

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 09:00AM 31 MARCH 2026

STARTS

The Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs for England and Wales formally begins its work

The Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs for England and Wales has now formally received its mandate. Today, we are publishing our Terms of Reference. Once these are laid before the House of Commons on 13 April, the Inquiry will begin its investigation into the sexual abuse and exploitation of children by grooming gangs across England and Wales.

The Inquiry is chaired by Baroness Anne Longfield CBE, supported by panellists Zoë Billingham CBE and Eleanor Kelly CBE. It is a statutory inquiry established under the Inquiries Act 2005. It is fully independent of the government and of all institutions it will investigate.

The Inquiry has full legal powers to compel witnesses within jurisdiction to give evidence and require organisations to hand over documents.

What the Inquiry will examine

The Inquiry will investigate how grooming gangs operated and how institutions, including police, local authorities, health services, social care services, and schools, responded to abuse. It will examine why children were so often disbelieved, dismissed, or blamed for their own abuse.

The Inquiry will directly examine whether the ethnicity, culture, or religion of either perpetrators or victims influenced patterns of offending, and whether these factors shaped the institutional response.

These are questions that previous reviews chose not to address. This Inquiry will not avoid them.

All evidence of possible criminal conduct by professionals will be referred to Operation Beaconport and to the relevant criminal authorities. Institutions will not be left to investigate themselves.

Local investigations

The Inquiry will conduct local investigations in areas across England and Wales concentrating on areas where serious failures have been identified, in the response to child sexual exploitation by grooming gangs. Oldham has been confirmed as among the first areas. A framework for selecting further areas will be published within three months.



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Baroness Anne Longfield, Chair of the Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, said:

"Children across England and Wales were and are sexually abused and exploited. When they asked for help, they were too often disbelieved, dismissed, or blamed. That is the reality this Inquiry exists to address.

"Victims and survivors have every right to ask whether this Inquiry will be any different from those that came before. My answer is this: where we can, we will publish our findings as we go, not in a single report years from now. There will be no opportunity for institutions to quietly manage what we find.

"We will follow the evidence wherever it leads. We will not flinch from uncomfortable truths."

Transparency and public hearings

The Inquiry will hold public hearings, which will be live-streamed. Transcripts will be published after each hearing. Findings will be published progressively throughout the Inquiry's work, not held until a final report.

The Inquiry will conclude no later than March 2029.

Victims and survivors

The Inquiry is committed to placing victims and survivors at the heart of its work. Support is available on our website.

ENDS



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Notes to editors

- For press and media enquiries, contact: pressqueries@grooming-gangs.independent-inquiry.uk
- For general enquiries: contactus@grooming-gangs.independent-inquiry.uk
- [Full Terms of Reference will be published on the website](#) at 9am on 31 March 2026

About the Inquiry

- The Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs is investigating the sexual abuse and exploitation of children by grooming gangs across England and Wales.
- It has full legal powers to compel witnesses in the jurisdiction to give evidence and require organisations to provide documents.
- The Inquiry is a statutory inquiry, established under the Inquiries Act 2005. It is fully independent of the Government and of all institutions it is investigating.
- It was set up following Recommendation 2 of Baroness Louise Casey's National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (June 2025).
- The National Audit found systemic failures and institutional paralysis had enabled grooming gangs to operate for many years.
- The Home Secretary appointed Baroness Anne Longfield CBE as Chair, with panellists Zoë Billingham CBE and Eleanor Kelly CBE, on 9 December 2025.
- The Chair and Panel will be supported but the Inquiry's Secretary, Solicitor and Counsel and wider team.
- The Inquiry will have offices in Leeds, London and Wales.
- The Inquiry formally began work on 31 March 2026 and has a maximum duration of three years.
- The Inquiry has a budget of £65 million.

The panel

- **Baroness Anne Longfield CBE** is the former Children's Commissioner for England and a long-standing independent advocate for vulnerable children.
- **Zoë Billingham CBE** is a former Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, where she led national inspections that strengthened policing's protection of women and girls.
- **Eleanor Kelly CBE** is the former Chief Executive of Southwark Council, with extensive experience in local government, crisis response, and public protection.