



## **INTERAGENCY CHILD PROTECTION GUIDANCE**

### **HANDBOOK**

#### **AIMS**

- To help agencies and professionals work together to protect children from the worst forms of abuse; those that constitute criminal offences
- Good practice in child protection must be based on effective collaboration amongst all agencies.
- This child protection policy is particularly relevant to those who work in health and education, the police, the Justice system, the Prison Service and others working for and with children. The lead agency will be the Department of Social Welfare.

This document:

- Sets out roles and responsibilities of different agencies and professionals;
- Outlines the way in which joint working arrangements should be agreed, implemented and reviewed through the mechanism of a National Child Protection Committee (NCPC);
- Sets out the processes which should be followed when there are concerns about a child, and the action which should be taken to protect the child;

Additional documents outline the kinds of abuse that will initially be addressed by this system and how they are to be recognized by professionals.

## **INTRODUCTION**

All children have the right to protection from abuse and all adults have responsibilities to ensure that children receive such protection. Each agency has its specific duties and/or powers in relation to children and are required to work together to protect them.

Most poorly resourced countries are only just beginning to address the problem of child abuse. In the first instance, therefore, the most serious forms of abuse must be addressed. As experience and systems develop, and further resources become available, other forms of harmful ill treatment will also be included in the policy.

No one agency can, or should, work in isolation from the others.

Child protection is a complex and demanding area of work. The distress and shock to front-line professionals caused by child abuse and the anxiety or uncertainty over a child's welfare must be recognized and acknowledged. Furthermore, professionals working in this area need to be supported

The common responses to abuse (reflected by the child, by the parents and /or carers, the extended family and agency staff involved in the child protection process) should be taken into account. There is a need to ensure that understandable emotions such as anger, fear or disbelief do not result in a failure to respond to suspicions or allegations- and that there is open discussion and open acknowledgement of the difficulty and distress of the process.

The welfare of children is a corporate responsibility of the Department of Social welfare, Department of State for Health, Department of State for Education, Department of State for Justice and the Police, working in partnership with other institutions, NGOs and service users, parents and carers.

The Department of Social welfare should take the lead responsibility for the establishment and effective functioning of the National Child Protection Committees (NCPC) - the interagency forums which act as a focal point for local co-operation to safeguard children.

The Department of Social Welfare has the duty and power to undertake enquiries into possible child abuse if they have reason to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, to enable the Department to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or support the child's welfare. The Department needs the help of other agencies in order to do this effectively.

Experience shows that it is in the best interests of the child to bring any concern or suspicion of child abuse to the attention of the investigative agencies. Sharing of information and early discussion on an interagency basis are necessary to decide whether, indeed, there is a child protection concern and then, if so, to plan interagency action.

Interagency collaboration in child protection is therefore, essential from the earliest suspicion of potential abuse.

## **Chapter 1 Types of abuse to be addressed initially as part of the child protection system**

### **Life threatening child abuse**

- Intentional suffocation
- Subdural haemorrhage in an infant
- Ruptured abdominal organ
- Deliberate poisoning
- Intentional drowning

### **Serious physical abuse**

- deliberate burns eg cigarettes, scalding, holding against hot objects
- multiple fractures, often at different times
- multiple deep bruises of different ages
- any major bruise in an infant, especially on face
- ritual punishments (eg regular and savage beatings usually with implements)
- deliberate starvation as distinct from neglect through failure to provide adequate nutrition
- inducement of illness

### **Serious sexual abuse**

Any penetrative abuse in a pre-pubertal child (vaginal, rectal or oral)

Any penetrative abuse in a post-pubertal child (vaginal, rectal or oral) (< 18 years) without consent

## Chapter 2 roles and responsibilities of different agencies and professionals in child protection

### The Department of Social Welfare

The Department will usually already provide care and support for adults, children and families; people with mental health problems; ex-prisoners; children in conflict with the law; families, especially children with special needs due to disability; children at risk of harm; abandoned children; children who have been orphaned needing placement in foster care or placed for adoption.

The responsibilities of the Department of Social Welfare should be seen in the context of this broad range of social care and support, so that children and families can be helped and supported in an integrated way which recognizes the range and diversity of their needs and strengths.

The Department of Social Welfare, acting in order to fulfill their functions, has specific legal duties in respect of children under the Children's Act (assuming that such a law has been passed by the Government: if not it is an essential requirement under the UNCRC)

In some cases, children can be safeguarded from harm by working with parents, family members and other significant adults in the child's life to make the child safe, and to promote his or her development, within the current close family setting or through exploration of the extended family. In some of the most serious forms of abuse to be addressed initially by the system, the child may not be safe within his/her existing close or extended family and alternative home based care may be needed through fostering outside the extended family.

The Department of Social Welfare should act as the principal point of contact for children in need of protection or about whom there are serious welfare concerns. They may be contacted directly by parents or family members seeking help, concerned friends and neighbours, or by professionals and other institutions and organisations.

In order to fulfill its required responsibilities to children in need of protection from serious abuse, the Department of Social Welfare will **urgently**:

- Take referrals
- Check records
- Make enquiries
- Co-ordinate an inter-agency assessment on the best way of managing the protection of the child
- Make joint enquiries with the police
- Convene strategy planning meetings (without family present) and/or case conferences (where family members are present)
- Keep a "register" of children who are felt to be at risk and require a child protection plan
- Make referrals of cases of serious abuse to the Court
- Supervise children on behalf of the Court
- Co-ordinate ongoing inter-agency intervention

## The police

Protecting life and preventing crimes are primary tasks of the Police. Children are citizens who have the right to the protection offered by the criminal justice system. The Police have a duty and responsibility to investigate criminal offences committed against children, and such investigation should be carried out sensitively, thoroughly and professionally. In dealing with offences involving a child victim, the Police will normally work in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and other relevant institutions.

Senior police officers who are willing to become involved and can be trained in the management of serious child abuse need to be identified for each region of the country. They will individually undergo a course in recognition of abuse and its management as part of the interagency collaboration on protection.

The Police must recognize the fundamental importance of inter-agency working in combating child abuse, as illustrated by hopefully existing arrangements for joint collaboration between the Police and Department of Social Welfare in baby abandonment cases. Every Police Station in the country must have a Police Child Welfare Unit, which despite their variation in structure and staffing levels, must take primary responsibility for handling and investigating all cases involving children. Ideally, Police Child Welfare Unit staff should, as a minimum, investigate all aspects of child abuse allegations, whether within the family or outside it, where the victim is under 18 years old. It is important that such units include sufficient staff with investigative experience commensurate with the serious nature of this work and the crimes committed.

