



The Maggie Oliver Foundation

Transforming pain into power

National Grooming Gang Enquiry

Summary of Our Interventions

This summary outlines the steps we have taken to advance the establishment of the enquiry and to advocate on behalf of the "Umbrella Survivor" group. Our efforts have focused on shaping the terms of reference, ensuring the inclusion of key areas of concern, and promoting the central involvement of victims' voices throughout the process.

1. 20th June 2025

Email from TMOF to Yvette Cooper, Home Secretary

2. 11th August 2025

Reply from Jess Phillips, Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG to TMOF

3. 26th August 2025

Reply from TMOF to Jess Phillips

www.themaggieoliverfoundation.com

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP - Secretary of State for the Home Department

Home Office
2 Marsham St
London
SW1P 4DF

Our ref: DE/O1544-3

20 June 2025

Dear Home Secretary

Re: Forthcoming Statutory Inquiry into Grooming Gangs
Our Clients: The Maggie Oliver Foundation and Mrs Maggie Oliver

We represent The Maggie Oliver Foundation, Ms Maggie Oliver and anticipate that we will act for a significant number of the victims of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation to whom reference was made in the report by Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB of 16th June 2025.

This letter relates to the forthcoming Public Inquiry into grooming gangs. It is not related to our client's Pre Action Protocol letter of 16 June 2025, in respect of the Government's responses to the October 2022 Final Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ('IICSA'). We ask that you treat this letter separately to the ongoing matter relating to IICSA.

Baroness Casey in her report called for "*a national inquiry co-ordinating a series of targeted local investigations*". Our clients welcome the decision by the Government to act on this recommendation, and the commitment to institute a national public inquiry, on a statutory footing.

In anticipation of that, our client makes the following observations and requests for clarification.

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Urgency

First, our clients share your stated view that these matters are urgent. Our clients urge that every effort is made to establish, commence and conclude the Inquiry and investigation process efficiently and quickly.

With this in mind, our clients ask for an assurance that the evidence and findings of the Augusta Independent Review, Rochdale Review and Rotherham Independent Review will inform and form part of the evidence of the statutory public inquiry.

Survivor centred Inquiry

Baroness Casey highlights the marginalisation of victims and survivors at section 6.4 of her Report:

“It has been survivors, campaigners, whistleblowers, and journalists who have often brought to light child sexual exploitation, not always the public services who are charged with tackling it. Instead, some services have persisted in denying problems through indifference, hostility and the threat of legal action.”

Baroness Newlove (Victims’ Commissioner) welcomed the recommendations from the Casey review and the new national inquiry, but warned that victims cannot wait for its outcome. Baroness Newlove said:

“Victims must remain at the heart of this work. Sharing experiences of child sexual abuse is deeply personal and often retraumatising,

Thousands came forward to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) – often for the first time. Yet years on, too little has changed. We must not repeat those mistakes.

This inquiry must not drag on, and progress must not pause while it runs. Victims need answers – and action.”

Our clients insist that the forthcoming public inquiry will, as the Victim’s Commissioner has said, put victims and survivors at the “heart of its work”. We ask you to confirm that this will be the approach adopted.

Baroness Casey describes the contribution made to her research by individuals and organisations as “vital” and in particular addresses the contribution of our clients in her personal note at pages 11-12:

“Maggie Oliver, of the Maggie Oliver Foundation, kindly brought together a group of survivors. Before meeting them, I had at least a small hope that these women, who had so kindly travelled from far and wide, would reassure me that some progress had been made. I was so disappointed that what I had heard about the treatment of victims in Rotherham, ten years ago, was still being experienced in the present day.”

“I can only thank Maggie Oliver for the support she has offered these women and their families, often at great personal cost.”

Our clients, Maggie Oliver and The Maggie Oliver Foundation will apply for Core Participant status in the forthcoming public inquiry in due course. We recognise that it will be for the Chair to designate core participant status, pursuant to Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules 2006. However, our clients request assurance from the Government that The Maggie Oliver Foundation, Maggie Oliver and the 10 survivors who met with Baroness Casey (and who made significant contributions to her report) can expect to be granted core participant status, so that they will be at the *“heart of its work”*.

Inquiry Terms of Reference

Applications for core participant status are usually considered by the Chair, after the Terms of Reference (‘TORs’) have been settled. Our clients wish to be consulted on the Terms of Reference at an earlier stage, not least because Maggie Oliver and The Maggie Oliver Foundation have a clear and potentially unique insight into the barriers that victims of CSA and CSE have faced when reporting abuse to the institutions.

