



# INDEPENDENT INQUIRY CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks investigation

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### Inquiry Counsel Opening Statement for Hearing Commencing 21 September 2020

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#### 1. Introduction

1. Good morning Chair and Panel. I appear today with Paul Livingston, Antonia Benfield and Ben Fullbrook of counsel, instructed by the Solicitor to the Inquiry.
2. As you have indicated, Chair, this is the Public Hearing in the **Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks** investigation. This investigation considers the institutional responses to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks.
3. Preliminary hearings were held on **2 May 2019** and **15 January 2020**. This public hearing was due to be heard in April 2020 but was postponed in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. This investigation considers the nature and extent of, and institutional responses to, sexual exploitation of children by organised networks incorporating case specific investigations alongside a review of information available from published and unpublished reports and reviews, court cases, and previous investigations. In doing so, it will consider the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation by organised networks.
5. There are **19** Core Participants represented in this investigation. I will introduce those Core Participants who are in attendance today. Each representative only appears on screen if they speak, so, as I introduce everyone, I would ask them to unmute their microphone and video and indicate whom you represent: see list and order [here](#).

#### 2. The investigation's scope, definition and overall methodology

6. From the outset of the Inquiry's scoping work on this investigation, it was clear that a great deal of analysis and learning had already taken place from work in response to high profile prosecutions, including serious case reviews (Oxford and Rochdale) and Chair, your own independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. The



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National Working Group (NWG) had compiled a report listing 451 recommendations from a range of investigations, inquiries, research and reports<sup>1</sup>.

7. All of this activity, by its very nature, involved examining what had gone wrong in the past, commenting on failures, identifying best practice, and suggesting improvements for the future. However it was clear that there was more to learn about whether learning and improvement was taking place as a result of high profile cases and about practice in other parts of the country.
8. The Inquiry was keen to ensure that this investigation was as forward-looking as possible in investigating the problem, focusing on whether contemporary practice had taken on board the lessons of historic failings.
9. Chair, we consider that central to the investigation are three key questions.
  - a. Is the sexual exploitation of children being prevented or at least reduced?
  - b. Are children now better protected by institutions from the perpetrators of sexual exploitation? and
  - c. Are perpetrators who associate with others to exploit children being identified, disrupted and brought to justice?
10. Chair, as you and Core Participants will be aware, the term "CSE" is sometimes used by practitioners as an abbreviation for Child Sexual Exploitation. Over the next two weeks, we will also use this term on, as well as using 'CSEN' for Child Sexual Exploitation by Networks. No disrespect is intended to victims and survivors and we are fully conscious that the use of abbreviations should not take away from reality - that we are talking about the sexual exploitation of children.
11. Chair, the **scope** of the investigation, the **definitions** adopted, and information about the **methodology** are contained in documents already published by the Inquiry, in particular, the definition of scope<sup>2</sup> and the March 2019 Update Note.
12. The **definition of scope** published at the outset of this investigation noted that the investigation would examine the extent to which:
  - a. Children subject to CSE were known to the relevant authorities;
  - b. The relevant authorities effectively identified the risk of CSE and took action to prevent it;
  - c. The response of the criminal justice system was appropriate in CSE cases
  - d. Recommendations from previous reports have been implemented effectively;
  - e. Effective strategies have been implemented to prevent CSE in the future and to monitor the safety of vulnerable, including missing, children; and

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- f. The applicable statutory and regulatory framework is effective in preventing CSE.
13. The definitions adopted for the investigations were set out in the Update Note and are as follows:
  - a. **Child sexual exploitation:** Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology.
  - b. **Organised network:** An organised network is characterised by two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child.
14. Chair, you and the Panel will note that the Inquiry's definition of an organised network focuses on sexual exploitation of children where two or more people are associated/involved. This is not the same as what is sometimes referred to in the press as a "grooming gang". The Inquiry's definition means any circumstance where two or more people associate with one another to bring about the sexual exploitation of a child. The Inquiry will hear evidence about models of sexual and other forms of child exploitation, including abuse by associated perpetrators.
15. The Inquiry's intention was to be thematic, that is to say, to identify from the findings and recommendations of the various national and local reviews a set of investigation themes that would allow the Inquiry to focus on the core issues. We have focused on **eight themes**, and I will return to these in a moment.
16. The Inquiry also wished to gather evidence about contemporary practice, focusing on good practice as well as areas for improvement. The Inquiry sampled a series of geographical areas and then chose **six areas** in which to examine the operation of the themes.
17. Finally the Inquiry selected a small group of **individual children's cases** in each geographical area for closer analysis.
3. **The nature and scale of child sexual exploitation in England and Wales**



