

# Managing complex child abuse investigations

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 21 January 2014 Updated 24 February 2022

Written by College of Policing

30 mins read

Read in conjunction with:

- the forthcoming authorised professional practice (APP) on managing major investigations
- [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#)

It is not always obvious when an original complaint is made that a single allegation may become part of a complex child abuse investigation. All officers should consider this when providing the first response to a child abuse allegation and responding operationally, so as to minimise any adverse impact on a potential future complex enquiry. For a definition see [complex child abuse](#).

The timing, coordination and extent of any arrests, potential victim or witness approaches, research enquiries (including with multi-agency partners) and evidential searches could, if not properly considered, have a detrimental effect on evidence gathering and, subsequently, on any prosecution (for example, by alerting suspects).

## Rationale

A senior investigating officer (SIO) should be able to explain why a particular child abuse investigation is potentially complex. They should also consider the following.

- Number of allegations currently highlighted.
- Seriousness and type of allegations.
- Potential for the investigation to transcend divisional and police force boundaries and even international jurisdictions (see also [cross-border and international investigations](#) and [Home Office Circular 36/2002](#)).
- Number and type of scenes or locations identified (for example, homes, premises or institutions referred to).

- Obtaining relevant informed consent from the victim(s) and their carer or parent for the release of third-party information (for example, medical records, family or civil proceedings).
- Number and identities of victims and witnesses.
- Any welfare or special needs of victims and witnesses.
- Time parameters of concern including dates of alleged offences, the length of time between the offences and any **delayed reporting**.
- Number and identities of potential suspects.
- Potential for the number of victims, witnesses, locations, scenes or suspects to increase.
- Dynamic risk assessment of the suspect's current access to children.
- Dynamic risk assessment regarding the vulnerability of any victims and witnesses.
- Securing and retaining documents (for example, from children's social care, institutions).
- Media interest and its impact on the investigation.
- Whether a community impact assessment and/or consultation with an independent advisory group is required – this could be because of the impact of information about the offence and/or offender(s) becoming available to the public, or where the investigation is linked to a particular faith, religious or community group.
- Whether a critical incident policy should be declared.
- Potential for parallel care and/or family proceedings and disclosure that may be sought by parties in those proceedings.
- Provision or funding of a multi-agency support strategy for victims and/or witnesses.
- Possible links to other investigations.
- Using analysts to present the information (for example, association, timeline chronology).
- Establishing a major incident room (MIR).
- Using HOLMES.

## Opening actions

### Scoping the size and complexity of an investigation

The SIO should scope the size and complexity of the inquiry and examine the options available to them. At this stage of the process it is essential to assess the short, medium, and long-term impact of such an inquiry and its potential to grow.

They should also take into account the confidentiality of the information under investigation and the possibility of any compromise in relation to the seizure of documents and exhibits at a later stage.

## **Liaising with the CPS**

The SIO should liaise with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at the earliest possible stage and at an appropriate level to obtain their views on the scope of any proposed investigation so as to focus operational resources appropriately. They should also obtain relevant and ongoing advice from the CPS to support the investigation.

## **Police forces and partner agencies**

The initial exchange of information should, where possible, be on a confidential need-to-know basis only. Equally, the possible future involvement of other police forces or partner agencies should be considered, as the nature of these types of offences means that they have the propensity to cross police and agency jurisdictional boundaries.

For further information see:

- [Cross-border and international investigations](#)
- [Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#)

## **Peer support**

At this initial stage it might be helpful to obtain peer support from an SIO who has previously undertaken an investigation of this type.

The College of Policing holds a database of SIOs with experience of a range of major investigations. These include complex child abuse inquiries such as institutional abuse, or cases involving criminal sexual offender networks using the internet or other organisations (for example, football clubs and associations for children and young people). If the investigation relates to child abuse images and the internet to facilitate the offending, Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) should be contacted. See also the APP on [Child sexual exploitation](#) and forthcoming APP on managing major investigations.

## Engaging with children's social care

In all instances the police retain the lead role in complex child abuse investigations. If circumstances warrant it, however, children's social care can be engaged as part of the interview teams, using appropriately trained staff. Developing a joint investigation capability is in line with [HM Government \(2015\) Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) and [Welsh Assembly Government \(n.d.\) Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004](#), which supports efforts to achieve a fully integrated approach.