Furthermore, Maggie Oliver has identified a number of issues that the Inquiry should consider when making recommendations for future conduct by institutions when faced with allegations of CSA and CSE.

Please confirm that our clients will be consulted on the Terms of Reference.

Points of clarification arising from Baroness Casey’s report

In the meantime, there are some points of clarification which arise from Baroness Casey’s report. Please provide clarity on the following issues, so that The Maggie Oliver Foundation will be in a position to assist the victims in understanding what they can expect from the forthcoming process. Please can you confirm the following:

- (i) The report refers to a national inquiry to be overseen by an Independent Commission. We have assumed that the government will, consistent with its recent announcement, institute an Inquiry under section 1 of the Inquiries Act 2005. Can you confirm that this will be the case?
- (ii) Can you confirm whether the Inquiry will be undertaken by a chair alone, or by a chair with one or more other members? (as per S3 Inquiries Act 2005)
- (iii) Can you confirm the identity of the proposed chair and any panel members, and whether it is proposed that a Judge is appointed to act as the Inquiry chair?
- (iv) Can you confirm the remit of the national police investigation, which is set out at Step 1 on page 150 of Baroness Casey's report?
- (v) Can you confirm, consistent with Baroness Casey's recommendation 12, that this investigation will be "fully resourced".
- (vi) Can you confirm the timeframe for the national police investigation?
- (vii) Baroness Casey states at page 151 of her report: *"There would need to be a process to identify instances and allegations of statutory agencies' failures, and we recommend that the government develops a list of criteria to determine the types and extent of failures which should be used to assess the triggering of a hearing"*. Can you confirm when the Government will develop a list of criteria to determine which cases of institutional failure should 'trigger a hearing'?
- (viii) Can you confirm that our clients will be consulted in relation to the said list of criteria to 'trigger a hearing'?
- (ix) Baroness Casey's report anticipates, at page 151, that the Inquiry will take the form of a number of separate local investigations. Can you confirm the prospective locations of the local investigations, and also confirm that The Maggie Oliver Foundation (which represents victims and survivors throughout the UK) will be consulted as to the locations?
- (x) Baroness Casey's report anticipates, at page 151, that the local investigations will have a 'single appointed legal team'. We understand that a Solicitor to the Inquiry ('STI') is usually appointed in public inquiries as the 'single appointed legal team'. Can you confirm the identity of the proposed STI and provide a contact for that person?

- (xi) Baroness Casey states, at page 152, of her report that there should be “...a charter for victims about what they should reasonably expect from this process as they are once again asked to relive their experiences”. Our clients appreciate that the Inquiry will proceed on the basis that victims should not be retraumatised, wherever possible, through the process of giving evidence. Can you confirm that you will invite submissions on the proposed charter from our clients before finalising or publishing the anticipated charter?

- (xii) Baroness Casey additionally states, at page 152, that ‘Local investigations could commence sooner in areas where the Independent Commission and Home Office agree that sufficient evidence already exists’. Our clients maintain that it is urgent that the Inquiry is not delayed. Can you confirm the areas the Home Office considers that sufficient evidence already exists for the Inquiry to commence within that locality?

- (xiii) Can you confirm when the Inquiry hearings are likely to commence?

Request for Pre-Inquiry funding

Given the exceptional nature and gravity of the issues of Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Sexual Abuse, and organised grooming groups, and the particular vulnerability of survivors both financially and emotionally, our clients expect that the remit of the Inquiry investigations will not be narrow, and thereby exclude the participation and voice of the victims and survivors. Baroness Casey anticipates in her report that victims will be involved in the Inquiry process.

It would be overwhelmingly in the public interest to ensure that survivors and those who represent them can meaningfully participate in the Inquiry, both during its preliminary stages and subsequently as core participants. The facilitation of such participation would ensure equality of arms between victims and survivors and institutions. It is certain that the institutions who failed victims will have unlimited resources to engage with the Inquiry. Victims and survivors must be able to contend with the institutions who allowed them to be harmed.

Funding for core participants will be a matter for the Minister to determine by Notice to the Chair of the Inquiry under s40 (4) of the Inquiries Act 2005. However, as we have set out above, there are a number of key preliminary matters that the Government should invite input from prospective core participants.

