

# PE2190/E: Hold an inquiry into grooming gangs in Scotland

## Anonymous written submission, 10 March 2026

I am one of the 3 Lived Experience Consultees of the Independent Inquiry into Telford Child Sexual Exploitation (IITCSE), chaired by Tom Crowther KC, and was a panel member of the National Working Group (NWG) led survivor panel of the, now titled, Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs.

Firstly, I wish to thank Ms Jenny Gilruth for establishing the Scottish inquiry into child sexual exploitation. We have previously met and had some discussion relating to measures of best practice, regarding survivor engagement, so again, thank you for taking some of those points forward.

I am writing in support of the petitioner and wish to provide additional insight into some of the matters that the petitioner has quite rightly raised. My experience of participating in national inquiry mechanisms, including the

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), reinforced the importance of robust safeguarding procedures for survivors who come forward.

While IICSA produced important findings, its structure also exposed several challenges relevant to Scotland. One element of that inquiry, the **Truth Project**, invited survivors to share their experiences of abuse. While thousands of individuals participated, survivor groups raised concerns that the process risked becoming a testimonial exercise rather than an investigative mechanism capable of delivering meaningful change.

In my own case, participation in the **Truth Project** raised serious safeguarding concerns regarding the handling of my evidence and welfare. I was interviewed by a professor with support from a safeguarding expert. The safeguarding expert expressed concerns, and I was left alone in the interview room listening to them, shouting at one another, whilst they stood outside the door.

I had been complacent in trusting that feeding into the Truth project would have been safe and confidential. However, the safeguarding expert later phoned to advise that unfortunately, there were serious safeguarding risks as a result of the content of my testimony. I was advised that it may be best, for my safety, to withdraw my statement. This left me very confused and upset that a national inquiry couldn't deal with the level of harm and suffering that I had endured. The situation required intervention to remedy the issues that had arisen. My testimony had to be withdrawn from IICSA as IICSA had not adopted safety measures, robust enough, to ensure my safety.

Also, based on the draft Terms of Reference for the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, I am outside the scope of that Inquiry, and it is unlikely that my testimony would be included. Given the level of significant failings and how those

failings resulted in life long severe and trans-generational disadvantages, that is a huge concern!

Experiences such as this, illustrate why survivor safeguarding must not be treated as an administrative detail within inquiry structures. It must be embedded as a central principle of the investigative process. Survivors who choose to engage with inquiries do so because they believe their testimony may help prevent future harm to children. Institutions therefore have a responsibility to ensure that the process is safe, respectful and meaningful.

As Scotland proceeds with the inquiry into organised child sexual exploitation, it has the opportunity to design a process that learns from previous experiences across the United Kingdom and place survivor welfare at the centre of its work. However, survivor participation must never become **extractive or symbolic**. Evidence from previous inquiries demonstrates that poorly designed engagement processes can lead to further harm. The Scottish inquiry must therefore embed safeguarding protections, including:

- independent advocacy for survivors providing evidence
- access to trauma-informed psychological support
- independent oversight of safeguarding processes
- clear complaint and escalation procedures

Without these protections, the inquiry risks undermining the very voices it seeks to hear.

It is important that, under the leadership of Professor Alexis Jay, that the Scottish inquiry understands that replicating the English national model is neither necessary nor desirable. Scotland has the opportunity to design a process that is:

- more focused
- more transparent, and
- more responsive to survivor concerns

The goal should not be to reproduce an existing inquiry structure, but to **learn from its strengths and weaknesses**. Most importantly, the inquiry must remain **accountable to the evidence rather than to political expectations**. Public discussion about organised child sexual exploitation has increasingly become politically polarised in recent years.

Survivors themselves have repeatedly warned that public debate can sometimes shift away from institutional accountability and towards broader political or cultural arguments. When this occurs, the experiences of victims' risks becoming secondary to wider ideological disputes. Ensuring the Scottish inquiry is fully independent, and does not mimic the English national model inquiry, offers a mechanism to address this problem.

For Scotland, the objective should therefore be to create an inquiry capable of **separating evidence from narrative**. Only a transparent and independent investigative process can ensure that the experiences of victims are understood within the proper safeguarding context, rather than being shaped by external political debates. In doing so, the inquiry would protect not only the interests of survivors, but also the integrity of public understanding of child sexual exploitation.

The Scottish Parliament should urge the Scottish Government to:

1. **Ensure the inquiry is structurally independent** from previous UK inquiry frameworks where survivor concerns have been raised.
2. **Embed survivor safeguarding protections** within all evidence-gathering processes.
3. **Investigate institutional responses** across policing, social care, education and health services.
4. **Provide clear mechanisms for survivor participation that prioritise safety and dignity.**

#### **Questions the Committee May Wish to Consider:**

- What safeguards will be put in place to ensure that the inquiry operates independently from government influence?
- How will the terms of reference be developed, and what role will survivors play in shaping them?
- What trauma-informed safeguarding frameworks will be implemented for survivors providing evidence?
- Will independent advocacy services be made available to survivors participating in the inquiry?
- How will the inquiry determine the prevalence of organised child sexual exploitation in Scotland?
- Will the inquiry examine institutional decision-making and safeguarding cultures across multiple agencies?
- How will lessons from investigations in other inquiries inform the design of the Scottish inquiry?
- What steps will be taken to ensure that survivor engagement processes avoid the safeguarding concerns raised by participants in previous inquiry mechanisms such as the **Truth Project**?