

The Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs

Protocol on Core Participants

1. This document explains how the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs ('the Inquiry') will approach the designation of Core Participants. It outlines the legal basis for Core Participant status, how applications are considered, and what participation as a Core Participant may involve.
2. Being designated as a Core Participant gives an individual, organisation or entity a defined procedural role in the Inquiry, but it does not indicate that their evidence is more significant than that of others, nor that it will be treated as carrying greater weight.
3. Many people and organisations will engage with the Inquiry without being Core Participants. Non-Core Participants may still contribute evidence, provide witness statements, attend or observe public hearings (subject to any direction of the Chair), and access materials that the Inquiry publishes.
4. In applying this Protocol, the Chair will act in accordance with section 17(3) of the Inquiries Act 2005, that is with fairness and with regard to the need to avoid any unnecessary cost.

General Principles

5. The power to designate Core Participants arises under rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules 2006.
6. In deciding whether to designate a person as a Core Participant, the Chair must in particular consider whether –
 - a. the person played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which the inquiry relates;

- b. the person has a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which the inquiry relates; or
 - c. the person may be subject to explicit or significant criticism during the inquiry proceedings or in the report, or in any interim report.
- 7. The scope of the Inquiry is set by its published Terms of Reference.
- 8. Meeting one or more of the Rule 5 criteria does not create an entitlement to Core Participant status and the Chair retains a broad discretion, which will be exercised fairly, consistently and proportionately in light of the Inquiry's aims and the efficient conduct of its work.
- 9. Applications for Core Participant Status can be made for (1) the national accountability hearings; (2) a particular local investigation; or (3) more than one local investigation and/or the national accountability hearings. Applications will need to address why they are applying for the national hearings or local investigation. Applications will be invited following the announcement of the national review hearings or investigation and should not be made prior to the opening of the relevant window. Core Participant Status in a local investigation is unlikely to be granted in respect of individuals or bodies who do not have a close connection with the relevant area. In respect of the national accountability hearings, the Chair anticipates that she will generally be assisted by applications from victim and survivor organisations or representative groups. However, applications from individual victims and survivors will be considered on their own merits.
- 10. No person, organisation or entity can be designated as a Core Participant without their agreement. Invitations to apply do not oblige an applicant to accept Core Participant status if offered.
- 11. Core Participant status may be withdrawn where the Chair considers that the basis on which it was granted no longer applies.

12. Core Participant status will end either on a date specified by the Chair in writing or when the Inquiry concludes.

Participation as a Core Participant

13. Core Participants may be permitted to:
 - a. Receive, in advance of hearings, disclosure of evidence which the Chair considers relevant to them (subject to any restrictions made under section 19 of the Inquiries Act);
 - b. Make opening and closing statements at hearings;
 - c. Suggest lines of questioning to be pursued by Counsel to the Inquiry;
 - d. Apply to the Chair to ask questions of a witness during hearings; and
 - e. Receive a copy of the Inquiry report (or any interim report) prior to publication.
14. Core Participants may also seek public funding for legal representation, where appropriate (see below).

Applications for Core Participant Status

15. Completed applications should be sent to the Inquiry on Solicitor@grooming-gangs.independent-inquiry.uk.
16. Applications should be concise, explaining how the applicant meets the Rule 5 criteria and how this relates to the subject matter of the Inquiry. Applicants may include any other information they consider relevant to the Chair's assessment.
17. In respect of those who are victims or survivors of Grooming Gangs, the application for Core Participant status would benefit from the following additional information:

- a. whether they are aware of any ongoing police investigation in respect of their case;
 - b. whether there has been a criminal trial and, if so, whether it has concluded; and
 - c. Where the application concerns the National Accountability Hearings, whether their interests could be represented through an existing victim and survivor organisation or representative group and, if not, why not.
18. All victims and survivors will be allocated an individual cipher by the Inquiry unless they wish to waive their anonymity.
19. Applicants should state whether they intend to instruct legal representatives and, if so, provide relevant details where available. There is no requirement to instruct legal representatives in order to be designated as a Core Participant.
20. The Chair will carefully consider all applications and, if she considers that further information is necessary before coming to a decision, may ask an Applicant to provide such information in writing. The Chair may make determinations based solely on written applications (together with any further information provided in accordance with this paragraph).
21. The window for applications to be received will be specified on the Inquiry's website at an appropriate time following the announcement of the national accountability hearings or local investigation. Applications received after the dates specified by the Inquiry may still be considered by the Chair at her discretion. The Chair may take into account additional factors (including the reason for any delay and the potential impact on the work of the Inquiry) in deciding whether to grant Core Participant status.

22. Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of their application unless another form of communication has been agreed

Legal Representation and Funding

23. The recognition of a person as a Core Participant is distinct from any decision concerning their legal representation.
24. In accordance with rule 7(2) of the Inquiry Rules 2006, where there are two or more Core Participants, each of whom seeks to be legally represented, and the Chair considers-
- a. their interests in the outcome of the Inquiry are similar;
 - b. the facts they are likely to rely on in the course of the Inquiry are similar; and
 - c. it is fair and proper for them to be jointly represented.
 - d. The Chair must direct that those Core Participants shall be represented by a single recognised legal representative ('RLR'), and the Chair may designate a qualified lawyer for that purpose.
25. Whilst all applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, the Chair considers that it is likely that all victims and survivors will be represented by a small number of RLRs. Legal representatives are encouraged to direct their clients to those RLRs at an early stage and will be required to explain in the application any reasons for not having done so.
26. Where joint representation is directed, Core Participants will be given an opportunity to agree an RLR. If agreement is not reached within a reasonable time, the Chair will appoint a representative she considers suitable.

27. Under section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005, the Chair may make awards in respect of legal costs and witness attendance, whether or not an applicant is a Core Participant.
28. Applications for funding must comply with the Ministerial Determination issued under section 40(4) of the Inquiries Act 2005 and with the Inquiry's Protocol on Legal Costs, both will be published on the Inquiry's website.

Confidentiality

29. Core Participants and their legal representatives must keep confidential any information provided by the Inquiry and must use it solely for the purposes of the Inquiry.
30. Confidential information must not be disclosed, shared or used for any other purpose. All Core Participants and their legal representatives will be required to sign an undertaking to this effect.
31. Failure to comply with confidentiality obligations may result in withdrawal of Core Participant status or other limitations on participation.

Contact and Review

32. Any questions concerning this Protocol should be directed to the Inquiry on Solicitor@grooming-gangs.independent-inquiry.uk.
33. This Protocol takes effect on the date set out below and applies unless and until updated or replaced. This Protocol may be revised during the course of the Inquiry. Any amended version will be published on the Inquiry's website following approval by the Chair.

Updated on 7 August 2026