

Local Area Investigation Selection Criteria

1 Purpose of Local Area Investigations

- 1.1 In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Inquiry will conduct Local Area Investigations to examine how group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse by grooming gangs was and is identified, understood, prevented and responded to in particular local areas. It will identify lessons for local improvement and wider national reform. This document explains the criteria used to select local areas for review. Prior to the confirmation of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, it was agreed that Oldham would be prioritised for a local investigation.
- 1.2 Local Area Investigations are intended to assist the Inquiry to understand local practice and local institutional responses, while also identifying lessons of wider national relevance.
- 1.3 Victims and survivors will be at the centre of the Inquiry's approach. Local Area Investigations will be informed by victim and survivor experience, including information and evidence provided by them.
- 1.4 The Inquiry will protect victims and survivors' anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with its published protocols and procedures and the Victims and Survivors' Charter. Victims and survivors will not have to give formal written evidence or oral evidence unless they wish to do so. Where a victim and survivor wishes to give formal written or oral evidence, the Inquiry will consider appropriate arrangements for doing so safely and fairly. Further details will be set out in the Inquiry's published protocols and procedures and the Victims and Survivors Charter.
- 1.5 The selection of a local area does not mean that the Inquiry has reached any conclusion about wrongdoing by any person, organisation or community in that area. Nor does it mean that areas not selected have no

relevant issues. All areas remain within the scope of the Inquiry's national work.

2 Overall approach to selection

- 2.1 The Inquiry will select local areas by applying the criteria set out below. The criteria are not a rigid scoring system. They are intended to guide the Chair and Panel's judgement about where a focused local investigation is most likely to assist the Inquiry in discharging its Terms of Reference.
- 2.2 No single criterion is determinative. An area may be selected because it strongly meets one criterion, or because it meets a combination of criteria. The Chair and Panel may also take account of the need to ensure that the overall programme of Local Area Investigations is balanced, deliverable and capable of producing meaningful findings and recommendations. The weight given to each criterion may vary from area to area.
- 2.3 The Inquiry recognises that available data on grooming gangs and group-based child sexual exploitation is incomplete and inconsistent. A lack of recorded cases, convictions or prosecutions does not necessarily mean that abuse did not occur. It may instead reflect under-reporting, under-recording, failures of identification, or weaknesses in institutional response.
- 2.4 For that reason, quantitative data will inform selection but will not determine it. The Inquiry will also consider public concern, victim and survivor accounts, previous reviews, institutional context, safeguarding indicators, and the potential for wider learning. The Inquiry must make targeted and informed selection within its timetable and resources, recognising that it cannot investigate every area in which concerns have been raised.
- 2.5 Local areas may include a local authority area, city, metropolitan area, group of neighbouring areas, or another defined geographical area where the Chair and Panel consider that approach is necessary to discharge the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

3 Selection criteria

The Inquiry may consider the following factors when selecting local areas for investigation.

3.1 Victim and survivor experience:

3.1.1 The Inquiry may consider evidence or information from victims and survivors, survivor organisations, advocacy organisations and support services.

3.1.2 Victims and survivors may provide information to the Inquiry to inform its work regardless of whether they are in a Local Area Investigation. The Inquiry will take account of such information when considering local area selection, while protecting their anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with its published protocols and procedures and the Victims and Survivors Charter. This may include information about the nature of abuse, barriers to disclosure, treatment by institutions, access to support, experiences of criminal justice processes, and whether victims and survivors consider that their concerns were heard and acted upon.

3.2 Indications of prevalence, harm or risk:

3.2.1 The Inquiry may consider available indicators of prevalence, harm or risk, including:

- (a) evidence of known or suspected group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse by grooming gangs;
- (b) offences, convictions, prosecutions, investigations, no further action decisions, complaints or referrals;
- (c) information about missing children, children in care, children at risk of exploitation, or other safeguarding and health indicators;
- (d) evidence of repeat locations, repeat suspects, linked offending, trafficking or movement of children between areas; and

- (e) information from public bodies, safeguarding partnerships, law enforcement, Operation Beaconport, victim and survivor engagement, or other relevant sources.

3.2.2 The Inquiry will treat such indicators with care, recognising that the quality, completeness and availability of data may vary significantly between areas, and that absence of recorded data does not necessarily mean absence of offending, harm or risk.

