

Referrals to the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit (Northumbria Police)

Any suspected, alleged or actual crime must be referred to the Police Protecting Vulnerable People Unit. They will make a decision, based on checks and information sharing whether to initiate a criminal investigation.

The following matters will always be investigated by the Police:

- Sexual offences - with the exception of underage sexual activity where an assessment indicates there is no evidence of abuse of power;
- Physical abuse amounting to offences;
- Previous neglect/cruelty offences;
- Minor offences where there are aggravating features.

Police Child Protection Officers attending Strategy Meetings or conducting Strategy Discussions will record the decisions and actions agreed, including who is to undertake the action and timescale. The Protecting Vulnerable People Unit will ensure that any discrepancies between Children's Social Care and Police records are resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Where a **Child in Need Assessment** has concluded that a Police investigation is inappropriate but subsequent information suggests the situation to be more serious than originally perceived, the case must be referred back to the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit for further assessment.

A joint Children's Social Care enquiry/assessment and Police investigation will always involve joint planning between professionals from the Children's Social Care and the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit. This requires early and precise communication between all agencies at the referral and strategy stage with a complete sharing of information.

Where a joint investigation has been agreed, no contact will take place with a member of the family unless this has been agreed by both a Police Child Protection Officer and the Social Worker or Team Manager and the purpose, frequency and terms of the contact clearly defined and recorded.

Although most activities, for example video interviews, will be conducted jointly, there will be tasks agreed at the planning stage, which will be conducted separately. This is due to the different remits of the Police and Children's Social Care regarding allegations and suspicions of child abuse.

Throughout the process, when different tasks are being undertaken, continual liaison must take place between the Police and Children Social Care.

In urgent criminal cases (critical incidents) the Police may need to act independently of partner agencies. In this event the Police will advise the appropriate agencies of the matter as soon as practicable.

Following a full assessment of the available information the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit may decide at any stage, after discussion with Children's Social Care, e.g. during or following a Strategy Meeting, to terminate a criminal investigation and will inform Children's Social Care of the decision.