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18. The sexual exploitation of children is by its very nature a hidden problem. Its exact nature and scale are the subject of ongoing discussion and debate, as you will hear over the next two weeks.
  - (a) **Nature**
19. Chair, tomorrow you will hear from two complainants:
  - **CS-A371** who describes her experiences of child sexual exploitation between 2003 and 2011.
  - **CS-A12** who describes being repeatedly sexually exploited while in the care of a local authority.
20. Later in the week, **CS-A2** will also describe her experiences as the mother of a sexually exploited child.
21. The Inquiry has also received written statements from three further complainants, whose evidence will be briefly summarised by Junior Counsel. Firstly Mr Livingston:
22. **CS-A317** (INQ005278 and INQ006259) was in care for much of her childhood and was accommodated in a number of childrens' homes. She describes being sexually abused and exploited from the age of 14. The staff within the childrens' homes were aware that CS-A317 was having sex with an older male. She was given alcohol and drugs and made to have sex with other men. CS-A317 reports that staff were dismissive and no action was taken. She believes the care home staff colluded with her abusers by suggesting they collect her by car near to the children's home rather than directly outside it. The abuse continued until CS-A317 was 18 years old. At this time, she was violently raped by the main perpetrator of her abuse. She reported this to the police but says that no action was taken. They took the view that because she had been associated with the perpetrator for a long time and had been in contact with him through text messages, CS-A317 had consented. CS-A317 had a breakdown and attempted suicide.
23. CS-A317 was contacted by the National Crime Agency (NCA) regarding the abuse she suffered as a teenager. She reports that the NCA recognised that at the time of her abuse, she was a vulnerable child who had been exploited, rather than a willing participant. As a result of the NCA investigation, the perpetrator was convicted of sexual activity with a child and sentenced to 9 years in prison. CS-A317 considers that the earlier police investigation into her abuse was "*completely flawed*" and that inaction led to further abuse. She feels that "*it was easier for the police to criminalise the children rather than go after the abusing adults*". She considers that she was given "*poor care and lack of safeguarding*" by the Council who badly failed her. She considers her overall experience with the NCA team was very positive. However, she identifies several learning points on her experiences in the course of the prosecution including the impact upon her of a female officer who had been involved during



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evidence gathering but was taken off the case just before trial. She further describes how at the sentencing hearing, she was not provided with special measures but was left to sit in the public gallery. She describes that as she left the sentencing hearing, she was confronted by the defendant's family who verbally attacked and threatened her. She feels that steps could have been taken by the NCA to avoid this. [I now pass over to Mr Fullbrook]

24. **CS-A372** (INQ005943) grew up in a family where there was neglect and domestic violence. She has pieced together events in her childhood through her social care records. She was first raped at the age of 12 by a 16 year old boy. Her mother reported this to police and the perpetrator was prosecuted and convicted of rape.
25. At this time, CS-A372 reports suffering from parental neglect, being bullied at school and describes herself as being desperate for affection. She was introduced to a male who was around 30 years old whom she believes was involved in drug dealing and prostitution. He gave her gifts and was kind to her. However, he expected her to have sex with him and later demanded that she have sex with other men. CS-A372 was missing from home frequently. She was self harming and being supplied with alcohol and cannabis; having sex with other teenagers and had a history of taking overdoses. When she turned 13 in 2008, her home life was increasingly violent and chaotic. She reports being assaulted by her father who also threatened to prostitute her. Her case was closed by social services despite knowledge of a history of overdose, repeat missing episodes, chaotic and crowded domestic conditions and sexual exploitation. Her records show that she was supported by a local service in 2009 and made disclosures of sexual exploitation to a health professional, who made a further referral to social services. Social services again closed her case on the basis that she was "*putting herself at risk*". This decision was later reversed.
26. During missing episodes, CS-A372 was regularly picked up by the police to whom she reported the sexual abuse. She was interviewed about a rape (by an associate of her main abuser), but was too traumatised to make a disclosure. She does not consider that meaningful steps were taken to protect her.
27. In June 2009, she was forced to give oral sex to over 20 men. This was filmed and CS-A372 was forced to drink alcohol and take drugs. CS-A372 explained this to police and a number of men were charged although the charges were later dropped. CS-A372 continued to be sexually exploited with repeat missing episodes.
28. In September 2009, CS-A372 was abducted by a group of men and was forced to have oral sex with 23 men while a gun was held to her head. She was raped. She was placed back in care having earlier returned to live with her mother. She tried to cooperate with police investigations but felt very conflicted and was repeatedly self-harming. CS-A372 considers that she was failed by social services and by the



