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Adult Safeguarding

This Service Instruction provides guidance on Adult Safeguarding and how the Police Service of Northern Ireland should respond to Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection through criminal investigations, safeguarding activity and normal contact.

It is supplemented by guidance produced by:

[The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice \(APP\) – ‘Major Investigation and Public Protection,](#)

[DHSSPS Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership;](#)

[NIASP Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures.](#)



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1. Objective

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is committed to the principal that everyone has the fundamental right to be safe; harm caused to adults by abuse, exploitation or neglect is not acceptable. The safeguarding needs of Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection are paramount. The PSNI objectives in responding to adult safeguarding are:

- To assess and manage the risks to the Adult at Risk of Harm or Adult in Need of Protection and to manage those risks through appropriate interventions.
- To investigate all reported crimes committed against Adults at Risk of Harm or Adults in Need of Protection in a consistent, robust and proactive manner, in line with investigative standards.
- To work in partnership with other agencies and organisations to collaboratively address adult safeguarding.

It is important that Service responsibilities to Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection are not seen solely as the role of Public Protection Branch (PPB), but that all Police Officers and Police Staff understand this is a normal part of their duties.

2. Definitions

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a term used to describe a person who is in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect.

Adult at Risk of Harm

An 'adult at risk of harm' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances.

Personal characteristics may include, but are not limited to, age, disability, special educational needs, illness, mental or physical frailty or impairment of, or

disturbance in, the functioning of the mind or brain.

Life circumstances may include, but are not limited to, isolation, socio-economic factors and environmental living conditions.

Adult in Need of Protection

An 'adult in need of protection' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their:

- A. Personal Characteristics *and/or*;
- B. Life Circumstances;

and

C. Who is **unable to protect** their own well-being, property, assets, rights or other interests;

and

D. Where the **action or inaction of another person or persons** is causing, or is likely to cause, him/her to be harmed.

*In order to meet the definition of an 'adult in need of protection' either A or B must be present, in addition to **both** elements C and D.*

Self-harm or self-neglect does not sit within the definition of an 'adult in need of protection'.

Persons with alcohol dependency or drug addiction are not viewed as an Adult at Risk of Harm unless they also have a mental illness or disability.

A person with a physical disability or an older person may not deem themselves as being an Adult at Risk of Harm, and may not wish to be dealt with under these procedures. In cases such as these, the incident can be investigated as normal, unless there is a concern that they do not have the capacity to make these decisions for themselves.

Harm

Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection are also entitled to protection against Harm, Safeguarding and provision of support and care services. The protective responsibility lies principally with Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts; equally, the responsibility for responding and acting to prevent immediate danger to persons may lie with PSNI and often with Local Police. Responsibility of preventing harm is also shared more widely.

Harm is the impact on the victim of abuse, exploitation or neglect. It is the result of any action whether by commission or omission, deliberate or as the result of a lack of knowledge or awareness, which may result in the impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, or mental health or well-being. Some harmful conduct may constitute a criminal offence or professional misconduct.

Serious Harm

There are no absolute criteria for judging when harm has become 'serious harm'; however this decision should include consideration of the degree, severity, duration and frequency of harm. The seriousness of harm depends on the impact experienced by the individual. Particularly careful consideration must be given to cases where the adult is unable to understand the impact harm is having on them. This will demand the application of professional judgement to consider all of the available evidence, the concerns and the wishes of the individual and to determine the seriousness of harm and the most appropriate intervention.

Safeguarding

Within this policy the term 'safeguarding' is used in its widest sense, encompassing

activity which prevents harm from occurring in the first place and activity which protects Adults at Risk where Harm has occurred or is likely to occur without intervention.

Further definitions of abuse can be found in the [NIASP Protocol for Joint Investigation of Adult Safeguarding Cases](#).

3. Multi-agency Response to Adult Safeguarding

HSC Trusts and the PSNI are the lead agencies with responsibility for adult protection. Each HSC Trust will have an Adult Protection Gateway Service which will receive adult protection referrals. Referrals outside normal working hours should be made to the Regional Emergency Social Work Service (RESWS).