We therefore request that the Government agrees to provide funding for legal representation of our clients, prior to the opportunity to apply for s40 funding, to enable our clients to participate meaningfully in the vital preliminary stages of the Inquiry as detailed above in this letter.

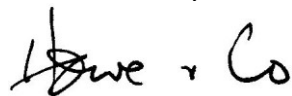
Request for a meeting

Finally, we request an early meeting with the designated senior official of the Home Office, who has been charged with leading on implementation of Baroness Casey's recommendations.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Enright at partners@howe.co.uk to arrange a meeting.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howe + Co". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

DAVID ENRIGHT JP
PARTNER
HOWE + CO SOLICITORS



David Enright LLB (Hons) JP
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DECS Reference: MIN/1348688/25
Your Reference: DE/O1544-3

11 August 2025

Dear Mr Enright,

Thank you for your letter of 20 June to the Home Secretary on behalf of The Maggie Oliver Foundation regarding the national inquiry into group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse. I am replying as the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls with lead responsibility for tackling child sexual abuse across government.

Firstly, I would like to thank Maggie Oliver and the members of The Maggie Oliver Foundation for their engagement with the Casey Audit. As you know, the Home Secretary commissioned Baroness Casey to conduct a national audit on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse in January to improve the national understanding of the scale, nature and drivers of group-based abuse. We have accepted all 12 recommendations within Baroness Casey's report and will continue to make wide-ranging changes across society to protect children from sexual abuse so that this scale of exploitation is never seen again. We will work with relevant bodies across the criminal justice system to identify any cases of wrongful criminalisation of victims and finally deliver the justice they deserve.

I would like to offer my assurance that the Government is moving swiftly to establish an Independent Commission on group-based child sexual exploitation under the Inquiries Act 2005, with the power to go into local areas, gather evidence, talk to victims, compel witnesses to appear, and to get to the truth of institutional failures. This will put national coordination and statutory powers behind the targeted local approach the Government proposed in January.

It is our intention that victims and survivors are at the heart of this work. A key part of the independent Commission will include gathering and assessing victim and survivor testimony to ensure that the findings and focus of the Commission are informed and led by victim and survivor voices. Thank you to Maggie Oliver and The Maggie Oliver Foundation for offering their support and insight for this work. Your letter will be kept and shared with the chair once they are appointed.

We are working closely with partners across government and beyond to develop the terms of reference, which will be shaped through engagement with the appointed chair, victims and survivors, and other key stakeholders. This collaborative process will help ensure the inquiry is survivor-focused, proportionate and clearly scoped. We will confirm and publish the terms of reference in due course, once this engagement is complete.

Following the appointment of the independent chair and the establishment of the inquiry structure, the Commission will begin considering evidence and data to select the first local areas to target. This will be based on information provided by the police, inspectorates, or through referrals from local agencies, victims and survivors, and members of the public.

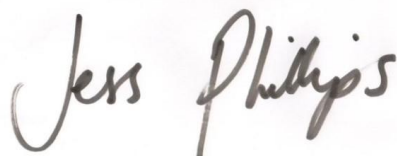
Alongside the national inquiry, as recommended in Baroness Casey's report, there will be a national police operation. The operation will be overseen by the National Crime Agency in close partnership with key policing partners and the specific specialist capabilities this Government has invested in like the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Taskforce and Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme (TOEX). Ensuring the operation is trauma-informed is paramount and we are working closely with operational partners to design a model of consistent approach across England and Wales. Once live, the operation will work to secure justice for the victims and survivors of grooming gangs.

The national operation will support both historic and current investigations, providing national expertise and specialism to support intelligence-led investigations. The operation will oversee cases identified by 'cold case' reviews and file searches to identify new leads for inquiries. Our approach will ensure that vital intelligence and operational support is shared to maximum effect, and it will also ensure that best practice and lessons learned from each investigation is shared.

The police are working at pace to stand up the national operation, building on the progress of the CSE Taskforce; which will continue to ensure it is supporting forces to bring more offenders to justice.

Thank you for writing to us on this important matter. I hope my response reassures both Maggie Oliver and The Maggie Oliver Foundation of the commitment with which this Government acts to improve our collective response to child sexual exploitation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jess Phillips MP
Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

Rt. Hon. Jess Phillips MP
**Minister for Safeguarding and
Violence Against Women and Girls**
2 Marsham Street
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By Recorded Delivery and Email: Public.Enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk;

26 August 2025

DECS Reference: MIN/1348688/25
Our Reference: DE/O1544-3

Dear Minister Phillips,

Thank you for your letter of 11 August 2025.

