NORTHUMBRIA Police has defended methods used by its officers during the Operation Rose child abuse investigation.

At a press conference Assistant Chief Constable John Scott said the force would use "trawling" again during its inquiries.

Northumbria Police came under fire yesterday at the end of Operation Rose, a three-year inquiry into sexual and physical abuse at North East care homes.

It was said that policing methods where officers re-visited former care home clients asking if they had ever experienced any problems whilst in care drew a raft of false allegations of abuse against former carers and teachers.

The North East branch of Falsely Accused Carers and Teachers said that lives had been ruined and careers left in tatters because innocent people were suspended and vilified after accusations were made.

Mr Scott said: "In many respects, we would conduct the inquiry in the same way, were we to do it again.

"However, a number of recommendations have been made to establish best practice should any other police force need to conduct similar investigations in the future."

Operation Rose, which cost the taxpayer 5million, was launched in the summer of 1997 after a woman in her 20s told a social worker that she and a friend had both been sexually and physically abused while in care at a Newcastle care home.

In some cases the allegations dated back 30 years.

Thirty two people were brought before the courts for a range of allegations relating to both physical and sexual abuse, of whom 26 were found not guilty.
Among those whose cases were dismissed were four male workers at the former Witherwack House residential home, in Sunderland, who had denied charges of child cruelty.

Six people were found guilty of a range of crimes including rape and indecent assault and were jailed for a total of 20 years.

Mr Scott added: "This was a thorough and professional investigation which sought to establish the truth behind what happened to children who were entrusted to the care of others.

"A number of people were convicted and jailed for serious offences against young, vulnerable people in their care."