In some inquiries where there are victims from several geographical areas, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child protection officers or other independent practitioners with relevant experience have been used to fulfil the role of children's social care staff (with the agreement of children's social care). This avoids each area having to provide resources individually for the inquiry. NSPCC staff or other independent practitioners are a less resource-intensive solution and bring continuity and consistency of approach.

## Cases of institutional abuse

There have been institutional abuse inquiries where victims initiate civil action for compensation against children's social care or local authorities. In these cases there is an added advantage to using NSPCC child protection officers as they are independent and, perhaps, will not be viewed negatively by the aggrieved parties. If this option is taken up, there needs to be a documented agreement between the NSPCC or other independent practitioners and respective children's social care outlining roles and responsibilities.

For further information, see the forthcoming APP on working with partners.

## Staffing

Managing staffing issues is a key initial consideration in planning complex child abuse investigations.

## Selection

The following factors should be considered when selecting staff for a complex child abuse investigation.

- The SIO should be accredited at Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP) level 3 or above, and Specialist Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme trained. If no such officer is available, a senior officer should make a policy entry explaining how the identified officer is suitably qualified and supported.
- Appointing staff with the appropriate investigative skills and abilities (for example, a tactical interview adviser to advise on suspect and victim/witness interview strategies, staff experienced or trained in interviewing suspected sexual offenders).
- Staff must have received training relating to the [Ministry of Justice \(2022\) Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures](#).
- Staff must have undertaken training relating to the investigation of sexual offences.
- Their availability to commit to a potentially long-term inquiry.
- A welfare audit of potential staff needs to be carried out to identify any particular vulnerability of individuals.
- How much previous experience in child abuse investigations they have.
- Additional equality and diversity issues (for example, if victims have expressed a preference to be interviewed by an officer of a particular sex).
- The roles of partner agencies in the investigation and whether they have powers under the [Children Act 1989](#) (see forthcoming APP on working with partners)

## Welfare

The welfare of all staff involved in complex investigations and long-standing inquiries should be a priority for SIOs when establishing the investigation team. See forthcoming APP on managing major investigations.

## Training

Complex child abuse inquiries can differ considerably from other major investigations. In some cases, defence barristers will ask for details of any specific and focused training that is available for investigations of this nature.

In a number of inquiries, shortfalls in skills and experience have been addressed by introducing or offering dedicated in-house training from expert practitioners in child abuse investigations. Training days are a common feature of most inquiries – they address identified needs and forge greater

understanding of multi-agency partnerships.

In developing a training package for this type of investigation, the SIO may wish to consider some of the following issues for all staff involved, including multi-agency staff in appropriate areas.

- Induction training.
- Dedicated training days.
- Multi-agency training.
- Specialist training, for example, family liaison (in particular, on issues where the suspect is in the family) and investigative interviewing to a developmental level.
- Training in accordance with [Ministry of Justice \(2022\) Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures.](#)

[CEOP](#) provides training which may be relevant in particular inquiries. This includes:

- courses on using the [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) to protect children from harm
- strategies for investigating serious sexual crimes against children
- strategies for interviewing child sexual offenders

## Gold group

If there is the possibility of any national consequences arising from a complex child abuse investigation, consideration should be given to establishing a gold group. A clear understanding of the expectation and capability of each partner in a gold group is essential to developing a joint-working relationship.

The function of the gold group is to set policy and strategy, and secure the funding and resources necessary for the investigation. For complex child abuse investigations this group can include:

- local authority (chief executive)
- children's services and children's social care (director level)
- health (director level)
- CPS (unit head)
- non-governmental organisations (for example, [Barnardo's](#), [NSPCC](#))
- legal (police and local authority solicitor)

- media and public relations (all agencies)
- local safeguarding children board (LSCB) (chair or senior member of board)
- multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) agencies, as appropriate

For further information, see the forthcoming APP on working with partners.

## Initial considerations

### Suspect's current access to children

Establishing any current risk to children or other vulnerable persons who may be linked to the proposed investigation should be a priority. The overriding principle in any investigation or other police action is the welfare of the child. Consideration should, therefore, be given to the balance between the rights of the victim and the public and those of the suspect. Any decision must be documented.

