

Outline of Scope: National Accountability Hearings

This opening phase of the national hearings in the Inquiry will take place at the end of 2026/beginning of 2027. It will start from, and seeks to learn from, numerous national and local inquiries, inspections, safeguarding reviews, serious case reviews, criminal investigations, thematic reports, parliamentary inquiries and reviews into grooming gangs over the past three decades. It will examine recommendations made in these investigations and hold organisations to account nationally for their implementation.

The Casey Audit identified repeated patterns in which institutional failings relating to grooming gangs were already known, recommendations had already been made through earlier reviews and inquiries, but implementation was inconsistent, fragmented, inadequate, insufficiently monitored or allowed to drift over time. The Audit therefore raises not only questions about earlier abuse and institutional failure, but also about implementation, accountability, oversight and delivery of safeguarding changes to children and young people in a meaningful way.

Against that backdrop, the first phase of the national accountability hearings will focus on why lessons identified repeatedly across many areas did not translate into sustained institutional and operational change. It will shine a spotlight on those organisations and individuals who have been tasked with change.

The experience of victims and survivors will be at the centre of the Inquiry's approach. The Inquiry will hear from organisations, charities and foundations which provide victim and survivor support and advocacy, learning where they consider victims have been let down by the pace, scope or implementation of change and by whom.

Recommendation 12 of the Casey Audit is the starting point for these hearings. Its emphasis on long-term implementation, cross-government coordination, sustained monitoring and regular reporting implicitly recognises that one of the recurring weaknesses in responses to grooming gangs has been the absence of sufficiently robust mechanisms to ensure recommendations translated into enduring operational change.

Part 1 of the national accountability hearings will therefore examine:

- what systems existed from 1996 onwards to protect children and young people.
- why those systems were either structurally unable to or (for reasons which will be explored) did not adequately protect those for whom they should care;
- what national policy or guidance has been put in place during this period to seek to tackle, prevent or deal with sexual exploitation by groups;
- what investigations, inquiries and reviews have taken place and what recommendations have been made and implemented;
- who has been responsible for implementation and change, what has happened where implementation failed or drifted over time and why that was the case;
- what the current standards of practice are, how they are implemented, the ways in which they are measured and what happens if they are not delivered;
- what governance and accountability mechanisms exist to ensure current and future meaningful change.

This will include, but not be limited to, asking the national organisations and individuals set out below about these issues:

- Organisations representing and undertaking work with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse including the provision of psychological support and other services.
- Central government departments, such as the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- Ministers and Parliamentarians holding relevant posts and positions.
- National Police bodies, Police and Crime Commissioners, the National Police Chiefs Council, the College of Policing.
- The Crown Prosecution Service.
- The Children's Commissioners of England and Wales.
- National and local government bodies.
- Health bodies commissioning and providing health services, including mental health and sexual health services.

- National charities who have worked with vulnerable young people who are exploited by grooming gangs.
- Those who regulate local authorities and inspect aspects of their work, along with the regulators of health, criminal justice and education agencies.
- Licensing bodies and those who regulate and/or oversee them.
- Ombudsmen and other bodies who receive complaints about the conduct of various statutory organisations.
- Religious institutions and bodies.

Part 2 of these accountability hearings will involve examining the response to previous local investigations and what steps were taken by the relevant bodies to act upon any recommendations, including those areas which have already had serious case reviews and local inquiries.

Part 3 of the national accountability hearings will be to investigate tech companies understanding and response to the role of technology in exploitation by grooming gangs.

The Inquiry will make early recommendations on all three parts of the national accountability hearings which will then be monitored throughout the Inquiry's lifetime.

The national accountability hearings will be a precursor to local area investigations which will use and test the evidence that is given in the context of identified local areas. The Inquiry will then hold a further set of national accountability hearings towards the end of the Inquiry period which will revisit the national and local agencies, drawing upon the evidence and themes arising in the local investigations, to address a series of recurring institutional themes. In this way, the national and local aspects of this Inquiry will inform each other. Both the local area investigations and the further national accountability hearings will continue to hold these organisations to account and lead to the Inquiry's final recommendations.

The first national hearings will take place alongside a series of seminars and engagement work which will hear accounts and gather evidence outside of the formal hearing structure.

The first national hearings will include analysis of any role played by ethnicity, religion and culture as reasons why recommendations or changes were either not implemented at all, or only partially implemented. Other hearings and dedicated seminars will also explore these issues.

A [Core Participant Protocol](#) which explains how to apply for Core Participant status in the national hearings has been published on the Inquiry's website.