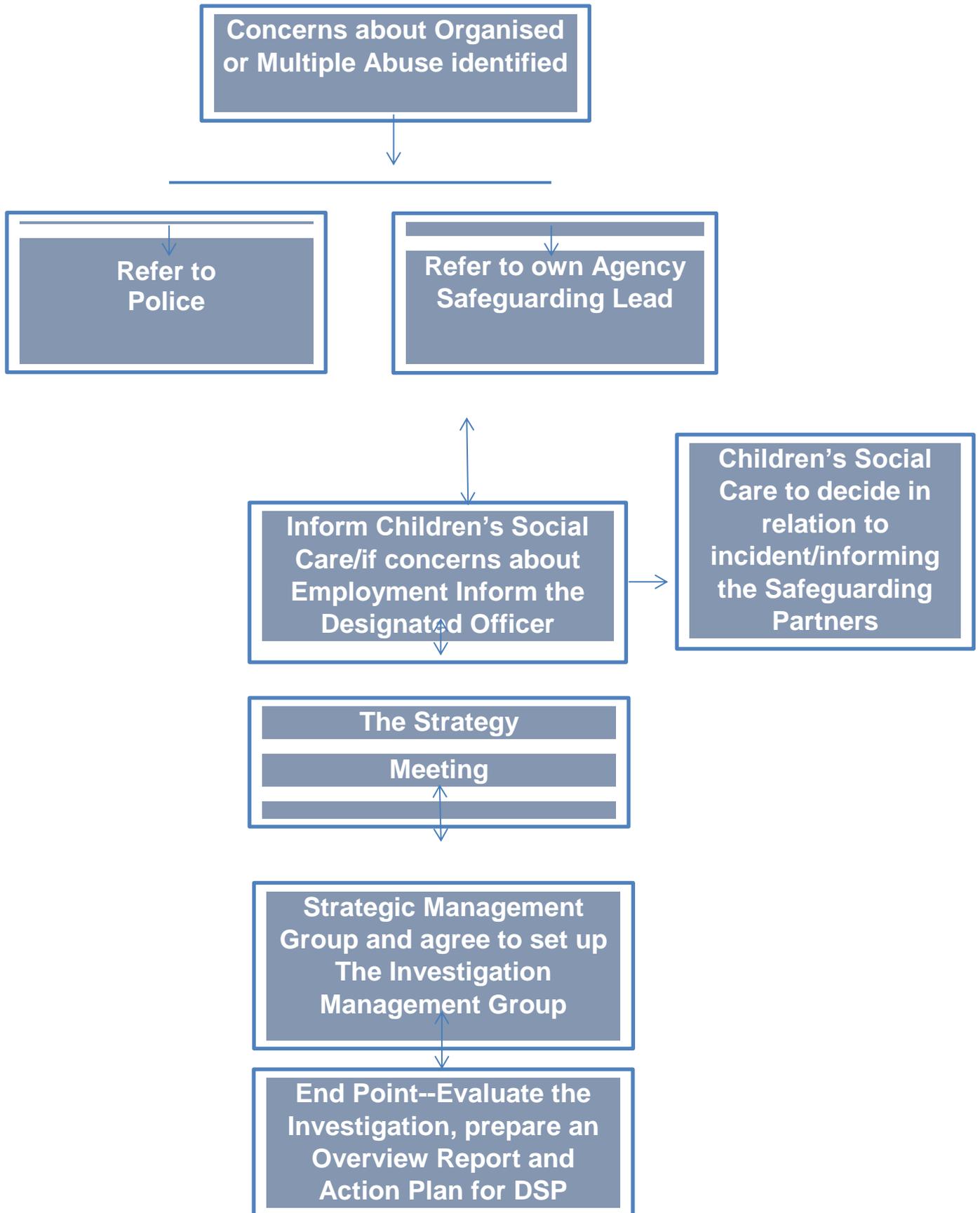
HM Government - [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

Royal College of Policing – [Managing Complex Child Abuse investigations](#)

House of Lords Research Briefings (June 2016) – [Historical Child Sexual Abuse Investigations](#)

# Organised or Multiple Abuse Process Map

## Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

## Checklist of Agencies and level of involvement

Agency	Service Area	Level of involvement required		
		The Strategy Meeting	Strategic Management Group	Investigation Management Group
Darlington Borough Council	Children Social Care			
	Adult Social Care			
	Housing Services			
	Youth Offending			
	Legal Services			
Durham Constabulary				
Education	Head of Education			
	Secondary			
	Primary			
Health	Durham and Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)			
	Primary Care in Darlington			
	NHS England			
	County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT)			
	Harrogate District Foundation Trust (HDFT)			

	Tees, Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust (TEWV)			
	Public Health			
National Probation Service	North East Division			
Community Rehabilitation Company	Durham Tees Valley			
Additional Agencies as highlighted				