It is also important that safeguarding children is not, within a policing context, seen as solely the role of the Police Child Welfare Unit officers, but that **all** police officers understand it is a fundamental part of their duties. As the Children's Act should place a duty on every person to report cases of child abuse or the violation of the rights of a child to the Police or the Department of Social Welfare, it is important for the Police Child Welfare Units to respond efficiently and effectively to the demands this may bring.

The Police are committed to sharing information and intelligence with other agencies where this is necessary to protect children. This includes a responsibility to ensure that officers representing the force at a child protection conference are fully informed about the case as well as being experienced in risk assessment and the decision-making process. Similarly, they can expect other agencies to share with them information and intelligence they hold to enable the police to carry out their duties.

The Police should be notified as soon as possible where a criminal offence has been committed, or is suspected of having been committed, against a child. Where The Department of Social Welfare is the first to be notified, it is essential that any serious abuse (crimes against children) is also notified to the Police Child Welfare Unit.

The Department of Social Welfare and the Police should have in place an agreed joint protocol to guide both institutions in how child protection enquiries should be conducted and, in particular, the circumstances in which joint enquiries are appropriate.

The decision as to whether or not criminal proceedings should be initiated is based on three factors:

- whether or not there is sufficient evidence to prosecute,
- whether it is in the public interest that proceedings should be instigated against a particular offender;
- most importantly, whether or not a criminal prosecution is in the best interest of the child.

Although, the Police may commence proceedings, it is the responsibility of the office of the Director of Public Prosecution to review the evidence and, where appropriate, conduct all criminal prosecutions. In some cases advice from the office of the Director of Public Prosecution will be sought prior to proceedings being initiated.

The evidential standard required by the criminal courts is "proof beyond reasonable doubt" that the defendant committed the offence. The burden of proof rests with the prosecution; defendants do not have to prove their innocence. Proceedings for the protection of children must take place in the Children's Court. It is not unusual for the Police or the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution to decide that criminal proceedings cannot be instigated against a person suspected of child abuse on the grounds that there is insufficient evidence to meet the higher standards of proof. This should NOT deter professionals and individuals from ensuring a full investigation is completed, as prosecution should only be viewed as one element in the larger process of child protection.

The role of the Police in child protection is one of:

- Prevention of severe abuse by whatever means they can, including the factor of deterrence
- Investigation of serious abuse against children in collaboration with other agencies and under the lead of the The Department of Social Welfare
- Protection of the victim and other potential victims from future abuse
- Bringing offenders before an appropriate court to be dealt with according to the law

Where the Police have reason to suspect that child abuse has occurred they will contact the Department of Social Welfare to discuss the referral before instigating a formal enquiry. This will apply in all circumstance **except where any possible delay might seriously jeopardize the child's safety or result in the loss of criminal evidence.**

In order to fulfill their responsibilities the Police may

- Assist in education and awareness programmes
- Liaise with colleague agencies
- Investigate allegations of crime through joint enquiries with the Department of Social Welfare
- Gather evidence in a forensically reliable manner
- Arrange medical examinations as necessary
- Carry out investigative interviews in collaboration with The Department of Social Welfare
- Attend strategy planning meetings and/or case conferences
- Attend court

## **The Director of Public Prosecutions**

The prosecution of crime is usually the responsibility of the Director of Public Prosecution. His/her representative at the Divisional or Municipal level is the Magistrate (or other appropriate named official) whose responsibilities encompass the prosecution of crime. Generally, reports are submitted by the police and the Magistrate will consider whether or not to prosecute, subject to the general direction and control of the Director of Public Prosecution. Before acting upon a report, the Magistrate must first be satisfied that the circumstances disclose a crime known within the laws of the country. He or she must then consider whether the evidence is sufficient, admissible and reliable. If not, no further action will be taken. When there is sufficient evidence the Magistrate will decide whether it is in the public interest to prosecute.

In deciding if there is sufficient evidence, the magistrate must decide, on the basis of the available admissible evidence, whether the standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt can be satisfied. The burden of proof in criminal cases is more onerous than that required in civil proceedings where, generally, proof on the balance of probabilities is required.

The magistrate can be contacted for advice in cases where the investigation or assessment of evidence is complex or where there are concerns in relation to the adequacy of support arrangements for child witnesses.

## **The Family Court**

Although most of the serious abuse subject to these initial proceedings falls under the category of criminal offenses, there might be certain forms of abuse that cannot be defined within the existing criminal codes.

In addition, as described above, there could be evidence of serious abuse but the level of evidence available falls below the required burden of proof for criminal prosecution. Examples might include sexual abuse where it is the word of the child against that of the perpetrator and where there is no forensic proof available.

For these cases a different court will be required. This would act in a non-adversarial way to examine all the evidence and a Judge trained in child protection would then be required to make a decision on the best way of managing the case and in particular always what is in the best interest of the child. The Judge would have the power to separate the child from his/her family if it was considered to be in the child's best interest.

Training for the Judges involved in this Family Court is an essential next step.



### **The Department of Reproductive and Child Health (or equivalent)**

All health professionals, in government, private sector and other agencies, play an essential part in recognising and responding to child abuse. Health professionals are often the first to be aware of injuries resulting from serious abuse and must share information about any concerns with the Department of Social Welfare or the Police at an early stage.

The involvement of health professionals is important at all stages of child protection:

- Recognising severe abuse in children<sup>1</sup>
- Contributing to enquires about a child and family<sup>2</sup>,
- Participating in strategy planning meetings and child protection conferences;
- Providing therapeutic help to abused children and to parents under stress (e.g. mental illness)
- Playing a part, through the child protection plan, in safeguarding children from significant harm;
- Contributing to follow up case conferences

A senior paediatrician and a senior nurse/midwife (designated senior professionals) should be appointed within the country to take the professional lead on all aspects of the health service contribution to safeguarding children. Designated professionals are a vital source of professional advice on child protection matters to other professionals and to the Department of Social Welfare. They will play an important role in promoting and influencing relevant training, skilled professional involvement in child protection processes in line with Child Protection Committee protocols, and participation in follow-up case conferences. Their roles should always be explicitly defined in their job descriptions and they should be allowed sufficient time to fulfil their child protection responsibilities effectively. Appointment as a designated professional does not, in itself, signify responsibility to personally provide daily aspects of child protection maintenance- but the responsibility is to ensure that child protection within the country is dealt with in a timely and effective manner, adhering to all relevant protocols. It is important to ensure that all health professionals are provided with access to these designated experts who can provide expert advice on child protection at any time that this is required.