The Protocol for Joint Investigation of Adult Safeguarding Cases guides interagency referral, consultation and information exchange and working arrangements and provides clarity in respect of the roles of the Police Service and HSC Trusts in the delivery of the adult protection response.

Police will remain the Lead Agency for all criminal investigation elements within an Adult at Risk of Harm or Adult in Need of Protection abuse enquiry. This includes all aspects of gathering evidence for criminal proceedings such as obtaining forensic evidence, medical evidence, photographs, statements etc. and will also include any evidential interview with the victim or other witnesses.

This does not preclude the participation of other agencies in aspects of this work, but as Police provide necessary skills in evidence-gathering they will retain responsibility and accountability for this activity.

In dealing with Criminal Offences involving Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection, Police work in partnership with Social Services and decisions in the Criminal Investigation will be informed by this. Considerations for Police instigating a Criminal Investigation will include the best interest of the Adult at Risk. Views expressed by Agencies and other parties regarding the best interest of the Victim should be noted and considered.

Within the context of a multi-agency response to Adult Safeguarding various

other statutory bodies have a role. Further details can be found in [DHSSPS Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership](#).

To assist police, the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership (NIASP) provides a wide range of support for our activity. Dozens of community, faith, care, volunteer and charitable organisations are represented in our partnership with NIASP and are available to assist police delivering services at the local level. A full list of the available contacts is available on the [NIASP website](#).

4. Key Roles/ Responsibilities in Responding to Adult Safeguarding

Police Role in the Investigation of Crime against Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection

Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection are entitled to the same protections of Law and the same level of service from the Police, as any other member of society. The aims of Criminal

Investigations involving Adults at Risk shall remain to:

- Identify if crime has been committed;
- Identify those responsible; and
- Identify and secure the best evidence for criminal proceedings.

Decisions on the allocation of a report or incident for enquiry by:

- Public Protection Unit (PPU),
- Reactive and Organised Crime (ROC),
- Local Policing Team (LPT) or
- Case Progression Team (CPT)

will be taken by Public Protection Branch Central Referral Unit (CRU).

Best practice is that all victims will be visited and cases allocated within 24 hours.

C7 Public Protection staff will investigate **crimes** where there has been an **abuse of trust** by a carer or family member of an **Adult in Need of Protection**.

All other investigations will be allocated according to the PSNI Case Allocation Policy.

Where any safeguarding concerns are identified for either an Adult at Risk or an Adult in Need of Protection where a crime is not suspected or alleged these concerns

should be referred directly to the Trust Adult Protection Gateway Service or Regional Emergency Social Work Service (RESWS) out of hours. Contact details can be found on PoliceNet C7 Public Protection Branch, Adult Safeguarding.

Appendix A Key Roles and Responsibilities

Responsible	Compliance	✓
Contact Management Centre (CMC)	Apply existing call handling procedures and task occurrence to CRU Whiteboard.	
Attending/Investigating Officer (AO/IO)	<p>Deal with the incident; conduct a robust investigation in line with minimum standards.</p> <p>Assess risk. Take positive action to safeguard the Adult at Risk of Harm or Adult in Need of Protection</p> <p>Brief supervisor as to incident, action and safeguarding actions.</p> <p>Email CRU</p>	
Sergeant	Review initial investigative and safeguarding actions.	
Central Referral Unit (CRU)	<p>Make referral to Social Services/RQIA (Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority) completing AJP1 form (Joint Protocol Adult Protection Referral Information) if required.</p> <p>Allocate the incident to the most suitable investigation team in line with the PSNI Case Allocation Policy.</p>	
CRU Supervisors	Dip sample of Adult Safeguarding referrals to ensure compliance with Joint Protocol	
Public Protection Branch	<p>Investigate cases of Adult in Need of Protection Abuse of Trust.</p> <p>Provide advice to colleagues outside of PPU who are allocated investigations under Joint Protocol.</p> <p>Appointment of Adult Safeguarding Champion</p>	

Appendix B Contact Us

Service Instruction Author

Detective Inspector PPU

Branch Email

zPublicProtectionSecretariat