### Continued risk to victims and witnesses

Indicators of possible abuse are listed in the forthcoming APP on identifying and reducing risk. In addition to those, the following should be considered in a complex child abuse investigation.

- Whether the suspect is still in contact with the victim and/or witness(es).
- Whether the victim and/or witness(es) have identified or traced, or may attempt to identify or trace, the suspect(s).
- Whether the suspect is operating within the care services and/or is involved with other child-focused organisations.
- The suspect's points of contact with children through work or domestic situations.
- The requirement for early action owing to the risk of harm to others by the suspect.
- The possibility or likelihood of self-harm or suicide by the suspect, victim or witness(es).
- Related force procedures (for example, custody or bail).

## Obtaining intelligence

Intelligence on the risk factors listed in [continued risk to victims and witnesses](#) may be available from children's social care, administrative documents from institutions including the suspect's employer, education and health files. Key items for consideration include:

- logbooks
- records of behaviour
- absconder books
- medical records
- counsellor records
- associated documents

CEOP's behavioural analysis unit can give advice on risk assessing child sexual offenders.

## Corroborative evidence

The delayed reporting of many complex child abuse allegations means that investigations require corroborative evidence. The SIO should give advice to officers on the value of corroborative evidence to support a victim or witness account. Such evidence may include emails, instant messages, a diary, letters and photographs of the individual, suspect or others at the relevant time. It may be appropriate for the SIO to introduce this type of evidence at the suspect interview stage. Material such as photographs may also be relevant to others involved in the investigation, including witnesses, victims and suspects.

Examining third-party material may also help find corroborative evidence to support or disprove the allegation, for example, observation by carers relating to changes in victim behaviour or evidence of grooming (for example, receiving gifts). Other sources include 999 tapes, house-to-house enquiries and images.

For further information see [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#).

## File examination and retention by partner agencies

Securing and preserving evidence early is of paramount importance in any investigation, and especially so in complex child abuse cases. Three options that were adopted in previous inquiries where children's social care held files on victims and witnesses may also apply where other agencies hold information relevant to a complex child abuse investigation.

The choice of option should be based on an assessment of the benefits and disadvantages of each in the context of the particular inquiry and the established joint-agency working relationships.

Whichever option is chosen, those viewing the files should have sufficient information to ascertain which material may be relevant. Access to details of allegations from a complainant's statements reduces the possibility of key information being overlooked because its relevance was not apparent. The existence and extent of third-party material needs to be identified as early as possible in the investigation.

For further information see [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#).

### **Option 1 – police retention of files**

Here the police view files (alone or in conjunction with trained personnel) and either retain them or copy the relevant areas. In both instances the files will be subject to full disclosure, and the police and partner agencies need to agree on retention and storage issues, for example, who will keep them and for how long?

### **Option 2 – partner agency retention of files**

The partner agency views the files, provides the relevant information to the inquiry team and retains the files. In these circumstances only the areas highlighted by partner agency staff are subject to disclosure by the police, but other material in the files may subsequently be subject to disclosure as third-party material. The storage and retention of files remains solely the responsibility of the partner agency. This option places considerable trust and responsibility on the partner agency employees, encouraging closer working practices and promoting a joint investigative training approach. The partner agency needs to be clear that the reason they are reviewing the files is to identify potential victims and witnesses, and to find corroboration such as third-party reports and medical information. This process may identify additional offences. In many operations, comprehensive questionnaires have been devised for the partner agency liaison officers to complete.

### **Option 3 – partner agency 'embassy system' co-located in police premises**

In this case the partner agency retains control of the files and reviews them as in option 2, but dedicated partner agency staff allocated to the inquiry have their own office or area (embassy) within the police MIR. The files can be securely stored there and are accessible to the police via the partner agency staff.

## Obtaining material relating to family court proceedings

Some cases may involve criminal proceedings and family proceedings, together with their respective investigations. These may take place simultaneously or with some degree of overlap, and this can present challenges for the different agencies concerned. In particular, material disclosed during family proceedings may be relevant to the criminal investigation.

Relevant material might include statements and admissions made during family court proceedings by defendants and witnesses in the criminal case, or expert testimony in the family court proceedings.