Senior professionals should receive adequate remuneration for this work.

All health professionals should be trained to recognise reliably the symptoms and signs of severe abuse.<sup>3</sup> They must also know how to act upon their concerns in line with National Child Protection Committee procedures. They should also receive regular updates as part of their post registration education programme, in particular clear outlines of existing Child Protection Committee procedures.

All health professionals in hospitals, major and minor health centres and in the community must be aware of local procedures, and know the names and contact details of the relevant named and

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<sup>1</sup> Special courses in the recognition of serious physical and sexual abuse are needed for all health professionals who come into contact with children

<sup>2</sup> In all cases confidentiality of medical information must not lead to the with-holding of information relevant to the possible abuse of her child and the General Medical and Nursing Councils if present in the country need to give guidance on this.

<sup>3</sup> A one day skill and scenario based training course on this has been prepared by MCAI/ALSG

designated professionals able to act appropriately with regard to possible or actual severe abuse. They should be alert to carers who seek medical care from a number of sources in order to conceal the repeated nature of a child's injuries. Specialist Paediatric advice in child protection should be available at all times to Accident and Emergency units and all wards where children receive care. If a child – or children from the same household – presents repeatedly with injuries which doctors, nurses, midwives or other staff find worrying, they should act upon their concerns in accordance with this guidance.

Although the Department of Social Welfare must always be informed by the health professional raising concerns, and in most cases should be the first point of contact, health professionals must consider if an emergency exists where urgent circumstances require the earliest call to be made to the Police. Urgent circumstances could include, for example, the immediate avoidance of the destruction of evidence, or the need for an immediate place of safety for a child.

Midwives and other health professionals caring for adult women must be aware of the possible link between domestic violence and severe child abuse.

## **The Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education (or equivalent)**

All schools have a pastoral responsibility towards their pupils. They can play a vital part in the recognition of serious abuse. Teachers are likely to have the greatest level of routine contact with children and they can contribute a great deal to recognizing serious abuse or the possible indicators that this might be occurring in a child in their class.

Children can be helped to understand what is and is not acceptable behaviour towards them, and taught about staying safe from harm, and how to speak up if they have worries or concerns. Equally, children subject to any child protection measures must continue to receive appropriate education.

If a teacher is concerned about possible abuse, he/she must refer concerns to the Department of Social Welfare or the police.

When a child has special educational needs, or has a disability, schools will have important information about the child's level of understanding and the most effective means of communicating with the child. They will also be well-placed to give a view on the impact of treatment or intervention on the child's care or behaviour.

The Department of State for Education itself does not have a direct investigative responsibility in child protection, but educational institutions have a role in assisting the Police or the Department of Social Welfare by referring concerns and providing information for child protection enquiries.

Where a child of school going age is the subject of an inter-agency Child Protection Plan, the Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education (or the school concerned) should be involved in case conferences and the preparation of the plan. The role and responsibilities of the Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education in contributing to actions to safeguard the child, and promote her or his welfare, should be clearly identified.

### **Throughout the Education system:**

All staff should be alert to the signs of severe abuse and know to whom they should report concerns or suspicions

All schools should have a designated member of staff with knowledge and skills in recognizing and acting upon child protection concerns following special training. The designated member of staff should act as source of expertise and advice, and is responsible for coordinating action within the institution and liaising with other agencies

All educational institutions should be aware of the child protection procedures established by the National Child Protection Committee and the Department of Social Welfare

All schools should have procedures for handling suspected cases of abuse, including procedures to be followed if a member of staff is accused of or suspected of abuse, either within the school or in his/her home

The School Board of Directors or Governors should exercise their child protection responsibilities, in particular in response to allegations against teachers and head teachers, and in ensuring that there are school child protection policies in place

Where a school is concerned that a child may have “disappeared” or about any aspect of a child’s transfer which gives rise to concern about a child’s welfare, it should report its concern to The Department of Social Welfare or the Police.

The Head Teacher or Principal or person deputizing for them has a duty to support the designated professional in referring cases to the Department of Social Welfare where there is suspicion that a child is in need of protection. Proof is not required at this stage. If there is doubt about whether to refer, the Department of Social Welfare should, in any case, be advised of the circumstances of the allegation and a strategy planning meeting can take place. The Regional Education Directorate should also be notified.

The head of the educational establishment or the person deputizing for the head, after judging that there may be grounds for suspicion, should then contact the Department of Social Welfare and/or the Police depending on urgency and safety issues.

Although the Department of Social Welfare must always be informed by the head or their deputy or the designated teacher for child protection and in most cases should be the first point of contact, teaching professionals must consider if an emergency exists where urgent circumstances require the earliest call to be made to the Police. Urgent circumstances could include, for example, the immediate avoidance of the destruction of evidence, or the need for an immediate place of safety for a child.

If the child has sustained an injury which requires immediate medical attention, obtain confirmation from the Department of Social Welfare as to the medical arrangements which will be made, and co-operate as necessary with arrangements to take the child to hospital or nearest health facility

Should the lead teacher decide that the child’s condition is a medical emergency then first aid and urgent removal to hospital or nearest health facility become first priority immediately followed by notifying the Department of Social Welfare and the Police. In such cases, the child should be accompanied to hospital or health facility by an appropriate member of the school teaching staff and the circumstances explained to the nurse or doctor in charge.

On the same day the head teacher or the person deputizing for the head should report the incident to the Regional Director of Education. A written report should be forwarded to these personnel and a copy kept in a confidential file set aside for this purpose within the educational establishment.

If the head of the school or educational establishment is suspected of involvement in the alleged abuse then the member of staff to whom the case is reported should contact the Department of Social Welfare and the Regional Director of Education or any person deputizing for him or her.

**The role of Education staff in child protection can be summarized as follows:**

- Identification of severe abuse
- Attendance at a strategy planning meeting or case conference
- Referring concerns about the possibility of severe abuse in a child to the Department of Social Welfare or the Police
- Assisting in an inter-agency assessment of the child’s needs and identifying possible supports.
- Assisting in compilation and/or delivery of child protection plan
- Monitoring of children on the child protection “register”
- Delivery of personal safety education programmes in schools thereby equipping children with the skills, knowledge and understanding in keeping themselves safe from sexual abuse.

The Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education has a responsibility to ensure that members of staff or employees accused of crimes against children are appropriately investigated.

Staff members or employees convicted of crimes against a child should be dealt with both through the law and their place within the education system should be reviewed under particular disciplinary measures to ensure that children are kept safe from known or convicted offenders.

## **The prison service**

The Prison Service has a duty (UNCRC) to protect children (<18 years) in its custody from physical or sexual abuse.

Children must be separated from adult prisoners.

The prison service is expected to establish its own child protection committee, to appoint a child protection coordinator and to establish, in consultation with the Child Protection Committee, a local child protection policy, detailing arrangements for acting on allegations or concerns that a young person may have experienced, or is at risk of experiencing significant harm.

The Prison Service works closely with other agencies to identify any prisoner who may represent a risk to the public on release. Regular risk assessments take account of progress made during the sentence, and inform decisions on post-sentence work with individual prisoners. The Director General of Prisons need to notify the Department of Social Welfare of plans to release prisoners convicted of offences against children so that appropriate action can be taken by agencies in the community to minimize risk.

The Prison Service recognises the importance for children (<18 years of age) who are in prison of being allowed and enabled to maintain contact with their family.

## **The role of non-governmental and civil society organisations**

Many Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organisations play a significant role in their work with children and families. They can provide a wide range of services and programmes aimed at preventing or reducing the risk of child abuse, or helping families recover from abuse. Such organisations can also offer advice and support to the Department of Social Welfare in its child protection work. Statutory agencies should provide advice and support to voluntary organisations in promoting effective child protection practice in their organisations.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should have a clear protocol for their staff in responding to concerns about a child's safety and protection. Where staff in NGOs have concerns about a child's protection and welfare or are told by a child of an abusive experience, they should follow the guidance in this document i.e. record in detail what they have seen or heard (do not subject the child to intrusive questioning) and pass on any concerns immediately to their designated supervisor and ensure their concerns urgently reach the Department of Social Welfare.

Non-Governmental organizations working with children must set in place procedures to ensure that none of the staff they employ have or might be themselves involved in the abuse of children. If the organization suspects one of their employees of abusing a child, they must report their concerns, even if unfounded, to the Department of Social Welfare.

## **Day care services for pre-school children**

Day Care Services and pre-school nurseries play an increasingly important part in the lives of large numbers of young children. Many services will be offering help to families and children with problems and stresses.

All those providing day care services should know how to recognize and respond to potential indicators of severe abuse. Day care providers in the private and voluntary sectors should have agreed procedures for when and how to contact the the Department of Social Welfare about an individual child.

Providers of day care and pre-school services working with children must set in place procedures to ensure that none of the staff they employ have or might be themselves involved in the abuse of children. If the organization suspects one of their employees of abusing a child, they must report their concerns, even if unfounded, to the Department of Social Welfare.



## **The wider community**

Very often referrals concerning a child at possible risk from severe abuse come from the general public. Children only rarely make initial allegations directly to the Police or Department of Social Welfare and instead it can often be a family member, friend or neighbour who first becomes aware of concern about possible risks to a child.

Everybody shares some responsibility for recognising severe abuse and preventing further harm to children. Agencies who work with children and families are in an ideal position to inform and educate the general public about their duties and responsibilities to protect children. Relevant information might include how and when to make contact where there are concerns about a child, and the response that members of the community should expect to a referral.

The media are also an important source of information about child abuse and it is essential that they act responsibly. The media must always place the best interests of the individual child first and must not breach their confidentiality. If the media act wrongly they should be subject to legal proceedings initiated by the Family Court system.

Members of communities also possess strengths and skills which can be harnessed for the benefit of vulnerable children and their families, including children at risk of significant harm. Community resources might include self-help and mutual aid initiatives, information resources and networks, support services, and advocacy and campaigning initiatives.

Child protection needs to be seen as the responsibility of not just the statutory agencies but also the community in which children live. The Department of Social Welfare and other relevant agencies should produce and distribute information sheets and leaflets to the general public to promote a sense of shared responsibility. Professionals must make it clear to the members of the public that they have an obligation to pass information about child abuse to the statutory agencies. Every effort must be made by the Police and/or Department of Social Welfare to ensure confidentiality for the informant.

## **Chapter 3 How to handle individual cases of suspected or proven severe child physical or sexual abuse**

### **Introduction**

This section sets out the ways in which agencies and professionals should work together to identify whether severe abuse has occurred and if so protect the individual child from further harm.

There should always be the opportunity to discuss child welfare concerns with, and seek advice from, colleagues, heads, a designated or named professional, or other agencies, but:

- Never delay emergency action to protect a child
- Always record in writing concerns and discussions about the possibility of abuse, whether or not further action is taken;
- At the close of a referral record in writing who will be taking what action, or if no further action is required.

### **What to do when severe abuse is alleged suspected or identified?**

A referral may come from any source, for example, another agency, member of the public or a concerned professional.

In some instances, the referral may clearly identify that a child has been or is at risk of severe abuse and in need of child protection. In other situations, it may be less clear as to whether there is a child protection issue and instead may be more general concerns about a child in need. Alternatively, there may be an allegation of a specific incident that requires investigation.

### **Outline of the child protection investigation following allegations of serious abuse**

- If the designated social worker decides after the initial inquiries that no immediate action should be taken, this must be discussed with the Director of Social welfare and endorsed by him/her
- Allegations of child abuse are not always clear or complete. Consideration should be given by the senior social welfare officer to interviewing the person who made the referral in the first instance if further information or clarification is required. This should not be done if the nature of the referral warrants an immediate approach to the family or if the information is sufficient.
- Where the level of concern is great, the Department of Social Welfare should consult with the police. Agreement should be reached on how the investigation should proceed. This may take the form of a senior social worker undertaking the initial stages of the investigation and thereafter collaborating with the police or a joint investigation by the police and Department of Social Welfare. Efforts must be made to avoid alerting the alleged perpetrator of concerns at this stage to prevent the child possibly being intimidated and silenced.
- Throughout the course of the investigation where there is indication that a parent has abused a child efforts should be made by the police to interview the parent in the first instance to avoid contamination of evidence. Both Department of Social Welfare and the Police should bear in mind that the safety and welfare of the child is paramount and takes precedence over the gathering of evidence for a criminal trial.

