

**Baroness Longfield CBE**

Chair, Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs

**By email**

Our Ref: DE/MOF

27 February 2026

Dear Baroness Longfield

**Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs**

It was a pleasure to meet you and your panel in Manchester on 20 February 2026.

The meeting was very well attended, with 26 survivors of group-based organised child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSAE) , as well as family members, Maggie Oliver and her team from the Foundation, and myself (their legal representative). The event provided an excellent opportunity for survivors to meet you, to hear your thoughts on the role they might play in your Inquiry, and to share with you their concerns and hopes for your work.

You informed the meeting of the consultation on the Inquiry Terms of Reference (ToRs). You and your panel took the meeting through the areas upon which you wish to invite submissions. We agreed that the attendees and others will channel their contributions via The Maggie Oliver Foundation (the Foundation) and then to me and my team. We will then work with the survivors and the Foundation in order to marshal those contributions into formal submissions on behalf of the survivors and the Foundation that we represent.

Trust deficit

The meeting in Manchester will only have enhanced your understanding of the entrenched trust deficit that victims and survivors have in relation to the institutions that were charged with their care and protection. The length of time it has taken to establish your Inquiry, the obstacles that have been placed in its path, and survivor concern that any recommendations you make will not be implemented have only deepened that lack of trust.

By way of example, when we look to the draft terms of reference that have been published, these arise from Recommendation 2 of Baroness Casey's National Audit. However, Baroness Casey predicated her recommendations on the implementation of the 20 Key Recommendations of the IICSA. Although these were published in October 2022, and sequential governments have promised implementation, those recommendations have not been implemented.

You are aware that we are bringing judicial review proceedings on behalf of The Maggie Oliver Foundation in order to seek to compel implementation or the publication of a timetable for implementation of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommendations. The permission application will be heard by the High Court on 5 March 2026.

The trust deficit that exists amongst survivors therefore is grounded in fact and experience.

#### Trust and confidence building measures

The meeting on 20 February 2026 was a welcome step in building trust and confidence. However, you will appreciate that it was a first step, and that trust and confidence will need to be built over time and through demonstrated action, and importantly, through the meaningful participation of victims and survivors in your Inquiry.

You raised, and the meeting discussed, core participant status for the survivors who form part of The Maggie Oliver Foundation umbrella group, many of whom were persons who met with and assisted Baroness Casey, who insisted (in her National Audit Report) that their cases be investigated.

We recognise that, as your Terms of Reference have not yet been settled by the Secretary of State, your Inquiry does not have the power to grant core participant status yet. However, the Secretary of State can be asked to publish her Determination on Section 40 legal funding now. That Determination could provide for some funding to be made available, at the Chair's discretion, to facilitate work by lay victims and survivors on the terms, and other appropriate early engagement work with the Inquiry. This would be consistent, for example, with the approach taken by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in respect of the Patrick Finucane Public Inquiry and also in respect of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.

Additionally, we would ask the Chair to request that when the Secretary of State publishes her Determination, that the Determination provides (in respect of victim and survivors core

participants) that there is no means testing in respect of Section 40 legal expenses awards. Further that any Section 40 award for victim or survivor core participants is made for the duration of the Inquiry. Again, this would be consistent with the Determination issued in respect of the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry, Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry and Patrick Finucane Public Inquiry.

For there to be trust and confidence in the Inquiry, victims and survivors must be able to contend and be on the same footing with institutional core participants, who will enjoy unrestricted access to legal advice and representation and other departmental support.

### Restorative Justice versus Listening Project

You will recall that we have previously written to the Minister asking that the Secretary of State and Inquiry commit to the development of a meaningful restorative justice process, alongside, and as part of any Inquiry, as a means of delivering tangible solutions of restoration for our clients and other victims now and in the long term.

In other Inquiries a “listening project” has run alongside the Inquiry. These initiatives have not been well received by victim participants, as they rightly consider that accounts they give are not acted upon and provide no healing or other material effect.

On behalf of our clients, we introduced the concept of Restorative Justice to the Post Office Horizon IT Scandal Inquiry. The Chair, Sir Wyn Williams, recognised its value in his recommendation 19 (Volume 1 Final Report - 8 July 2025). We then engaged with the Department of Business, Fujitsu and Post Office Ltd, to develop and deliver a national restorative justice project and process.

The first stage of that initiative was spun up and implemented within a matter of weeks, and led to the publication of *The Restorative Justice Council Horizon Project First [Report](#), Rebuilding Trust: The First Step Toward a Restorative Future - 31 October 2025*. We would invite you to read that report. In its opening passages it states:

*Over a two-week period, the RJC engaged with 145 participants across the United Kingdom, utilising in person and online sessions as well as written submissions. From the onset, the importance of collaboration with those harmed was abundantly clear. This engagement provided profound insights into the experiences of affected individuals and allowed for the identification of potential restorative processes that could effectively address their needs.*

*The success of restorative justice is intrinsically linked to inclusive dialogue—where the voices of individuals directly impacted are genuinely heard and respected. Initiatives undertaken without this essential input risk being ineffective or could even exacerbate feelings of harm.*

...

*The sessions uncovered powerful insights into what an effective restorative justice programme must entail. Participants advocated for a comprehensive, inclusive, and trauma-informed approach that offers multiple pathways for engagement, respects individual readiness, and supports long-term recovery. Key themes emerged from their feedback, including:*

***Truth and Acknowledgement:*** *Calls for public and written apologies that fully recognise the extent of harm and affirm the integrity of those wrongfully accused.*

***Restoration and Support:*** *Holistic measures, including family counselling and financial security, to facilitate lasting recovery.*

***Inclusion and Voice:*** *Ensuring that those harmed continue to participate in shaping and reviewing the restorative justice programme.*

***Institutional Reform:*** *Embedding restorative principles within organisational culture to prevent future harm.*

Whereas, it would not be right to prejudge the needs of survivors, based on our initial understanding of the concerns articulated by survivors and The Foundation, these *key themes* would likely arise from or form part of a restorative justice initiative with victims of CSE.

We are now in the process of working up the practical elements of a proposed 5-year restorative justice programme with the Restorative Justice Council, funded by the Department for Business and Trade, Fujitsu PLC and Post Office Ltd.

We suggest that this initiative, instigated by another current national inquiry, provides a ready model and framework for a similar initiative by this Inquiry that could have significant positive outcomes.

## Conclusion

We would appreciate a response on the above matters.

You also mentioned that you are now recruiting the Inquiry's legal team, and we would welcome the opportunity to engage with them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howe + Co". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

**David Enright JP**

**Partner**

**Howe + Co Solicitors**