There are a number of ways in which investigators may become aware of relevant material. For example:

- the police may have obtained the material from the local authority (or elsewhere) in line with their duties of child protection. Note: in these circumstances, the police cannot share the material with the CPS (nor can they share with the CPS the information on which documentation is based) without the permission of the family court. The police have to simply alert the CPS to the fact that relevant family court material exists
- in accordance with the terms of a local or national protocol, the local authority may alert the CPS to the existence of relevant material relating to family court proceedings. The local authority should provide information on request by the police, in line with agreed protocols. Otherwise, prosecutors can go to the family courts and apply for an order

For further information on obtaining relevant material, consult the CPS prosecutor.

For further information see:

- disclosure of material to family or civil proceedings
- [Association of Chief Police Officers \(ACPO\) and others \(2013\) Protocol and Good Practice Model: Disclosure of information in cases of alleged child abuse and linked criminal and care directions hearings](#)

## Obtaining material relating to civil proceedings

Victims of child abuse may decide to seek compensation by instigating civil proceedings against an alleged perpetrator. These proceedings may precede or overlap with a relevant criminal investigation.

Positive consent should be obtained from victims (or their parent or carer) for relevant material to be disclosed, where possible. However, the [CPS Disclosure Manual, chapter 4](#) sets out the process to be adopted where the victim's consent is not available.

For further information on obtaining relevant material, consult the CPS prosecutor.

For further information see:

- disclosure of material to family or civil proceedings
- [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#)

## Information protocol between police forces and local authorities

Police forces and local authorities should agree a protocol to identify the preferred option for handling material. The CPS website has a national template protocol between ACPO, the CPS, the Local Government Association and the Home Office. See also [ACPO and others \(2013\) Protocol and Good Practice Model: Disclosure of information in cases of alleged child abuse and linked criminal and care directions hearings](#).

## Disclosure to the CPS

Whenever the police are given access to information, it must be revealed to the CPS for disclosure purposes. An assessment needs to be made in respect of each element of the information on whether it is to be regarded as sensitive. Material is not sensitive just because it is held by children's social care or a third party.

Where the partner agency maintains control of the information, the CPS and the defence may request information from them and they may be summoned to produce documents at court.

## Victim and witness identification

## Strategy

Some complex abuse investigations involve organisations, groups, homes and institutions that have long since ceased to exist. Identifying additional victims and witnesses can be difficult because of a lack of accessible information from the relevant period. At an early stage of the inquiry, the SIO should clearly establish whether to proactively identify victims and/or witnesses. When developing an identification strategy, an evidence or intelligence-led approach should be used to avoid any suggestion of 'trawling' in an illogical, illegal or unprofessional manner. The SIO should consult the CPS for advice when developing such a strategy.

Evidence or intelligence-led victim and witness identification processes have been developed in previous inquiries, including those of child abuse. The SIO should carefully consider how appropriate they are in light of the specific circumstances of each case.

For further information, see the forthcoming APP on managing major investigations.

## Victim/witness approach and protocol

General guidance on the initial contact between victims and witnesses is provided in [Ministry of Justice \(2022\) Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures](#). It is essential that a victim/witness approach protocol is designed for each specific inquiry. This should set out the rationale and considerations for the most appropriate method of contact for the respective victims and witnesses featured in the inquiry, and take into account relevant advice from the CPS. It will also identify who should make initial contact. The protocol should be documented by the SIO in their policy file, and adopted and understood by all those working on the investigation. This officer should be accredited at PIP level 3 or above, and Specialist Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme trained. If no such officer is available, a senior officer should make a policy entry explaining how the identified officer is suitably qualified and supported.

For further information see:

- [Investigative interviewing](#)
- the forthcoming APP on working with vulnerable people
- the forthcoming APP on managing major investigations

## First contact

The initial contact between investigating officers and the potential victim or witness is of fundamental importance, as this is when the rapport between the two parties is established. Of primary concern to the SIO during this phase of the inquiry is the correct identification and subsequent contact with potential victims or witnesses, many of whom may not have disclosed the abuse to those closest to them.

The style of first contact differs from inquiry to inquiry. Irrespective of the method of contact adopted, managing the expectation of potential victims or witnesses is an important consideration. Every effort should be made to provide an honest appraisal of the likely consequence of making a report and the potential timescale of the inquiry. Any approach to potential victims or witnesses should include contact details for access to support, including local specialist services, [independent sexual violence advisors](#) and national helplines.