- Where the referral alleges that only one parent has abused the child, efforts should be made to seek permission from the non-abusing parent to interview the child.
- Where it is suspected that a parent or both parents have been involved in abusing a child or is/are conniving with the alleged perpetrator in the abuse of the child, consideration should be given to interviewing the child without parental permission.
- If the child alleges that he/she has been abused, other children with whom the alleged offender has had contact, both within and outside the household, may be interviewed with the parent's and child's permission.
- If after initial investigation, it is suspected that the report of abuse is true, a medical examination will be arranged (the child being supported by a member of her/his extended family).
- The decision taken on immediate care arrangements will be transmitted to parents.
- The main task of the police is to attempt to ascertain if a crime has been committed and gather evidence which may be used in the criminal court.
- The main task of Department of Social Welfare is to protect children from future harm. This involves attempting to ascertain if a child has been abused and if so to make plans to protect the child.
- The Department of Social Welfare to consider the long term care of the child, whether or not prosecution is being pursued.
- Timescales should be agreed. It is the responsibility of the Department of Social Welfare to ensure that timescales are met throughout the investigation.
- Sometimes the criminal conviction of the abusing adult is important in the protection of other children. In these circumstances, the Department of Social Welfare can best support the police by utilizing their skills in communicating with children at a joint interviewing stage. If children are interviewed in a skilled manner and feel able to talk about any abuse, then this evidence may assist in a possible conviction.
- The police must have the protection and welfare of the child who has been abused as their priority when conducting investigations. Investigations which are child-centered are more likely to succeed at court and there is greater likelihood of a conviction.
- In cases of organized abuse or involvement of multiple abusers or victims as in child pornography or prostitution, communication must take place between the Director of the Department of Social Welfare and senior management of the police and agreement reached on who should have overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the investigation. This person should co-ordinate the activities of the workers involved in the investigation and report to the Director of Social welfare and a senior police officer.

At each stage of the investigation a record of the decision(s) taken, with reasons, should be made. It is essential that the Department of Social Welfare and Police each keep a file for the case.

The referrer and the parents of the children should be informed, where appropriate and as and when necessary, about the outcome of the case.

The object of enquiries is to determine whether action is needed to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child or children who are the subject of the enquiries. Those making enquiries should always be alert to the potential needs and safety of any siblings, or other children in the household of the child in question. In addition, enquiries may also need to cover children in other households, with whom the alleged offender may have had contact. At the same time, the police will need (where relevant) to establish the facts about any offence which may have been committed against a child, and to collect evidence.

Assessing the needs of a child and the capacity of their parents or wider family network adequately to ensure their safety, health and development, very often depends on building a jigsaw picture of the child's situation on the basis of information from many sources. Enquiries should always involve separate interviews with the child who is the subject of concern and – in the great majority of cases – interviews with parents and/or carers, and observation of the interactions between parents and children. Enquiries may also include interviews with those who are personally and professionally connected with the child; specific examinations or assessments of the child by other professionals (e.g. medical or developmental checks, assessment of emotional or psychological state); and interviews with those who are personally and professionally connected with the child's parents and/or carers.

Individuals should always be enabled to participate fully in the enquiry process. Where a child or parent is disabled, it may be necessary to provide help with communication to enable the child or parent to express him/herself to the best of his or her ability. Where a child or parent speaks a language other than that spoken by the interviewer, there should be an interpreter provided. If the child is unable to take part in an interview because of age or understanding, alternative means of understanding the child's perspective should be used, including observation where children are very young or where they have communication difficulties.

Children are a key, and sometimes the only, source of information about what has happened to them, especially in child sexual abuse cases, but also in physical and other forms of abuse. Accurate and complete information is essential for taking action to promote the welfare of the child, as well as for any criminal proceeding which may be instigated concerning an alleged perpetrator of abuse. When children are first approached, the nature and extent of any harm suffered by them may not be clear, nor whether a criminal offence has been committed. It is important that even initial discussions with children are conducted in a way that minimizes any distress caused to them, and maximizes the likelihood that they will provide accurate and complete information. It is important, wherever possible, to have separate communication with a child. Leading or suggestive communication should always be avoided. Children may need time, and more than one opportunity, in order to develop sufficient trust to communicate any concerns they may have, especially if they have communication difficulties, learning difficulties, are very young, or are experiencing mental health problems.

Exceptionally, a joint enquiries/investigation team may need to speak to a suspected child victim without the knowledge of the parent or carer. Relevant circumstances would include the possibility that a child would be threatened or otherwise coerced into silence; a strong likelihood that important evidence would be destroyed; or that the child in question did not wish the parent to be involved at that stage, and is competent to take that decision. In all cases where the police are involved, the decision about when to inform the parent or carer will have a bearing on the conduct of police investigations, and the strategy discussion should decide on the most appropriate timing of parental participation.

## **Actions immediately following allegations**

### **a) When severe abuse is alleged by a child to a professional**

The health or education professional to whom the child first confides an allegation of abuse needs to handle that confidence with care, asking sufficient questions to confirm that there is an allegation of severe abuse but avoiding cross-examination or detailed questioning of the child.

- (a) Listen carefully to the child
- (b) Discuss with the senior colleague designated for child protection (if there is one)
- (c) Tell the child what action you are taking.
- (d) Contact without delay the Department of Social Welfare<sup>4</sup> or police if there is an immediate danger of further abuse
- (e) All information should be recorded in writing

NB: There can be no physical signs in sexual abuse and the child's account of what has happened therefore assumes a greater importance. If the child is being abused by a member of their family, they may be under great pressure not to tell, and it is not always possible to be as open with parents/carers initially as one would be when investigating other forms of abuse.

Attention must always be paid to the needs and safety of other siblings or children in the household with whom the alleged offender may have had contact.

A social worker from the Department of Social Welfare will provide advice and guidance as to whether a referral needs to be made and any other appropriate action (for example medical examination and forensic testing) that needs to be taken.

### **b) When severe abuse is alleged to a professional by a person other than the child**

- (a) Discuss with the senior colleague designated for child protection (if there is one)
- (b) Tell the informant what action you are taking.
- (c) Contact without delay the Department of Social Welfare or police if there is an immediate danger of further abuse
- (d) All information should be recorded in writing
- (e) Keep confidential the details of the informant

Attention must always be paid to the needs and safety of other siblings or children in the household with whom the alleged offender may have had contact.

