

**Council Report**

Improving Lives Select Commission

**Title**

Complex Abuse Processes

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?** No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Thomas, Children and Young People's Services

**Report Author(s)**

Vicky Schofield – Head of Service First Response

**Ward(s) Affected** All

**Summary**

1. Complex abuse procedures are used in cases where there are believed to be issues of connected, organised or multiple abuse of children. This is a multi-agency procedure in place under the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board.
2. There is a currently large scale Complex Abuse Inquiry ongoing in Rotherham Borough which commenced during early 2017.
3. This report sets out information generally about the ways of working with connected or organised abuse and a brief summary of the scope and nature of the current Rotherham Inquiry.

**Recommendations**

2.1 Note the contents of the report.

**List of Appendices Included** None

**Background Papers** None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required** No

**Exempt from the Press and Public** No

## **Title:** Complex Abuse Processes

### **1. Recommendations**

1.1 Note the contents of the report.

### **2. Background**

2.1 Complex abuse procedures are used in cases where there are believed to be issues of connected, organised or multiple abuse of children. This may occur where multiple children (across more than one sibling group) are abused by a single perpetrator or when multiple, connected perpetrators are involved in abusing children in some “organised” way. Complex abuse investigations are governed by the same legislative principals as all other investigations of child abuse (section 47, Children Act 1989 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015). The local authority therefore has a statutory duty to investigate where there are reasonable grounds to believe that children are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, taking all necessary action to ensure their welfare as a result.

There is a multi-agency procedure in place under the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board relating Complex Abuse. The procedure sets out a way of working to ensure a multi-agency approach to the identification, planning and investigation around this type of abuse, including putting in place operating arrangements such that abuse is understood and safety for the affected children is achieved.

The ways of working in cases of connected or organised abuse are typically more difficult to establish, given the need for staff involved to have a broad understanding about the whole network / range of evidence available, rather than focussing specifically on individual children and their families. In such cases, the challenges are around ensuring the whole investigation is co-ordinated, that information is correctly shared and understood by those involved. Often, given that connect abuse cases often involve a higher volume of more complex work, mobilisation of resource is required. Communications strategies are often needed, given that some Complex Abuse matters are potentially high profile.

2.2 In Rotherham, there is currently one large scale Complex Abuse Inquiry ongoing. This inquiry commenced during January 2017, RMBC and partner agencies commenced a process in line with the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board Complex Abuse Procedure. Following the early Strategic and Operational Meetings, a bespoke Social Work Team was established, with connected Health, Police and Early Help colleagues. The team have worked to further understand the nature and extent of abuse involved.

- 2.3 During the recent OFSTED inspection, the quality and impact of this work was noted. Inspectors were impressed with the “forensic” and “tenacious” approach in place, specifically identifying the quality of assessments and the impact that Social Workers were having in very challenging circumstances. The leadership of the work was equally identified and commented on in a positive way, the inspectorate noting that an “impressive forward thinking” approach had been adopted and implemented. The whole process was identified as reflective of outstanding practice.
- 2.4 Our organisational learning arising from this current inquiry has been significant, a learning review has been undertaken in parallel to the operational work in children’s cases, setting out specific developments in practice that go beyond the work on the these particular cases.
- 2.5 Our learning relates to the way we work with vulnerable children who move between local authority areas and across international borders, in particular specific procedures have been implemented around the sharing of information between agencies in different countries. Processes in relation to the identification of missing families have been developed (in order to address the issues about risk of flight during child protection processes), and our skills and expertise in mapping large amounts of familial information to aid assessment has increased significantly. More generally, the learning from this work is helping to strengthen social work assessments, in the context of accumulative information giving rise to concerns about children’s safety.

### **3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 The key issues are set out in the body of the report (above).

### **4. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 4.1 No options are proposed, the report is to provide information.

### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 As above.

### **6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 6.1 No decision is required.

### **7. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 7.1 As above.

### **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 As above.

## **9. Human Resources Implications**

9.1 As above.

## **10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

10.1 There continues to be an ongoing Complex Abuse Inquiry which has identified a significant number of children suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm. This work is likely to form a longer term part of Rotherham's safeguarding landscape and so the work of the Complex Abuse Strategic Group and broader Children and Young People Directorate are now considering how this is embedded into usual business in the longer term.

## **11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications**

11.1 The equalities and human rights implications are considered throughout case work with individual children and young people as is the case for all other safeguarding interventions.

## **12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates**

12.1 Complex Abuse inquiries are embedded in a multi-agency process with all key partners engaged. This process is carried out on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in line with the multi-agency procedure.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 No decisions are sought in line with this report.

## **14. Accountable Officer(s)**

Vicky Schofield, Head of First Response

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