Officers making first contact should assess whether a [registered intermediary](#) and/or an appropriate adult should be used and, where appropriate, advice should be sought from interview advisers and/or the CPS.

## Telling victims about other allegations

To enable a child or young person to give an account of what has occurred, they can be told – in general terms – that a suspect has been the subject of complaints by others. Taking this approach may strengthen the victim's resolve to become engaged with the criminal justice process.

This should normally be done after the victim's statement has been taken or video interview has been recorded. In exceptional circumstances, this may take place before the statement or video interview. However, a PIP level 3 and Specialist Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme trained officer must authorise this. If no such officer is available, a senior officer should make a policy entry explaining how the identified officer is suitably qualified and supported.

Details of the other allegations should not be disclosed and a careful record should be kept of what the child or young person has been told.

For further information see:

- [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#)

- the forthcoming APP on working with vulnerable people
- the forthcoming APP on managing major investigations

## Proving the allegation

A complex child abuse investigation will potentially involve vulnerable victims and witnesses. The SIO should recognise this and consider how the defence may try to discredit a number of complainants in the trial process.

The SIO should also recognise the unique nature of an investigation, when a length of time has elapsed between the alleged offences and disclosure of allegations.

Careful consideration should be given to ensuring the integrity of the victim's evidence. This should include risk assessing the issues confronting the SIO and how they can be mitigated so that a prosecution can still proceed.

## Discussing the investigation

If victims or witnesses have discussed the circumstances under investigation (either inadvertently or otherwise) with other victims or witnesses, the details of this should be documented as soon as the police become aware of it, and disclosed as appropriate. See also [telling victims about other allegations](#).

## Further risk factors

The following points have been raised in past cases and should be included, as appropriate, in the risk-assessment process.

- Character, credibility and vulnerability of the suspect.
- Previous allegations against the suspect.
- Relationship between the complainant(s) and the suspect, where the latter has acted in the role of a guardian or carer (loco parentis).
- How the first account came to light and any subsequent accounts.
- Character, credibility, vulnerability and circumstances of the complainant(s).
- Possibility and motivation of a third party having influence over a complainant.

The investigation should consider how each risk can be mitigated to ensure that the focus of the investigation is on proving or disproving the allegation against the suspect, and not only focused on the credibility of the victim. It is likely that child abuse cases will require access to third-party material when building the evidential case. This includes using expert advisers and their testimonies.

Where there are multiple victims, consideration should also be given to whether there:

- has been collusion in their accounts and, if so, when and why
- are similarities between the complaints
- is any evidence which undermines corroboration

For further information see:

- [CPS \(2013\) Guidelines on Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- the forthcoming APP on working with vulnerable people

## Impact on those associated with victims, witnesses or suspects

This is a factor in all investigations. For example, where suspects or victims have been identified and are part of a club or association, parents of other children may become concerned and contact the police. How this is dealt with should be agreed with other agencies, including the CPS and the club or association (for example, via a letter or other communication). This should allay concerns and avoid compromising the investigation.

## Support groups

These are available to provide counselling and advice to those who have been affected by allegations of abuse involving persons close to them, such as relatives and associates of victims, witnesses and suspects. Some specialist sexual violence and abuse support services may also be available locally, offering support for victims and others, including siblings and non-abusing parents or carers. Details of these support groups should be made available to those who may need them. Children's social care also has a role in taking account of any impact on the victims and others. For a list of support groups see forthcoming APP on working with partners.

## Other interested parties and groups

The SIO should be aware that there are a number of groups that may have an interest in investigations of this kind (either from the perspective of the victim or the suspect). In some circumstances the concerns of such groups may need to be addressed without compromising the investigation (for example, any legal constraints relating to the timing and content of any communications may need to be considered).

## Suspects

### Suspect strategy

Any complex child abuse suspect strategy should consider three time parameters in relation to what any suspect:

- was doing at the time of the offence(s)
- is doing now
- was doing in the intervening period

It may be useful for the investigation to have reactive and proactive elements. The reactive element looks at the specific allegations in the first time parameter, while the proactive element focuses on the second and third time parameters.

The SIO should consider all proactive policing methods in their investigations. The following aspects may also be appropriate.