A social worker from the Department of Social Welfare will provide advice and guidance as to whether a referral needs to be made and any other appropriate action (for example medical examination and forensic testing) that needs to be taken.

### **c) When severe abuse is identified on physical examination in a health facility or elsewhere by a health professional**

Any emergency medical treatment that is required as a result of severe abuse must be a priority of health professionals involved. Once the child is stable a referral must be made to the Department of Social Welfare, as above.

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<sup>4</sup> the Department of Social Welfare's role includes the provision of a consultation service

#### **d) When an allegation of abuse comes from a non-governmental organisation**

If an organisation other than the Police or Department of Social Welfare is the first to be contacted in an instance of child abuse, the relevant officer in such an organisation should contact the Department of Social Welfare and/or the Police and fill out the **official referral form**.

#### **e) Determine whether there is an Immediate Risk of further harm**

In circumstances where it is unclear whether the child is at risk of significant harm, Department of Social Welfare should make initial enquiries into the matter. This could involve a visit by Department of Social Welfare to assess the matter. As a result of initial enquiries Department of Social Welfare may decide to pursue an inter-agency assessment and any possible risk to the child. Alternatively or during this process, it may become apparent that the child is, or likely to become at risk of significant harm. In such instances the Police should be notified to discuss possible responses.

If the child is in danger, the Police and the Department for Social Welfare should work together and ensure the child is protected in a place of safety.

#### **f) Referring to the Police**

Where initial enquiries of Department of Social Welfare have established child abuse, they should notify the Police about the referral as soon as possible, and together decide upon an initial strategy which would usually involve a strategy planning meeting..

#### **g) Referring to Health professionals**

Where it has been decided to pursue child protection procedures, the most appropriate health professional able to undertake a medical assessment (history and examination) should be contacted as soon as possible.

### **Actions of The Department of Social Welfare and Police following allegations**

#### **a) Immediate investigations**

All allegations must be investigated or assessed without delay. Since this initial child protection system is aimed at managing severe child abuse, a joint Social welfare/Police investigation will always be required. The main tasks are:

- (a) To establish the facts about the circumstances giving rise to the diagnosis of severe abuse.
- (b) To identify the likelihood/danger of further abuse
- (d) To decide protective or other action in relation to the child and any others in the family

The designated key worker from the Department of Social Welfare should contact all those agencies that may have information concerning the child and/or other members of the child's family. It is the duty of each agency to ensure that the relevant information is made available as soon as possible.

A judgement must be made urgently about the level of risk to the child and any siblings as well as any other children who may be in contact with the alleged perpetrator. The child and the alleged perpetrator may need to be separated immediately, not only to protect the child from further abuse, but to ensure that the child is not victimized, threatened, or put at further risk.

When the alleged perpetrator is a member of the same household as the child, or when other children or young people in the same household as the alleged perpetrator, are deemed to be at risk, consideration should always be given to physically separate the children involved from the alleged perpetrator. If it is not considered appropriate for alleged perpetrator to leave the house or premises where the alleged abuse is said to have occurred, consideration should be given as to whether the child/children involved should:

- (a) Stay temporarily with other carers (with or without legal intervention).
- (b) Be placed temporarily under the care of The Department of Social welfare in an appropriate manner.
- (c) Be admitted to suitable health facility
- (d) Be placed according to a court order or police intervention.

Evaluating these options and making a decision on the best course of action will need careful consideration and recording.

Where the child or young person has special needs from disabilities, appropriate accommodation and advice need to be made available by competent persons/institutions.

#### **b) Initial Interview with the Parents/Carers**

The safety of the child must be the paramount concern.

It is important to assess the whole family situation. It may be appropriate to suggest that parents/carers accompany the child to a hospital or health facility for medical examination and if necessary treatment.

It should be made clear to the parents that no absolute pledge of confidentiality can be given.

If, when asked to provide an explanation for injuries either of the parents/carers admit an offence, no further questions should be asked and they should be treated as suspects in accordance with the laws of the country. As far as is possible, the parents'/carers actual words should be noted and observations are strictly factual. Notes made at the time of the interview must be retained and should become a documentary exhibit in any future court proceedings. Notes made after the interview (within a few hours) must also be retained. They can, with the permission of the court, be referred to when giving evidence.

#### **c) Interviewing the child**

The Department of Social welfare in close collaboration with the Police will be primarily responsible for interviewing the child. It is essential to ensure that the child remains adequately protected once the alleged perpetrator hears the allegations made against them or if, having been charged with an offence, they are subsequently released on bail. It is important to ensure that a person fluent in the alleged perpetrator's own language or method of communication and qualified in interpreting is available.

It is occasionally possible to decide whether an injury is non-accidental on the medical evidence alone, but in most cases the diagnosis is dependent on a joint medical/social assessment. A joint assessment will always be needed as part of the investigation. The person conducting the initial interview should be aware of the need to be able to present the evidence with clarity, backed up by careful recording.

#### **d) Interviewing Other Siblings**

It is common for more than one child in the family to have been abused. If it seems at all likely that siblings may have been involved they too should be interviewed as soon as reasonably possible.

#### **e) The Medical Examination**

When a medical examination is considered necessary, care should be taken to ensure that the parents/carers and the child, depending upon their age and understanding, are made fully aware of the reason for, and the nature of, the examination.

Only a specially trained doctor or senior nurse/midwife (ideally in combination) should undertake the examination. Training in how to recognise the most serious end of the spectrum regarding sexual and/or physical abuse is soon to be available. This training programme will include details on how to conduct the history and examination of the child, including details on the forensic specimens that might be needed and how these should be collected, labelled and analysed.

It is important to avoid subjecting the child to multiple medical examinations. The overriding priority must be that the child is only examined once.

Before an examination is conducted, the doctor and/or senior nurse must be fully briefed regarding the allegation. Thereafter they should form part of the investigating team. The evidence from the medical examination may not prove the existence of abuse, may be stated as being compatible with abuse, may discount abuse or may establish abuse beyond reasonable doubt.

### **The child protection investigation following referral and initial assessment**

#### **Initial strategy planning meeting**

This should normally be arranged and chaired by the senior social worker responsible for the enquiry from the Department of Social Welfare supported by a named member of the Police Child Welfare Unit.

