

ARGYLL AND BUTE PROTOCOL ON INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS OF HISTORIC ABUSE.

Introduction

The term historical abuse refers to reports of neglect; emotional, physical and sexual abuse which took place before the victim was 16 (or 18, in particular circumstances) and which have been made after a significant time lapse. The complainant may be an adult but could be an older young person making reports of abuse in early childhood. The reports may relate to an individual's experience in the

- x Child sexual exploitation is sexual abuse even where the victim may not see it as such or may feel responsible – no child can consent to their own abuse
- x Perpetrators of historic abuse may have significant access to children now
- x Historic allegations may indicate a need to protect children currently exposed to risk
- x Victims of historic abuse may need access to additional support or counselling and other services

Responding to allegations of Historic Abuse

Services supporting or taking part in investigations relating to individuals reporting historical abuse should be mindful of potential barriers to making a report. These may include the fear of not being believed or that the investigating agencies may side with the abuser(s), especially if the abuse has happened within a care setting.

As with all investigations into suspected or reported abuse, the agencies involved should take a measured, planned approach that balances current child protection risks with support for the individual. Multi-agency communication and collaboration is vital and services should be proactive in ensuring they have a clear understanding of each other's roles and remits.

Individuals reporting historical abuse should be offered ongoing emotional support and agencies should provide or access sources of support both during and after the investigation, as needed.

Practitioners need to be aware that it is not uncommon for a person to experience an increase in post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms as they are questioned about their abusive experiences. Services should be mindful of how this may impact on an individual's ability to convey essential information to inform the investigation.

Key to the investigation of reports of historical abuse is access to relevant records, including those relating to, for example, former staff in residential care settings and foster carers. Locating and retrieving records can be a challenge and the quality and level of detail may vary. Each agency should have clear protocols on record-keeping and record management, including record retrieval.

Where investigations into reports of historical abuse suggest that the reported abuse was part of a wider organised network or involved multiple abusers, agencies should follow the national guidance on managing complex child abuse investigations.

Actions on receiving an allegation of historic sexual abuse.

Where any practitioner receives information which indicates a possible disclosure of historic abuse this must be recorded and discussed with a supervisor, child protection adviser or equivalent at the earliest opportunity.

The supervisor or child protection adviser will contact the police and share the concerns. The Police will convene an Initial Referral Tripartite Discussion (IRTD) to (tuD)

The IRTD will be chaired by an appropriately trained officer of supervisory rank, involve a Locality Manager and nominated representatives from Education and Health. Where the allegation indicates that the abuse was perpetrated by a member of staff or within a service setting, including residential or foster care, HR from the relevant organisation will also be involved.

The IRTD will consider how the allegation of historic abuse needs to be investigated and seek to identify any children currently potentially at risk. See IRTD guidance for further information available on the HUB or the website at <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/protocols-and-guidance> .

Where the IRTD identifies a requirement to make further investigations into allegations of historic abuse an interagency investigation team will be established to oversee all enquiries and will be responsible for the investigation through to its conclusion and for ensuring that any victims receive appropriate support.

Where the IRTD identifies that there may be children currently at risk and there is no requirement for immediate protective action, a Child Protection Case Discussion will normally be convened