- **Bad character evidence**.
- Reference to the Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) database.
- Use of **risk of sexual harm orders**, **sexual offences prevention orders** and **foreign travel orders**.

Suspect enquiries should be balanced against the impact that such actions may have on the suspect's personal life. These enquiries carry risks that need to be planned for, assessed and documented. The suspect may face suspension from employment, media coverage and a criminal prosecution. Care should be taken to ensure that, wherever possible, steps are taken to reduce the adverse impact that an investigation of this nature could have on the suspect's family.

Using unmarked police vehicles, referring suspects' families to support agencies and a measured media release are practical considerations that should not have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the inquiry.

For further information see:

- the forthcoming APP on [rape and sexual offences](#)
- [Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998](#)
- [College of Policing \(2013\) Guidance on Relationships with the Media](#)

## Search of a suspect's premises

Child sexual offenders usually offend over several decades. They may keep records of their abuse in the form of photographs, drawings, images, audio and visual recordings and writings, including diaries, computer files and emails. At the time of the suspect's arrest, searches for memorabilia, trophies and IT equipment may need to be made. These searches may include the suspect's current or previous premises, including any locations where the abuse may have taken place.

A search may uncover information, intelligence, evidence and corroboration in relation to all aspects of the investigation. Computers and related media should be seized, and premises photographed for comparison with images or descriptions given by victims and witnesses.

Plans of premises and old images or photographs showing, for example, the layout, wallpaper patterns and views from windows may also assist in corroborating accounts. Distinctive items of clothing, jewellery, spectacles, or items of furniture might also provide additional verification of accounts by victims, witnesses or persons of interest.

In addition to search powers under the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\) s 32](#) and [s 18](#), there are powers available to search for evidence on the authority of a warrant issued under [PACE s 8](#). Indecent images of children under the age of 18 can also be searched for on the authority of a warrant issued under the [Protection of Children Act 1978 s 4](#).

## Disciplinary proceedings relating to the suspect

The decision to instigate disciplinary proceedings in relation to suspects featured in the inquiry is a matter for the relevant employer, and the SIO should remain independent from such decisions.

Generally, there should be no release of documentation to other interested parties until criminal proceedings are concluded as this could subsequently undermine the judicial process.

Disciplinary procedures may have an adverse effect on the criminal investigation by, for example, resulting in abuse of process, alerting suspects and restricting future options. In light of such procedures the CPS, the police, children's social care and, where appropriate, any other parties concerned should hold a strategy meeting to manage the impact on the investigation. A protocol for the release of information to third parties should be developed at an early stage of the investigation. Such an agreement will deter subsequent requests for early disclosure outside the established criteria.

It may assist if victims and witnesses sign a declaration on their MG11 giving informed consent to allow relevant information to be used in other proceedings, thereby avoiding the requirement for further authorisations or problems with disclosure. Where a prosecution has been concluded or has been discontinued, issues relating to disclosure of information should be dealt with in consultation with the force solicitor, to avoid allegations of defamation. Disclosure of evidence that is relevant, factual, necessary and free from the opinion of the investigating officer will support the principle of objectivity in these cases.

## Suspects living or working overseas

In some cases, consideration will need to be given to whether the [Sexual Offences Act 2003 s 72](#) will enable a prosecution to take place in the UK for offences committed abroad. Where suspects are living or working abroad, contact should be made with the CEOP Overseas Tracker Team, the [National Crime Agency \(NCA\)](#) or [International Criminal Police Organization \(INTERPOL\)](#). See also the forthcoming APP on [managing sexual offenders and violent offenders](#).

## Arrest, charging and prosecution

### Arrest

The timing of the arrest and charging of offenders must be planned to take advantage of opportunities to obtain all relevant information from files, potential victims and witnesses. Invariably, a number of unrelated suspects will feature in the investigation. Some of these suspects may be active in childcare services, and the SIO will be under pressure to prioritise the response to these

individuals.

The SIO may find it beneficial to develop a prioritisation list, and a decision-making matrix assists this process. If an arrest is made, it may be useful to interview family members while the suspect is in detention. Investigators should also take into account [College of Policing \(2013\) Guidance on Relationships with the Media](#) when considering whether it is necessary or appropriate to disclose the name of a suspect on arrest.