The purpose of this meeting is to share information and agree upon a plan of intervention. Following discussions between the two lead agencies, it may be agreed that either the Department of Social Welfare will make initial enquiries or that a joint investigation or coordinated enquiry should take place with the police. In cases where an offence has been committed against a child but there is no familial responsibility, the police will conduct a criminal investigation and the role of the Department of Social Welfare, where required, will be one of support.

Other agencies as appropriate (e.g. education and health), should be invited, especially if they were the referring agency. Where a medical examination may be needed or has been undertaken, the doctor or senior nurse from the providing service should be present. The discussion should be used to:

- Share available information;
- Plan how enquiries should be handled, including the need for any medical treatment, and by whom;
- Agree what action is needed immediately to protect the child from further abuse,



- Determine what information about the strategy discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at risk of further harm or jeopardize police investigations into any alleged criminal offence (s).

Relevant matters will include:

- Agreeing on what further information is needed about the child and family and how it should be obtained;
- Agreeing who should be interviewed, by whom, for what purpose, and when. The way in which interviews are conducted can play a significant part in minimizing any distress caused to children, and increasing the likelihood of maintaining constructive working relationship with families. When a criminal offence may have been committed against a child, the timing and handling of interviews with victims, their families and witnesses, can have important implications for the collection and preservation of evidence;
- Considering the needs of other children who may be affected e.g. siblings and other children in contact with alleged abusers.

Significant harm to a child gives rise to both child welfare and law enforcement concerns. The police have a duty to carry out thorough and professional investigation into allegation of crime, and the obtaining of clear strong evidence is in the best interests of a child, since it makes it less likely that a child victim will have to give evidence in criminal court. Enquiries may, therefore, give rise to information which is relevant to decisions which have to be taken by both the social services department and the police. They need to create the basis for future support and help to the child and family on a planned, co-ordinated basis. They may contribute to legal proceedings, whether criminal, civil or both.

### **Enquiries and further assessment following strategy planning meeting**

Following the initial investigation there are a number of possible options that may need to be considered:

- Is there a need for immediate action to protect the child?
- Is a further interview with the child required?
- Will the Police be undertaking interviews of suspects and/or possible witnesses?
- Does the safety of any other children need to be considered?
- No risk may have been identified but an inter-agency comprehensive assessment of the child and family's need is required.
- Is a case conference required?

### **Joint Investigations**

A joint investigation is the process whereby the Department of Social Welfare, Police and Health Services plan and carry out their respective tasks together when responding to complex or substantial child protection referrals.

The aim of joint investigations is as follows:

1. Children are not to be subjected to unnecessary interviews.
2. Unnecessary medical examination of children is to be avoided.
3. There should be an appropriate sharing of information among professionals regarding the case;
4. Decisions and actions in an investigation will, whenever possible, follow consultation within and between agencies; and
5. The parents and carers are to be kept informed of all developments of the investigation, unless in doing so places children at further risk or impedes the investigation

### **Case Conferences**

Following initial enquiries and discussions between agencies, it may be decided that further information and a formal discussion is required to decide what form of action would best meet the needs of the child. It is not always possible to convene a Case Conference prior to the commencement of a co-ordinated enquiry, particularly in circumstances where immediate action is required. In such circumstances, the initial discussions may be conducted by telephone between senior officers.

It should be noted that a Case Conference can take place without the knowledge of the alleged perpetrator, and this may mean that a Case Conference can take place without the knowledge of either parent. This can be to enable staff to take a view about how any further enquiries, including approaches to the parents or the alleged perpetrator, should be conducted. In such instances, the parents should be advised of the Case Conference and its content as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising the safety of the child or the investigation.

In such scenarios, and in all referrals of severe abuse, a Case Conference may be convened and all the relevant agencies invited. The Case Discussion will be convened and chaired by Department of Social Welfare and should incorporate:

- discussion of the allegation
- the opinions of the professionals involved
- any additional information to be discussed
- clarification of any other information required
- a current assessment of the situation and needs of the child and family
- subsequent action plan to be agreed

### **Purpose**

The initial child protection conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate, and those professionals most involved with the child and family. Its purpose is:

- To bring together and analyze in an inter-agency setting the information which has been obtained about the abuse
- To consider background information about the child's health, development and functioning, and the parents' or carers' capacity to ensure the child's safety and promote the child's health and development.
- To make judgment about the likelihood of a child suffering significant harm in the future; and

- To decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child, promote his or her welfare, how that action will be taken forward, and with what intended outcome.

A number of decisions may result from the Case Conference, including:

- no further action
- to continue with a joint police and Department of Social Welfare investigation
- to reconvene once additional information has been obtained

Decisions at the Case Conference should be minuted and any future meetings agreed upon. Decisions not to proceed should be recorded.

### **The Child Protection Plan**

The initial child protection conference is responsible for agreeing an outline child protection plan. Professionals and parents/carers (excluding those who have been undertaking the abuse but including those who may have been too frightened to oppose it) should take part in the development of the details of the plan. The aim of the plan is to:

- Safeguard and protect the child from further abuse
- Promote the child's welfare and development
- Provided it is in the best interests of the child, to support the family and wider family members to promote the welfare of the child.

The child protection plan should set out what work needs to be done, why, when and by whom. The plan should:

- Describe the identified needs of the child, and what services are required;
- Include specific, achievable, child-focused objectives intended to safeguard and protect the child and promote his or her welfare;
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members, including the nature and frequency of contacts by professionals with children and family members;
- Lay down points at which progress will be reviewed, and the means by which progress will be judged; and
- Set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of those professionals with routine contact with the child, example nurse, teachers as well as any specialist or targeted support to the child and family.

The child protection plan should take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child, and the views of the parents, insofar as this is consistent with the child's welfare. It is important that every effort is made to ensure that the children and parents have a clear understanding of the objectives of the plan, that they accept it and are willing to work to it.

### **The Child Protection Review Conference**

## **Timescale**

A timescale for review should be written into the child protection plan and should be adhered to by all.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the child protection review is to review the safety, health and development of the child against intended outcomes set out in the child protection plan; to ensure that the child continues to be adequately protected; and to consider whether the child protection plan should continue in place or should be changed. Every review should consider explicitly whether the child continues to be at risk of significant harm, and hence continues to need protection through adherence to a formal child protection plan.

The professionals who have been working with the child and family have a responsibility to produce reports for the child protection review which provide an overview of work undertaken, and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the objectives set out in the child protection plan.