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police. She also considers there was a lack of coordination between agencies tasked with protecting her. [I now pass over to Ms Benfield]

29. **CS-A373** (INQ005838) experienced domestic violence as a young child and felt rejected at home. She started to associate with older girls and men in the area. She repeatedly went missing from home but was found by the police and returned to her mother. When she was 12, an adult in the group gave her cannabis, forced her to perform oral sex and raped her. Six months later, she disclosed the rape and the police were informed but no charges brought. Her home life became increasingly difficult and she was repeatedly going missing and being taken home by police. At age 13, CS-A373 was given drugs by a local man and had a severe reaction requiring hospitalisation. Social services intervened and CS-A373 was placed in temporary care. She was moved to several different foster care placements but was desperate to return home and kept running away. She was using alcohol and cannabis. CS-A373 was moved out of area and was placed in a care home between the ages of 14 and 16.
30. In February 2011, CS-A373 absconded from the care home and started to meet a man of 26 years old. She told the care home staff that he was 18 and she was permitted to meet him. She then met another adult male who gave her alcohol and cannabis before raping her. She managed to run away and went to the police. The perpetrator was cautioned for having sex with a child under 16. CS-A373 took an overdose. She reports that she was not provided with support or counselling following the rape.
31. CS-A373 considers that the police took little action to investigate the abuse that she was subjected to and failed to assess the risk that perpetrators posed in the local community. She considers that the police and social services had very little or no empathy for her and made no real attempt to understand her experiences. She feels she was returned home from multiple missing episodes without any enquiry as to why she was running away. She considers that she was never risk assessed so that she could be properly protected.
32. **Daisy**. The Inquiry has also been provided with a transcript of 'File on 4 - "Groomed, abused and put in prison: Rochdale's Untold Story' (CWJ000001) which was broadcast on 14 July 2020. The transcript details a reporter's discussion with a woman referred to as Daisy, to protect her identity.
33. Daisy describes a happy childhood until at age 12, when she made friends with a girl whose mother took drugs and was involved in prostitution. Daisy explains that she then started to drink and go missing. She was introduced to a group of men and would drink heavily with them in a flat. She explained that she first saw this as friendship but when aged 13, the sexual abuse started.



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34. Men ten or twelve years older than her told her they were her boyfriends, that they were in love. Daisy was too young to know better but despite there being warning signs that she was at risk, no action was taken. From age 13, Daisy was well known to the police, she was arrested and charged on a number of occasions, often connected to the abuse she was suffering. Daisy explains 'it was always like drunk and disorderly, assault, racial abuse. It was always when I was out with Asian men. Never once was anyone ever arrested, only me'. Daisy told police officers that she was being forced into sex and physically abused but no action was taken against any perpetrator.
35. At age 14, Daisy became pregnant and had an abortion. She describes being passed around for sex by anywhere between 100 and 150 men. At the same time, she became a regular at the youth offenders court in Rochdale. Her solicitor tried to explain the abuse Daisy was suffering but no investigation was conducted. Instead, Daisy was sentenced to four months in a young offenders' institution at age 15. On her release, the cycle of abuse continued as did her repeated arrest and reported lack of investigation.
36. In 2008, Greater Manchester Police initiated Operation Span, the investigation that led to the Rochdale grooming trial. The investigation had a list of well over two dozen girls, of which Daisy was one. In 2011, Daisy was approached by officers investigating the case and she agreed to assist the investigation. She explains that the officers were interested primarily in the abuse suffered by another girl, and not in abuse that she had suffered. Daisy explains that the trial commenced in 2012 and she attended as a witness. The trial lasted ten weeks and on the 8th of May 2012, nine of the eleven men were convicted of child sex offences. Daisy was left feeling overwhelmed, struggling to cope and on her own. Following the trial, Daisy reported to the police that she was threatened, harassed and her home broken into but states that she was provided with no support.

