

Operation Crocus – guidance on responding to sexual abuse incidents in care homes

Investigation guidance for officers investigating sexual abuse cases in care facilities.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Adults at risk Rape and serious sexual offences Investigation
Organisation	Essex Police
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Disability Offenders Victims Women
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Aim

The aim of Operation Crocus is to:

- investigate reports of sexual abuse of residents in care facilities by staff
- promptly gather good quality evidence to support charges for a criminal investigation
- share good practice with other teams to improve the standard of investigations

Intended outcome

The intended outcome of Operation Crocus are to:

- improve the standard of investigations of sexual abuse in the care sector
- increase the charge rate for cases of sexual abuse in care homes
- improve collaborative working with care establishments to decrease the number of sexual abuse cases
- improve care establishments' understanding of force processes when investigating such incidents
- enhance the safety of care homes

Description

Operation Crocus was launched in June 2023, in response to a safeguarding adult review (SAR) into the investigations of reported sexual offences that had occurred in a care homes. The review found that there had been errors during the investigation process.

In response, a detective chief inspector from the Public Protection Department created a response plan for officers and senior investigating officers. The guidance is intended for use in any cases

where there have been reports of sexual abuse in a care facility. Once the plan was created and signed off by senior management, the Strategic Vulnerability Centre Team rolled this out to officers force-wide. Essex Police's force control room have been provided with an action card of questions to utilise when they receive calls of this nature, namely sexual abuse in care facilities.

Operation Crocus response plan

The response plan was created on Microsoft Word. The guidance is accessible to all officers in Essex Police and is presented as a table of suggested fast track lines of enquiry to be considered in every case. The plan includes:

Victim considerations:

- addressing medical welfare
- implementing a medical strategy to seize evidence
- conducting a first or evidential account
- accessing their current care plan

Suspect considerations:

- addressing their welfare
- collecting evidence such as photographs, non-intimate and intimate samples
- seizing of electronic devices
- conducting employment and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks
- Witness considerations by identifying significant, professional, first disclosure and disclosure witnesses. If witnesses are identified as being part of the case, they are required to complete MG11 witness statement.

Location of offences:

- understanding the staff hierarchy and who was on shift at the time of the incident
- establishing whether the care home has launched an investigation
- creating evidential opportunities through obtained CCTV and electronic records.
- obtaining training packages and policies

Strategies and going forward:

- implementing a media strategy by informing the force's press team at the earliest opportunity and consulting with the care facility
- creating a list of seized devices and reviewing CCTV footage and records
- briefing the district commander, establishing if there are further victims and determining if the case is a critical incident
- notifying the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- identifying forensic strategies and consulting with crime scene management at the earliest opportunity
- engaging with the Crown Prosecution Service

There has been no cost to the development and implementation of Operation Crocus.

Overall impact

- Operation Crocus is now used to support investigations of sexual abuse in care facilities. The force has reported improved collaboration with care facilities to investigate cases, identify signs of sexual abuse and launch internal investigations.
- Within force, there has been an increase in awareness by contact management, who now tag sexual abuse incidents in care homes under 'Operation Crocus' which prompts attending officers to follow the guidance.
- Feedback from officers has been positive – they have commented by using the comprehensive plan, they have increased confidence to collect evidence and investigate the incident.

Learning

- It has been essential to raise the awareness of officers conducting investigations of this nature. By implementing the plan force-wide, officers are now more likely to deliver a better quality of investigation by following the procedures outlined in the guidance.
- It is important to have strong partnership working with care homes to improve the management of such investigations.
- By engaging with care home staff at the earliest opportunity, they are more likely to share available evidence and support the investigation process.

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