

Complex Strategy Discussion Practice Guidance

Introduction

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 gives guidance on inter-agency working to enable practitioners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The document looks more closely at the challenges around contextual safeguarding and identifies the difficulties associated with investigating complex (i.e. organised or multiple) abuse. Our definition of Contextual Safeguarding includes preventing and protecting children from risks such as: Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Children Missing from Home, Care and Education (Missing), Criminal Exploitation that may include; Gangs, County Lines, Gun and Knife Crime and Modern Slavery.

Definition of complex abuse

Complex abuse can occur both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, and within institutions such as residential homes or schools. Such abuse can be significantly traumatic for the children involved. Investigations can be time-consuming and requires specialist skills from police, social work staff and wider agencies. They become even more complex at times due to number of places and people involved, and the period of abuse.

Complex abuse is defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children as –

“abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children and young people (3 or more). 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.”

When is a complex strategy discussion required?

The purpose of strategy discussions is to share information in order to decide whether to start an enquiry into concerns about significant harm (Section 47 Children’s Act 1989), to inform any criminal investigation and to agree any safety plans required to protect the child in the immediate. A complex strategy discussion is of the same statutory status as a strategy discussion.

If any professional identifies that there is complex or organised abuse, a complex strategy discussion should be completed. This should be in line with the Exploitation Protocol.

When exploitation has been identified, each child will have a risk profiling assessment and will be discussed at a multi-agency RAM Meeting (Risk Assessment

Management). The RAM meeting will review arrangements for each individual child and ensure that there is a clear plan to address the concerns including signposting to relevant support agencies.

Who must the discussion include and who Chairs?

The complex strategy meeting must be chaired by a service manager or Head of Service.

All identified professionals should be invited; this may include professionals from other local authorities as well as external agencies. **As a minimum Police, Children Social Care, Education, Health, the Exploitation Hub must be invited for child criminal and sexual exploitation/missing cases.**

A strategy discussion may take place via telephone/Skype or an arranged face to face meeting.

Escalation process

Non-attendance by agencies must be noted as an action for the Chair to formally escalate unless there has been agreement by the Chair that a report would suffice in their absence.

Timeliness

A strategy discussion may take place immediately after information has been received which raises child protection concerns and should take place within 24 hours. There may be some instances whereby a planned meeting will be required.

Discussion and planning

The strategy discussion should have a clear safety plan about how a child(ren) is/are going to be safeguarded during the enquiry. It should also identify what actions are to be taken by whom and when and in addition, what support is required.

In terms of planning for the safety of the child taking a contextual approach the strategy discussion should consider:

- An assessment of the information known to date.
- Whether the enquiry is joint s.47 or single agency.
- A clear rationale around the reason for the s.47.
- How soon the child needs to be seen and by whom.
- Child's voice and parent's views.
- Parents' role in safeguarding their child.
- Themes and patterns.
- Any Police intelligence.
- History and any Adverse childhood experiences.

- Clear description of the concerns (avoidance of victim blaming language).
- Any peers (negative or positive) and/or any peer on peer abuse.
- Mapping in terms of locations, buildings, peers and include safe spaces.
- A clear plan that includes diversion tactics to disrupt the perpetrators and who is taking what action and by when.
- Consider any immediate protective action required (reference application to the National Referral Mechanism).
- Identify any police action that may be taken (reference to the Home Office disruption toolkit).
- Consider and determine any other actions which may disrupt harmful activities, e.g. any relevant Orders to be served on perpetrators of abuse or where licensed operations are involved, suspension of licences or contracts, pending further enquiries.
- Plan should also discuss whether any media alerts are required.
- Intervention and support that focuses on addressing also wider environmental factors.
- Implementation of any safeguarding measures.
- Any information stemming from a return home interview.
- The exploitation screening tool should also be referenced to within the strategy discussion.
- Children who may be alleged perpetrators should also be discussed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare.
- Interventions should focus on addressing wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care.
- Children not in education (exclusions increase vulnerability) managed moves map patterns of children linked through alternative provisions.
- Teenage brain development.
- Any social media sites or activity of concern.
- Any trauma associated with significant events (historical or current) events leading up to the incident(s).
- The children who may be in current contact with possible perpetrators of abuse.
- Children who were, but no longer are, in contact with possible abusers.
- Possible victims who are now adults (we will need to consider children preparing for adulthood up to age 25).
- A clear recording of what further information is required at this stage and arrangements for the gathering of such information by whom and by when.
- Consider any information to assist with the initial mapping exercise.

The outcome of any strategy discussion (complex or not) should conclude whether there is a need for an individual assessments and/or commencement of s.47 investigations.

Confidentiality

All information shared within the meeting must remain confidential. Should any information need to be shared outside of the meeting, this should not be shared without the prior consent of the sharing agency. Any decision should reflect the impact on any ongoing police investigation.

Recording

A designated Business Support note taker must be appointed to assist the Chair.

All requests for any open strategy discussions should be completed on the child's record on LCS.

All information needs to be recorded directly on the child's record in LCS on the strategy discussion form. Any reports or additional information need to be attached to the strategy discussion form on the child's record on LCS.

Where there are multiple children discussed, please ensure that the LCS numbers of the children linked are noted within the strategy discussion.

Minutes of the discussion should be shared with all attendees at the meeting within 24 hours where possible.