**(b) Scale**

37. Chair, you are going to hear evidence from national witnesses about the difficulties of accurately measuring the problem. You are also going to hear from local institutions about the scale of the problem in their area, how good their intelligence is, whether there are any gaps, and whether there are accurate and up to date profiles of the problem.
38. What is not disputed is that cases of child sexual exploitation are under-reported and the numbers of children affected are much higher than official records report. We know from research that the big picture is that many thousands of children are sexually exploited each year.
39. You will hear evidence from national witnesses outlining their views that national figures may not be reliable and the possible reasons for this. You will also hear that



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recorded cases are dropping in some areas. A recent Department of Health report commented on the unreliability of counts of CSE cases and reporting bias. It states that CSE is almost always likely to be unreported and the need for public health input to address this issue.

40. Nationally, we do not know how much child sexual exploitation is carried out by perpetrators associated with one another. In 2016, Regional Organised Crime Units received funding to produce regional CSE profiles and you will hear evidence from HMICFRS and other witnesses regarding the current state of CSE profiling and whether further improvements are needed.
41. A 2016 report produced by Sheffield University to assist professionals dealing with CSE reviewed the research and Government statistics on child in need assessments and concluded that:

*In total therefore, a very rough estimate is that CSE is a notable concern for close to 40,000 children/young people in England currently in contact with children's social care. There is additionally likely to be other children/young people who are not known to children's social care for whom CSE is a notable concern over and above this estimate".*
42. Research carried out in 2018 found wide variations between different local authorities - figures ranged from over 30 children at risk of CSE per 10,000 to zero children at risk per 10,000. However, as noted by the authors, "*children's services data tells us less about the scale of CSA in child protection systems and more about recording practices over time*".
43. The ONS recorded that in 2018/19, there were 18,720 assessments carried out in England which identified sexual exploitation as a factor contributing to concerns about the child. This had reduced from 20,000 the previous year. Welsh Government guidance from March 2020 will require this data to be collected in Wales as well.
44. For the last two years, experimental statistics from police forces in England and Wales show a total of CSE-flagged offences 11,554 in 2018/19, a decrease from 13,544 in 2017/18. The ONS make clear that the data is yet not robust enough for comparisons between years.
45. In 2018/19, police recorded 1012 offences of 'Abuse of Children Through Sexual Exploitation' and 5900 offences of 'sexual grooming', though this doesn't take into account the various other sexual offences (such as rape or sexual assault) which can be committed as part of sexual exploitation.
46. As at February 2020, there were over 90 police investigations into group-based child sexual exploitation in operation.





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## (c) Harmful effects

47. Chair, you will hear evidence from many witnesses this week, including complainant witnesses, about the harmful effects of sexual exploitation on children while they are children, and the devastating impact it has on young lives. We also know that the effects last into adulthood and for some victims into old age.
48. Inquiry's Truth Project has amassed a body of evidence from witness accounts which attest to the harm children and adults have suffered as a result of sexual abuse and exploitation.
49. Research has documented the harms caused by the perpetrators of CSE and child abuse more generally as follows.
  - a. The possible mental health effects of being subject to sexual abuse as a child/young person include anxiety, conduct disorder, depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), self-harm and suicide attempts.
  - b. The potential effects on future behaviour and development include age-inappropriate sexual activity, alcohol and drug misuse, lack of ability to trust others and build relationships, and involvement in the sexual victimisation of others.
  - c. Physical health implications include contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unplanned pregnancy and possible termination, physical injury and genital injury.
50. It is also documented that there is a significant link between exposure to sexual abuse as a child/young person and the likelihood of experiencing behavioural problems, poor physical health and poor mental health as an adult.
51. Notably not all children and young people subject to sexual abuse will exhibit all of these issues. However, some of the effects may also take time to manifest themselves after exposure to the abuse had ended.
52. The severity of the effects of CSE will be influenced by a combination of factors: **(i)** Individual child/young person level factors: pre-existing mental health and psychology; age; gender; framing of what has happened to them, particularly the extent to which blame or shame regarding the abuse is internalised; **(ii)** Abuse related factors: duration, nature and severity of the abuse; and **(iii)** Support related factors: whether the abuse completely ceases; whether there is provision of therapeutic support around the psychological and emotional impact of the abuse; whether there are familial and professional networks of effective support.

