

7 point briefing

Safeguarding Practice Review

Complex Case Procedure

March 2019

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This seven point briefing highlights the positive multi-agency working during a complex and large scale safeguarding case. The investigation was led by North Yorkshire Police and related to an online child abuse case where a teacher had been using false social media accounts posing as a teenage girl and boy. The teacher had made contact with individuals in both the UK and abroad persuading them to send indecent images of themselves and in some cases inciting individuals to abuse their siblings or children and record this for his own gratification.

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One of the biggest tasks was to ensure that children at risk were quickly identified and safeguarding measures were co-ordinated and enacted quickly in order to minimise distress and anxiety for those affected (e.g. children, parents, families and staff). [NYSCB Complex Case Procedures](#) were utilised in this instance and aided coordination and decision making on a multi-agency scale. The case moved at a fast pace and a dynamic response was required.

The complex case meetings were time consuming owing to their regularity at the start of the investigation, however a positive was that information was quickly assessed and built on across the partnership. For example, other partners were able to build on the small amount of Police intelligence available in order to identify children who may have been affected and what support, if any, was already being offered to the families. Appropriate senior representatives from each agency attended the meetings which meant that proactive joint decision making was made and action agreed.

The management and content of communication to third parties was important to ensure victims were safeguarded and risks mitigated without compromising the Police investigation. As a result, information to children, parents, staff and wider safeguarding partners was structured and planned and minimal press and social media coverage was received. Support packages were established and delivered as part of initial disclosures. Support was also given to school staff during the initial phase of the investigation.

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Confidentiality was vital in ensuring that victims were safe and evidence relating to the offences protected. Chairing of the complex case group was managed by North Yorkshire Police and the group developed a significant level of trust between organisations which was in part due to the focus Police gave to ensuring the investigation was victim and child focused. The level of information shared allowed children to be identified and in addition supported mechanisms agreed as part of the disclosure and follow up process which were consistently applied ensuring that the right information was shared with right person at the right time. This case has demonstrated a highly effective multi-agency approach which has enabled mass mobilisation of resources to identify and support victims, parents, the school and the investigation. Due to the pace of the investigation it was vital that all partners were kept up to date with developments. Colleagues from health, education, police and social care were able to help to identify victims through their management information systems, local knowledge and social media channels. A distribution list was quickly established and utilised for the sharing of priority information and meeting invites.

The multi-agency response to the case has been effective. It was recognised during the complex case group debrief that North Yorkshire Police's child centred approach was outstanding and the inclusivity of multi-agency partners was excellent. All those involved considered it a model of good practice.

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The complex case group were able to meet frequently to allow rapid sharing of information leading to reassessment of plans and responses in place. Membership of the group was consistent to ensure partners were fully informed throughout and where needed effective use of conference call facilities aided this investigation. It was recognised that there was effective leadership and management from the chair of the group.

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The teacher was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment with a further 8 years after release on licence for a total of 80 offences. Offences included, abuse of position of trust, offences relating to indecent images of children, along with inciting and encouraging sexual offences against children.

As a result of the investigation over 171 further victims and suspects from outside North Yorkshire have been identified. All relevant information identified by North Yorkshire Police in relation to victims and suspects have been shared with the relevant Police Forces for further investigation, 78 of these are international victims/suspects.

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Learning points:

- **Complex Case Procedures** – This experience has provided the opportunity to remind partners that Complex Case Procedures should be used for any similar cases in the future to ensure robust partnership working and a planned approach to both the investigative process and to supporting children, young people and families.
- **Professional Boundaries** – Staff employment procedures need to be strengthened to reinforce the maintaining of professional relationships and boundaries with children and young people in the course of their employment, both off and online.
- **Child Awareness** – Messages regarding the importance of checking and confirming contact/friend requests on social media platforms and not accepting requests from individuals not known to them offline needs to be reinforced. Although in this case the teacher knew some of the victims, the victims themselves did not know that they were being contacted by the teacher due to the use of false profiles. Whilst online safety messages had been delivered to children in the school affected, this case shows the need to revisit the messages regularly.
- **Parental awareness** – Parents play an important part with regards to keeping their children safe both online and offline, parents should be reminded to proactively maintain an interest and awareness in how their children use social media and encourage open and honest conversations between themselves and their children regarding the risk associated with technology. Support should be provided by partners to promote this.
- **Research** – There is a need for more research to be undertaken regarding what impact current online safety training has with children and young people to keep them safe and how they feel this could be improved to reduce opportunities for children and young people to be exploited.

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What to do next:

- You can access the Complex Case Procedures here: NYSCB Complex Case Procedure www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/historical-complex-procedure
- You can access the Managing Allegations Against Staff Practice Guidance here: NYSCB Managing Allegations Against Staff Practice Guidance www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/professionals/managing-allegations-against-staff