Your letter raises issues of concern. As set out below, we seek confirmation that the investigation will be on a statutory footing as a national Public Inquiry, with targeted individual investigations, including identifying past failings and establishing accountability. Further that the Inquiry secures the meaningful participation of victims from its inception specifically in the framing of the Terms of Reference.

Additionally we note that your letter is written in your capacity as the lead responsibility for the cross-government approach to tackling child sexual abuse. We have assumed that in addition your role will include leading on the government approach to child sexual exploitation as these phenomena are closely linked.

The structure of the proposed statutory inquiry

At paragraph 3 of your letter, you provide assurance that the Government is swiftly establishing an Independent Commission under the Inquiries Act 2005 with various powers including the power to “*compel witnesses*”. We welcome your confirmation that this will be a national public statutory inquiry.

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However, the structure of the Inquiry that you have proposed raises 4 areas of significant concern:

- The model of an ‘independent commission’ does not sit properly with a statutory inquiry;
- A localised approach would certainly repeat past mistakes;
- The proposals fail to deal with accountability through an investigation of past failings;
- There is no commitment to victim consultation in framing the Terms of Reference.

An Independent Commission

You identify the Inquiry structure as being an Independent Commission coordinating and utilising powers under the Inquiries Act 2005 to assist in a “*targeted local approach*” to investigating group-based child sexual exploitation.

Our client is firmly of the view that this approach would not satisfy victims and survivors of abuse and public concern that the issue of grooming gangs is properly considered. We submit that the government must commit to a full public inquiry. The notion of an independent commission does not provide any confidence that the investigation will be conducted in an open and transparent manner. There is no reason to depart from the statutory public inquiry model, which is governed by primary and secondary legislation, and which ensures that matters of public concern are investigated within open and transparent public hearings and chaired by an individual with full powers to compel the production of witnesses and evidence.

A localised approach

The model of a localised approach is similarly problematic. Baroness Casey identified an “*illustrative rather than comprehensive list*” of over 16 localised investigations/inquiries but concluded “*the delivery has not matched the intent*” and “*ultimately it has let down the children who have been victims of child sexual exploitation*”. It is critical to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation that the same mistakes are not repeated.

We accept that any comprehensive inquiry will require a level of grass roots investigation in understanding the issues on the ground; the real experiences of victims and survivors; and the characteristics of predators and abusers. However, a dominant focus of the Inquiry on a “*targeted local approach*” is unlikely to properly address what is a national issue.

Our client is rightly concerned that a series of local investigations would result in a repeat of the mistakes of the past, whereby stakeholders responsible for protecting children would give self-serving evidence as to how they have improved their practices, whilst underplaying past and continuing failures. Our client has been critical of the Organised Networks strand of IICSA and considers that the public bodies responsible for decades of failures to protect children used the

process as a platform to apologise for ‘failures of the past’ whilst side-stepping current concerns. Our client maintains that the same power play which has for so long silenced victims of Child Sexual Abuse (“CSA”) and Child Sexual Exploitation (“CSE”) will potentially persist in the model that you propose.

It is imperative that the new Inquiry addresses present failings and that victims and survivors and non-institutional core participants are provided with the requisite time and resources to give evidence in a public setting, particularly in areas where exploitation is rife today.

It is vital that the government understands that victims and survivors may re-traumatise themselves through participating in the Inquiry. They need to be confident that, finally the process will bring about real change, if they can be expected to invest in that process. Clearly the Inquiry should offer support and counselling services to victims and survivors who participate in the Inquiry process.

It is important to note that there are particular areas which the Inquiry must investigate. These include areas including but not limited to Hull, Barrow, Bradford, Keighley, West Midlands, Oldham, Blackpool and Bury. We will be happy to provide further details of areas where child exploitation is rife upon being consulted as to the Terms of Reference.

Our client maintains that Child Sexual Exploitation is prevalent in the areas detailed above and that the agencies who are responsible for the care of children are not responding appropriately. If the Inquiry avoids investigation of these areas, it will miss the opportunity to fully understand national patterns of abuse and exploitation.

Furthermore, the Inquiry will need to investigate CSE in certain settings such as care homes and foster care. This will involve satellite investigations which will all contribute to the findings of the Inquiry.

All of these local and focused investigations must take place under the umbrella of a national inquiry. Local investigations into a national problem have not succeeded in the past.