The most commonly found factors in developing such a matrix are:

- continued risk to children
- work in childcare services
- suspension from duty
- nature of the allegation
- number of complaints
- time elapsed since the report or referral relating to the allegation
- age of the offender and state of health
- access to children via the family or other means
- community impact assessment
- personal circumstances of the suspect

## Pre-trial witness interviews

There is a facility for the CPS to carry out pre-trial witness interviews prior to making a charging decision. See [CPS \(2008\) Pre-Trial Witness Interviews – Guidance for Prosecutors](#).

## Charging

General procedures apply to charging. However, there may be particular complexities when cases involve delayed allegations.

## No further action policy

The SIO should speak to the CPS prosecutor at an early stage to discuss and agree a no further action (NFA) policy, recognising that there might still be a need for a risk assessment even if there is a decision to NFA a case. Where a decision is taken to NFA a case, the victim may require

additional support. See the forthcoming APP on [managing sexual offenders and violent offenders](#).

## Victim's Right to Review Scheme

Victims are entitled to seek a review of a decision not to bring charges or to terminate proceedings. The scheme applies to decisions made on or after 5 June 2013.

For further information see:

- [CPS \(2013\) Victim's Right to Review Scheme](#)
- [ACPO \(2013\) National Child Sexual Abuse Review Panel Guidelines for Police Forces & the Crown Prosecution Service \(CPS\)](#) (available from College Learn, which is a RESTRICTED online tool available to [authorised users](#) who are logged on to the College Learn)

## Possible allegations of false complaints

Some lobby or pressure groups campaigning against perceived miscarriages of justice, for convicted offenders or people currently under investigation, can be active in the media and in speaking to other interested audiences. Where an investigation identifies a false allegation, it may be appropriate to support a prosecution for attempting to pervert the course of justice. It is essential in all cases that all steps are taken to test the validity of statements, corroborate accounts and establish an accurate picture.

## Additional considerations

### Exit strategy

As an investigation evolves, the SIO should, at an appropriate juncture, develop an exit strategy. This should be in consultation with the CPS. The diverse nature of this type of investigation means that it is difficult to recommend a generic approach. However, the following should be considered:

- An exit strategy is joint-agency managed.
- There is a gradual scale down of operations.
- The management of future allegations.
- The approach to pending court cases.

- Document storage.
- Civil litigation.
- **Management of the media.**
- Ongoing welfare of the victim(s).

Investigating complex child abuse is time-consuming, resource intensive and costly. The competing demands placed on chief officers require regular assessment to justify continuing the inquiry. Introducing an exit strategy at the earliest opportunity will facilitate this scrutiny.

## Measuring success of an investigation

The success of a child abuse investigation should be measured in a number of ways. These include the:

- number of children protected
- number of incidents where abuse has been stopped
- number of perpetrators arrested, charged and convicted
- number of people barred from working in a position of trust with children
- success of family and civil proceedings in preventing perpetrators having access to children
- provision of compensation to the victims of abuse

## Disclosure of material to family or civil proceedings

Once a case has been through the criminal judicial process, the demands placed on the inquiry through civil litigation can be potentially more acute. The investigation team should include a dedicated point of contact for enquiries relating to civil litigation.

It may assist if victims and witnesses sign a declaration on their MG11 giving informed consent to allow relevant information to be used in other proceedings. This will avoid the requirement for further authorisations or problems with disclosure.

In all cases, disclosure of relevant material from the investigation should take place in consultation with force legal departments and the CPS, taking into account the requirements of the **Data Protection Act 1998** and the **Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996**.

For further information, see [ACPO et al \(2013\) Protocol and Good Practice Model: Disclosure of information in cases of alleged child abuse and linked criminal and care directions hearings.](#)

## Reviews

Periodically, the SIO may wish to consider instigating a review of an ongoing complex child abuse investigation to ensure quality and identify additional investigative opportunities. See the forthcoming APP on major investigation reviews.

Sometimes a serious case review will also be undertaken by local safeguarding children boards. This occurs where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected and either the child has died or been seriously harmed and there is cause for concern about how the local authority, the local safeguarding children board partners or other relevant persons have worked together to safeguard the child.

For further information see [Serious case reviews.](#)

## Tags

Child abuse