

Lucy Allan MP

Member of Parliament for Telford



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Chairman
IITCSE, c/o Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP
115 Colmore Row
Birmingham
B3 3AL

2 July 2019

Dear Chairman

Telford Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Thank you for the invitation to consult on the Terms of Reference for the above inquiry which is most welcome.

As the Member of Parliament for Telford, I have been working with survivors and their families, as well as campaigning on this issue since my election in 2015. During this time, I have met with many survivors, families, police, councillors, the safeguarding board chair and Family Connect. I have raised my constituents' concerns on this issue in Parliament on many occasions. I am delighted that despite initially refusing to hold an inquiry in 2016, the Council has finally agreed to hold this inquiry and that a Chairman has now been appointed to take this forward.

I am of firm belief that any victim of CSE that occurred in Telford and wishes to participate in the inquiry should be allowed to do so. Please may I request that the inquiry is dealt with expeditiously to ensure public confidence in the process and importantly justice for survivors.

I enclose my response to the invitation to the consultation. I should be pleased to work with you in any way that is helpful to you in achieving the objectives of the inquiry.

I look forward to the progress of this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Lucy Allan'.

Lucy Allan MP

1. Question 1 - What time period should be under examination?

- 1.1. The experience of any victim and/or their family members who come forward to give evidence should be fully considered irrespective of when the event occurred.
- 1.2. It would be inappropriate to introduce an arbitrary cut-off date and exclude testimony, where there is a victim and/or family wanting to be heard.
- 1.3. Some of the first reported cases of CSE occurred where the victim was living in residential children's homes, some forty years ago.
- 1.4. It is however, fully accepted that if no victims or families come forward to give evidence to the inquiry then the focus of the inquiry rightly will be on the more recent cases where victims and their families are coming forward.

2. Question 2 – Location

- 2.1 It is right that the inquiry focuses on victims and survivors who lived in Telford at the time that the exploitation occurred.
- 2.2 This must include all those victims who no longer live in Telford and those who were living in Telford but abused and exploited elsewhere. It is known that Telford residents were taken to Birmingham and Wolverhampton, for example and were exploited there. It is important that these cases are included in the remit of the inquiry.
- 2.3 The consultation invitation suggests that Child Sexual Exploitation that took place in Telford but happened to a victim who was not a Telford resident should be excluded. I would invite the inquiry to reconsider this proposal for the following reasons:
- 2.4 A victim who may have lived just outside the borough boundary but attended school in Telford with a social network of friends and contacts within Telford, would be excluded from the inquiry. This would be a mistake as clearly the issue under consideration is Child Sexual Exploitation in Telford. The Telford Authorities are responsible for crimes which take place in Telford. A victim who happened to live in say Broseley or Shifnal and was groomed and exploited in betting shops and takeaways in Telford, by Telford perpetrators should not have their testimony ignored. Indeed, there is much for the authorities to learn from any experience of street grooming and gang activity occurring in Telford irrespective of where the victim lived.
- 2.5 Crimes committed by a perpetrator who may have lived and may continue to live in Telford are the responsibility of the Telford authorities. Excluding any examination of these crimes because their victims lived outside the borough boundary would send the wrong message about the purpose of the inquiry.

2.6 A victim who was not resident in Telford at the time the crime occurred may well have had a previous connection with Telford which led them to become a victim of CSE in Telford.

3. Question 3 - How should the inquiry define CSE and the cases that it looks at?

3.1 The inquiry must be restricted to CSE cases only and CSE should not be conflated with all child abuse. It is essential that the inquiry understands the manipulative nature of grooming and issues around 'deemed consent.' The CPS has in the past decided not to prosecute because the 'perpetrator would not have known that the victim did not consent.' CSE victims do not consent.

3.2 CSE will have some of the following elements:

- The child victim will be groomed online or by street grooming.
- Grooming can include what is perceived by the victim as 'befriending.'
- The grooming allows the perpetrator to coerce the victim into carrying out sexual activities without the coercion necessarily being apparent at the outset.
- Some victims will be threatened with exposure of sexual activities to friends and family or threatened with sexual images being shared online/at school, unless they agree to sexual activities.
- CSE will usually involve a group of connected perpetrators who may be connected by family and community ties. Victims are often asked to 'do a favour' for my uncle, cousin or family friend.
- Betting shops, takeaways, taxi hire cars have been involved in CSE in Telford.


3.3 Any case where the grooming began when the victim was a child should be considered by the inquiry, even if the subsequent sexual exploitation occurred once the child was over 16.

4. Question 4 -Other issues to consider

4.1 The social and cultural attitudes towards young women and girls allowed CSE to go undetected and not treated as a crime. There were those in authority who considered it was the behaviour of the child who had 'brought it on themselves.' Too often the police and CPS have considered that the victim would make an 'unsympathetic witness.'

4.2 Role of those in authority

Why did a group of men, all in positions of authority, sign a letter to the Home Secretary in September 2016 stating that no CSE inquiry was necessary in Telford? This was a coordinated use of positions of power to prevent CSE in Telford from being examined.



Some of those men remain in these positions - the public needs to understand how their attitudes to CSE have changed.

4.3 The Cabinet member for Children's Services in Telford stated in 2016 that the investigative journalist who brought the issue out into the open was a 'despicable source' who was only raising the issue to promote her career. Similar accusations were made that by raising CSE in Parliament the MP was 'disgracefully politicising' the issue and was 'racist.' It should be noted that previous Telford MP, David Wright MP, who was in office from 2001 until 2015 and is now a local Councillor did not raise this issue in Parliament. The Chair of the child safeguarding claimed the numbers of victims were 'made up on the back of a fag packet.' The Police Superintendent claimed the occurrence of CSE has been 'sensationalised.'

5. Timetable

5.1 There must be a timetable with a scheduled end date to ensure that any further delays are avoided.

5.2 It is strongly recommended that the Chair ensures the inquiry is dealt with expeditiously to give the community confidence in the process and give survivors justice. The Council was proposing to involve a variety of organisations in this inquiry. It is important to focus on the role of the police and the role of social services and not dilute this focus by investigating too many organisations.