



Viewing Digital Material of an Indecent Nature Policy (1169/2026)

Abstract

This policy details the criteria to be applied when viewing indecent digital material and the welfare support available to police officers and police staff.

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Police officers and police staff may encounter or be required to view digital material of an indecent nature as part of their investigation, in particular images or footage of child sexual abuse. This will frequently be a planned activity, but on occasion, indecent images may be unexpectedly encountered whilst viewing other digital material.

1.2 There is a need to provide suitable guidance to ensure that police officers and police staff who view or grade such material are suitably trained and the viewing or grading is done in a controlled environment. It is vital that the welfare of the individual carrying out the viewing is considered, and any appropriate wellbeing support provided to minimise the risk of trauma to the individual.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy relates to the planned and unplanned viewing of indecent material that is stored digitally, irrespective of the type of device or component from which it originated or on which it is stored. It does not extend to the viewing or reviewing of digital materials, whether on Divisions or elsewhere, which are not of an indecent nature.

2.2 The supporting procedures and associated DFT Process for Viewing and Grading Material detail the;

- The competency required to view and grade images,
- Criteria surrounding the viewing process,
- How the digital material must be graded by the viewing individual,
- The security of the digital material exhibit,
- Wellbeing support to individuals viewing or grading of digital material.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 The number of digital devices seized during police investigations is increasing and some of these will contain indecent images of children.

It is Sussex Police policy that all viewing and grading of indecent images is undertaken in a planned way:

- By individuals who have successfully completed the National Accredited Grading (NAG) training programme.
- Within a secure environment and in accordance with the procedures set out in this policy (including DFT Process for Viewing and Grading Material).
- By individuals who are subject to psychological screening and appropriate welfare support.

3.2 Where indecent images are encountered in unforeseen circumstances, such as when reviewing a device download, which is not known to contain indecent images, the viewing must immediately cease. Further viewing must take place in a planned way, in accordance with this policy.

Procedure

1. Overview

1.1 Where a digital device is known or suspected to contain indecent material, all viewing and grading will be undertaken in a planned way in accordance with this policy.

1.2 Where a digital device / download is not known or expected to contain indecent material, the material may be viewed using appropriate local facilities. However, in the event that indecent material is encountered, the viewing must cease immediately, and all further viewing must be conducted in accordance with this policy.

2. Training

2.1 All individuals undertaking the planned viewing and grading of indecent images must have completed the current NAG training, prior to any viewing or grading of digital material.

2.2 Individuals who have successfully completed this training can be identified by contacting supervision in either the Digital Forensic Team (DFT) or the Online Child Abuse Team (OCAT).

3. Storage, Viewing and Grading of Indecent Digital Material

3.1 Digital material recovered from seized devices must be stored on:

- Secure servers within DFT.
- Approved, encrypted removable digital storage material.

3.2 The viewing and grading of indecent material by trained staff must take place within the DFT at (redacted) Police Station or when capacity allows at OCAT offices at (redacted).

3.3 The viewing and grading of indecent materials must be undertaken:

- Within a secure environment in order to avoid exposing persons not involved in the viewing to indecent material
- In accordance with the procedures set out in this policy to ensure the welfare of individuals viewing the material and maintain the security and integrity of the encryption measures employed to ensure data security.

3.4 Digital material of an indecent nature must never be:

- Removed from police premises, unless for legitimate policing purposes (i.e., court, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) viewing or transfer between police premises, etc.) and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure data security of the device / digital material.
- Copied or transferred to any unauthorised device.
- Stored in a manner which negates or circumvents any encryption measures employed to maintain data security.

4. Viewing and Grading Material

4.1 To view and grade digital material use one of the two options listed below.

- DFT at (redacted) where appropriate advice and equipment is available. The viewing and grading of material at DFT will follow defined process as set out in DFT Process for Viewing and Grading Material.
- OCAT will continue to view / grade digital material at their locations within (redacted) Police Stations, with the assistance of DFT. OCAT where possible will allow trained staff to attend the location to be able to view and grade. This will require prior discussion with OCAT supervision to arrange and agree attendance due to limited capacity and local procedures will be followed.

5. Welfare and Wellbeing Support

5.1 The College of Policing's NAG training has moved away from setting rigid time limits for how long an individual can grade for. But it is recommended that it should be undertaken for no more than 50% of your shift. The following headlines regarding wellbeing are covered in the NAG training as follows, officers and line managers must ensure they are aware of the below headlines, what they mean and keep them under constant review.

- Limit length of time working with disturbing media
- Understanding the nature and demands of the task

- Introduce officers gradually to images
- Denial does not work
- Know and follow policy and procedures
- Talk to your manager
- Occupational Health
- Internal support – group discussion
- Create routines / coping mechanisms
- Reflective practice
- Social support

5.2 All individuals engaged in the planned viewing and grading of indecent digital material will be offered and must complete psychological screening every six months for OCAT. It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure the individual has completed the required psychological screening.

5.3 Additional welfare and wellbeing support will be provided in accordance with the [College of Policing in Supporting the wellbeing of Internet Child Abuse Teams \(ICAT\)](#).

5.4 Following the viewing of indecent material, it is the individual's responsibility to inform their line manager if the viewing has had a detrimental or adverse effect on them. It is also the line manager's responsibility to speak to the individual after viewing and/or look for signs of distress / stress. This may not be apparent immediately following the viewing and could happen days, weeks or even months later.

5.5 Line Manager

In these circumstances the individual must inform their line manager who should then discuss their needs with them. If the **line manager** considers further support is required, they have the following options available:

5.6 Individual

- Refer the individual to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service via the Wellbeing Hub. Also refer to line managers guidance.
- Where deemed necessary interim advice can be obtained from Occupational Health. Also refer to the contacts tab on the OHWS page.

For immediate and urgent support, the **individual** can **self-refer** to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The EAP is available to anyone 24/7. An individual **does not** need to be referred by a line manager. This is a confidential service that can be used at any time of the day.

There are multiple ways to get in touch with EAP including a new App:

- 24/7 via the mobile App called: MCL Medics EAP (free to download from the Apple Store / Google Play) Refer to EAP (Getting in touch) for account activation code,
- 24/7 via Web portal. Refer to EAP (Getting in touch) for account activation code,
- 24/7 via email
- 24/7 via Freephone number

The Individual can also:

- Seek the support of a Mental Health First Aider,
- Seek primary care support from their Registered General Practitioner (GP).

5.7 The Wellbeing Hub can be accessed via the Joint Intranet and has links to many forms of support both internal and external.

Team: Public Protection