3.3 Public interest, public concern and confidence:

3.3.1 The Inquiry may select an area where there is significant public interest or public concern about whether grooming gangs or group-based child sexual exploitation were properly identified, prevented, investigated or responded to.

3.3.2 Public concern may be identified from sources such as victim and survivor accounts, community concerns, parliamentary or public debate, previous media reporting, previous reviews or investigations, complaints, whistleblowing, or concerns raised with the Inquiry.

3.3.3 Public concern is not treated as proof that abuse occurred or that institutions failed. It is a factor which may justify investigation where the Chair and Panel consider that a local investigation would assist public confidence, transparency and accountability.

3.4 Evidence or allegations of institutional or systemic failure:

3.4.1 The Inquiry may consider whether there is evidence, allegation or public concern suggesting possible institutional or systemic failure, including in relation to:

- (a) recognition of exploitation risk;
- (b) safeguarding thresholds and decision making;
- (c) police investigation and disruption activity;
- (d) social care, education or health responses;

- (e) multi-agency working and information sharing;
- (f) leadership, governance and accountability;
- (g) professional challenge, whistleblowing or escalation; and
- (h) implementation of previous recommendations or lessons learned.

3.5 Previous reviews, investigations and unresolved issues:

3.5.1 The Inquiry may select areas where previous reviews, investigations, inspections, serious case reviews, safeguarding reviews, criminal investigations or other public material have identified relevant issues.

3.5.2 The Inquiry may also select areas where there has been an absence of previous investigation despite significant public concern or evidence suggesting potential risk or harm.

3.5.3 The Inquiry may consider whether previous recommendations were implemented, whether lessons were sustained, and whether unresolved issues remain.

3.5.4 Previous reviews, investigations, inspections, serious case reviews, safeguarding reviews, criminal investigations and other relevant material will also be considered as part of the Inquiry's National Review. Local Area Investigations will therefore sit alongside, and inform, the Inquiry's national work.

3.6 Wider national learning:

3.6.1 The Inquiry may select areas which are likely to provide learning of wider national relevance.

3.6.2 This may include areas which help the Inquiry examine different institutional structures, local demographics, policing arrangements, safeguarding models, urban or rural settings (although whether an area is urban or rural will not itself be a freestanding selection

criterion), local authority arrangements, night-time economy risks, online exploitation, trafficking or cross-boundary offending.

3.6.3 The Inquiry may also select areas to ensure that the overall programme of Local Area Investigations captures a range of experiences and institutional contexts, rather than only areas with the highest recorded number of cases or convictions.

3.7 Practical deliverability and sequencing:

3.7.1 The Inquiry may consider practical issues relevant to the fair, effective and timely conduct of the Inquiry's investigation, including:

- (a) whether sufficient evidence is likely to be available;
- (b) whether there are live criminal investigations or proceedings requiring deconfliction (although the existence of live or potential criminal investigations or proceedings will not itself prevent a Local Area Investigation from proceeding);
- (c) whether the area can be investigated within the Inquiry's timetable and resources;
- (d) whether investigation of the area should take place earlier or later in the Inquiry's work; and
- (e) whether the area can contribute effectively to local and national findings and recommendations.

3.7.2 The Inquiry may sequence Local Area Investigations so that early investigations can begin promptly while further evidence and data are gathered to inform later selections.

4 Phased selection and continuing application of the criteria

4.1 The criteria in this document will apply to the selection of Local Area Investigations, including any initial selections and any later selections made as the Inquiry's evidence and analysis develops.

- 4.2 The Inquiry may select local areas in phases. The Chair and Panel may make initial selections before evidence-gathering has been completed where, applying the criteria in the round, they consider this necessary to enable the Inquiry to begin its investigative work promptly, meet its timetable and discharge its Terms of Reference.
- 4.3 Later selections may be informed by further evidence and the Inquiry's developing analysis. The selection of any initial local areas does not prevent the Inquiry from selecting further local areas as additional evidence becomes available.
- 4.4 The Inquiry may also refine the scope or sequencing of a Local Area Investigation where necessary to protect fairness, avoid prejudice to criminal investigations or proceedings, respond to emerging evidence, or ensure that the Inquiry remains deliverable within its Terms of Reference and timetable.