## 4. The historical and legal context



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53. Chair, I now intend to draw out a few key points from a detailed summary of the historical and legal context in both England and Wales which the Inquiry's legal team has prepared and which we hope you will find helpful. This summarises the work of the investigation in seeking to understand what has been learnt about CSE to date, and how institutions have responded. This includes consideration of key or landmark publications, guidance and legislation. Different legal and regulatory frameworks exist in England and Wales and, for this reason, I deal with each separately, although there is clear overlap between the two: **Annex: The historical and legal context**.
54. Drawing this together, it is clear that significant work has been undertaken to understand the nature of CSEN. A large number of reports have been produced on this issue. Some have been geographically focused, others have been more thematic. All have made a number of recommendations as to how the problem should be tackled.
55. This investigation, which is focused on **institutional responses** to CSEN, does not seek to repeat what has come before, but to establish whether the key recommendations in the field have been implemented and if they have not been why that is the case.
- 5. The eight themes**
56. The starting point for the investigation was a review of recommendations made by national reports and local SCRs/reviews/inquiries. This built on work done by the National Working Group in 2015. The recommendations were used to inform the selection of themes adopted by the Inquiry and the issues which witnesses have been asked to address in their witness statements.
57. The themes selected by the Inquiry are:
- 1: CSE Problem profiling (including gender and ethnicity) and disruption of offenders**
  - 2: Empathy and concern for child victims**
  - 3: Risk assessment and protection from harm**
  - 4: Missing children, return home interviews and looked after children including children looked after out of area**
  - 5: Male victims**
  - 6: Children with a disability**
  - 7: Partnership working on CSE**



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## 8: Audit, review and performance improvement.

58. I will now go on to briefly describe each of the eight themes and the broad issues within each one, as were set out in the Chair's Decision on 15 January 2020, following the second Preliminary Hearing.

### **Theme 1a: Problem Profiling**

59. This theme looks at the extent to which local authorities and police forces understand and have reliable information about the nature and extent of CSE in their area, including the gender and ethnicity of those at risk.
60. The issues which it will explore are:
- a. Do police forces and local authorities have comprehensive and up to date information about (i) local patterns of child sexual exploitation in their area; (ii) movement of individuals suspected of involvement in child sexual exploitation into their area; and (iii) national level information regarding patterns and trends relating to child sexual exploitation by networks?*
  - b. To what extent is this information effective and reliable?*
61. The Inquiry's examination of this theme will largely focus on the understanding of the nature and extent of CSE at a local level, by the relevant institutions in our six geographical areas. At a national level, there appears to be a recognition that there is more work to be done in understanding the scale and prevalence of CSE.
62. Chair, Over the last decade, many successful CSE prosecution cases that have hit the headlines have involved networks of associated males with the same ethnic origin. The debate that has followed is often polarised.
63. The issue of race was covered in some detail in the 2013 House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee report on child sexual exploitation. The committee heard about the difficulties of raising concerns about local patterns of child sexual exploitation, for fear of being labelled racist. Around the same time, the Children's Commissioner highlighted the under-reporting of sexual violence and exploitation of children within minority ethnic communities.
64. Chair, your own report in Rotherham identified several issues, not least an over reliance on traditional community leaders and lack of engagement with women's groups and other voices in minority ethnic communities. If heard, these would have alerted institutions to concerns about child sexual exploitation.
65. Very recently, the Inquiry has heard evidence in the CPIROS public hearing that is directly relevant to these matters. In May 2020, the Inquiry published a research report on child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities. This cited research



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which suggests that unhelpful stereotypes which assume that CSE is perpetrated by Asian men against white girls have led some professionals to believe that children from ethnic minorities are unlikely to be the victims of CSE and that, on balance, a lack of awareness of the risks to these children and especially boys has led to failings. Additionally, the literature review highlighted that there is a notable lack of research available on the experience of boys and men from ethnic minority communities in relation to child sexual abuse and exploitation.

66. In this investigation, ethnicity is dealt with under the theme of CSE problem profiling. We will ask national and local witnesses about the extent to which intelligence about the ethnicity of victims and perpetrators is collected and analysed. The profiles the Inquiry has seen so far suggests that the picture is at best patchy. You may wish to consider whether nationally or locally, profiling allows an evidence based approach to dealing with these problems.