Investigation of past failings

Victims require accountability for past failures as well as those that are ongoing.

Our client is concerned that previous failures would not be adequately addressed under the model proposed in your letter. In particular, the Inquiry should consider evidence collected in previous investigations and examine the conduct of such investigations. For example, Operation Augusta and the Rochdale investigation spent 6 years scrutinising local issues but ultimately failed in securing change for victims. The problems that persist today may be attributed to past failings in

investigations. Our client states that new investigations that have arisen from publication of reports from local inquiries in Manchester have not treated victims and survivors appropriately. Many such victims have been re-traumatised by the process and have lost faith in the police as a result of continuing failures to charge abusers, in some cases 6 years after those new inquiries began.

Furthermore, the Inquiry must ensure that Government and other agencies responsible for past and continuing failures will not escape investigation. It is of note that Baroness Casey in her report observes that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue ("HMICFRS") effectively conclude in their 2023 report that the positive "**claims made in the 2017 update on the 2015 Action Plan have *not been realised***" (our emphasis).

This Inquiry must have sufficient remit to examine decision-making at senior levels as well as related funding decisions, so as to understand why CSE initiatives and investigations have failed in the past and are still failing victims today.

Meaningful participation of victims and survivors in framing the Terms of Reference

It is important that we reiterate that a national public inquiry needs to secure the meaningful participation of victims and that the voices of victims must be listened to and heard. Victims must be able to tell their stories and should be regarded as at the front and centre of any Public Inquiry.

The importance of public inquiries hearing from the victims has been demonstrated over and over again. By way of example in both the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry, the stories of the victims formed a substantial and key part of the hearings and subsequent reports. Our client maintains that there is a growing concern amongst victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation that institutions and authorities are more concerned with protecting their own reputations than in seeking to get to the root cause of the failures and hold those responsible legally to account.

In addition to the meaningful participation of victims, it is vital that organisations such as The Maggie Oliver Foundation, in their role as advocates and providers of ongoing support to victims and survivors, are also able to participate fully. You will recall that Maggie Oliver recently brought three survivors, who are supported by The Maggie Oliver Foundation, to meet you at the House of Lords. You heard, at first hand, their accounts of the anger and trauma that they experience because of lack of action and continuing failures in tackling child sexual exploitation. Our client takes the view that it is critically important that the new Inquiry process fully takes heed of the concerns of victims and survivors.

You state in your letter that the Department are working with partners across government and beyond to develop the Terms of Reference. This statement ignores the fact that meaningful

participation of victims is not limited to the giving of evidence in the Inquiry itself, but must also extend to the shaping of the Terms of Reference of the proposed Public Inquiry. It is a matter of considerable concern that voices from organisations such as The Maggie Oliver Foundation (which worked with Baroness Casey in her recent audit) are being excluded from discussions around the Terms of Reference.

Worryingly you state our letter will be *“kept and shared with the chair once appointed”*. However, the issues raised in our submissions need to be considered at the earliest possible stage. A *“survivor-focussed”* inquiry demands meaningful participation of victims and survivors from its very inception.

It is of paramount importance that victims have input into any decisions regarding the framework and Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. To disregard the views of victims at the pre-hearing stages of the Inquiry would be disingenuous and ineffective in terms of meeting the needs and expectations of victims and the wider public; and in achieving an effective public inquiry. The victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be reduced to merely titular stakeholders.

Accordingly, we ask that you commit to consulting The Maggie Oliver Foundation (through ourselves) and other victim and survivor-based stakeholders in relation to the Terms of Reference for the forthcoming Public Inquiry. The Maggie Oliver Foundation has assembled an umbrella group of survivors whose lives were destroyed by the abuse they were subjected to as children. It is imperative that the voices of such individuals are taken into account during the process of devising the Terms of Reference.

Conclusion

We have raised four significant concerns in this letter, which we repeat herein:

- The model of an ‘independent commission’ does not sit properly with a statutory inquiry;
- A localised approach would repeat past mistakes;
- The proposals fail to deal with accountability through an investigation of past failings;
- There is no commitment to victim consultation in framing the Terms of Reference.

We look forward to receiving confirmation that our significant concerns highlighted above are accepted and acted upon in the formative stages of the Inquiry to ensure the protection of victims and survivors today and the safeguarding of future generations.

Yours sincerely,

Howe + Co

Howe + Co