Records should use clear, straightforward language, should be concise and should be accurate not only in fact but also in differentiating between opinion, judgements and theory. Well kept records are essential to good child protection practice. Safeguarding children requires information to be brought together from a number of sources and careful professional judgements to be made on the basis of this information. Records should be clear, accessible and comprehensive, with judgements made, and actions and decisions taken being carefully recorded. Where decisions have been taken jointly across agencies, or endorsed by a manager, this should be made clear.

## **Confidentiality of Information/Statements**

All agencies should be aware that the personal information they hold about others is subject to a legal duty of confidence and should not normally be disclosed without the consent of the person concerned. There are circumstances in which the law permits the disclosure of confidential information when it is necessary in the public interest to safeguard a child or children. In such circumstances the public interest in child protection may override the public interest in maintaining confidentiality. Agencies should always seek their own legal advice if it seems likely that it will be necessary to breach confidence for whatever reason.

## **Chapter 4 The role and responsibilities of the National Child Protection Committee (NCPC)**

The Department of Social Welfare, in exercising its statutory function regarding the protection of children, as supported by the law and indicated in the Children's Act will set up a National Child Protection Committee which brings together representatives of each of the main agencies and professionals responsible for helping to protect children from abuse and neglect. The National Child Protection Committee is an inter-agency forum for agreeing on how the different services and professional groups should co-operate to safeguard children, and for making sure that arrangements work effectively to bring about good outcomes for children.

The scope, multifaceted, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral nature of child protection, and the fact that child abuse is a serious violation of the rights of children, requires the setting up of a multi-sectoral National Child Protection Committee to help maintain an integrated approach and to facilitate a joint strategy in addressing child protection issues. It is hoped that this Committee, to be composed of members with expertise, would give technical advice and inputs pertaining to issues referred to it.

### **Specific Responsibilities of the Child Protection Committee**

- To monitor, co-ordinate and evaluate the implementation of these guidelines and how well services work together to protect children.
- To facilitate and improve communication between different agencies involved in child protection.
- To offer technical advice on planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- To ensure synergy and integration among the different institutions and professionals involved in child protection.
- To develop and agree on local policies and procedures for inter-agency work to protect children, within the framework and objectives provided by these guidelines;
- To encourage and help develop effective working relationships between the various institutions and professionals, based on trust and mutual understanding;
- To ensure that there is a level of agreement and understanding across the institutions about operational definitions and thresholds for intervention;
- To put in place objectives and performance indicators for child protection, within the framework and objectives set out in this guideline.
- To improve local ways of working in the light of knowledge gained through national and local experience and research, and to make sure that any lessons learned and shared, are understood and acted upon;
- To improve the quality of child protection work and of interagency collaboration working through specifying needs for interagency training and development, and ensuring that training is delivered;

- To raise awareness within the wider community of the need to promote and protect the rights of children, and, if possible, to explain how the wider community can contribute to achieving the objectives of the National Child Protection Committee.

### **Scope of Interest**

The scope of the responsibilities should, as a minimum, extend to:

- Children abused within families
- Children abused outside families by adults known to them
- Children abused by professional carers away from home
- Children abused by strangers
- Children abused by other young people
- Children involved in prostitution or pornography
- Young perpetrators of abuse

### **Relevant Responsibilities**

- Raising awareness in the wider community and among institutions, NGOs and the media, about how everybody can contribute to safeguarding children and promoting their welfare
- Working together across institutions to identify and act upon concerns about a child's safety and welfare, and
- Working together across institutions to help those children who have suffered, or who are at continuing risk of significant harm, in order to safeguard such children and promote their welfare

### **Accountability**

- The National Child Protection Committee is accountable for its work to the main constituent institutions whose agreement is required for all work which has implication for policy, planning and protection of children. Programmes of work should be agreed and endorsed at a senior level within each of the main member agencies.
- Each institution should take lead responsibility for the effective working of the National Child Protection Committee, although the main constituent institutions are responsible for contributing fully and effectively to the working of the National Child Protection Committee.
- A senior person from the Government should chair the National Child Protection Committee (the CHAIR). He or she should have a good knowledge of the Laws relating to child protection. He/she will be overall responsible for the functioning of the NCPC.

### **The NCPC Membership**

To carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently, the National Child Protection Committee should have members drawn from each of the main departments and institutions responsible for working together to protect and promote the rights of children, whose roles and seniority would enable them to contribute to developing and maintaining strong and effective interagency child protection procedures and protocols, and ensure that child protection services are adequately resourced.

A. Membership should include, as a minimum, representation from:

- Department of State for Justice
- Department of Social Welfare
- Department of State for Health
- Department of State for Education
- Police Child Welfare Unit
- Non-Governmental agencies involved in child protection
- UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA
- The Prison Service

B. The National Child Protection Committee should make appropriate arrangements to involve relevant Departments and Institutions in its work as needed.

C. The National Child Protection Committee may set up working groups or subgroups, on a short-term or a standing basis:

- to provide specialist advice (e.g. in respect of children with disabilities)
- to carry out specific tasks (e.g. maintaining and updating procedures and protocols, identifying inter-agency training needs and arranging appropriate training)

All such working groups or subgroups should work to agreed terms of reference with explicit lines of reporting, communication and accountability to the National Child Protection Committee.

## **WAYS OF WORKING**

### **Chairing**

The National Child Protection Committee should be chaired by a senior person within the Government as outlined above.

### **Meetings**

The Director of Social Welfare should be responsible for summoning National Child Protection Committee meetings on behalf of the CHAIR. The NCPC should meet as frequently as possible to address its overall coordination needs as well as to review the achievements made towards realizing the stated objectives and the constraints thereof. This is important so as to maintain an integrated approach and to facilitate a joint strategy in addressing constraints and in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

### **Report**

The National Child Protection Committee should produce a report every quarter and this should be copied to the main constituent members to keep them abreast of emerging issues.

### **Quorum**

Fifty per cent of the membership of the National Child Protection Committee should form a quorum for the meetings of the NCPC.

**Emergency Meetings**

The CHAIR could summon extraordinary meetings of the National Child Protection Committee as and when deemed necessary.

**Coordinator/Secretary**

The Director of Social Welfare should be responsible for the co-ordination of the entire work of the Child Protection Committee.

**Venue of NCPC Meetings**

NCPC meetings should be held in the Ministry unless specified otherwise.