## **Theme 1b: Disruption of offenders**

67. This theme looks at the extent to which institutions, particularly the police, are using legislative and other tools to target and disrupt those who pose a risk of child sexual exploitation to children. This includes the use of Early Investigative Advice and the prosecution of suspected offenders.
68. The main issue to be explored under this theme is:
- To what extent is disruption of offenders, based on the local profile information and/or national level information, and more generally, effective?*
69. Chair, you and the Panel may wish to consider whether significant variations in standards remain and whether, when a victim is not willing to make a statement, some police forces are not proactive in looking at other means of disruption.

## **Theme 2: Empathy and concern for child victims**

70. The issues to be explored under this theme are:
- a. *Do child victims, and adults who were abused as children, feel they are treated with empathy and respect by the police, local authorities and support services when they disclose sexual exploitation?*
  - b. *What action do police and local authorities take to ensure that victims are treated with empathy and respect?*
  - c. *What action do they take to prevent and/or respond to negative stereotyping of victims?*



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71. Evidence currently before the Inquiry suggests that, at a national level, public authorities have taken steps to ensure victims receive greater empathy and support. For example, the adoption of “victim-centred criminal justice” has included the provision of special measures to protect vulnerable witnesses in court and also attempted to improve the court environment more generally. There is a recognition that there are specific issues around access to support from BAME and LGBTQI+ victims and some additional funding has been made available under the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy - although this is not CSE specific.
72. Despite this, Ofsted is still finding that cases are being closed prematurely because children have been reluctant to engage with professionals, and some inspections, and evidence before the Inquiry, show the use of inappropriate language in relation to victims and survivors of CSE.

### **Theme 3: Risk assessment and protection from harm**

73. This theme will look at the ways in which institutions assess and monitor the extent to which children are at risk of CSE, whether via tools or otherwise. It will also consider whether children are protected from harm, and the outcomes for those children who are subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation.
74. The issues to be considered include:
  - a. *Are risks to sexually exploited children, including those who are placed out of area in cross-boundary placements, understood, documented and managed effectively?*
  - b. *Do local multi agency meetings take appropriate action to safeguard children from the threat of sexual exploitation?*
75. You may wish to consider whether template risk assessments (such as SERAF) inhibit the use of professional judgment to the detriment of the assessment overall. Research has found a wide range of tools and checklists being used, with a variation in practice as to who was to complete the tools, how to complete them, and some confusion about whether the tool was being used for screening or risk assessment. Many tools conflated risk and actual harm, whilst some placed too much emphasis on scoring and did not allow for narrative information. It has been suggested that the use of narrative information (which takes into account a child’s background and family history) should take precedence over scoring. Indeed, the Welsh Government has decided to replace its prescribed SERAF risk assessment with a “Practitioners’ Prompt”.



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## **Theme 4a: Missing children**

76. The links between CSE and children going missing from home are increasingly recognised and research suggests that 70% of sexually exploited children go missing from home. As a result, the main issue under this theme is:

*What is being done to prevent children from going missing and to protect such children from the threat of child sexual exploitation?*

77. This includes the use of interventions, the understanding of the number of children going missing, whether missing episodes are seen in isolation from the bigger picture, and the response once children, particularly those at risk of sexual exploitation, go missing.
78. At a national level, the DfE is currently in the process of reviewing its 2014 “Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home”. Two areas for improvement which have already emerged are (i) reshaping the narrative to promote building stronger trusting relationships with children and young people to empower them to disclose the causes of missing episodes; and (ii) strengthening multi-partnership arrangements so that placements for looked after children are appropriately assessed for suitability and agencies work effectively together.

## **Theme 4b: Return Home Interviews**

79. Return Home Interviews, sometimes referred to as ‘debriefs’ in Wales, is a generic term used to refer to an interview carried out with a child following their return from a period of having gone missing from home. This theme considers:

- a. *Are Return Home Interviews carried out as and when they should be?*
- b. *What use is made of data from such interviews?*

80. You may wish to consider whether data collected is acted on to protect the child from danger and to prevent the child going missing again; and whether the data is used to inform CSE intelligence and results in action by the police and other local agencies (such as hotel and taxi licensing) to disrupt perpetrators and protect other children from harm.
81. At a national level, the Department for Education’s statutory guidance is under review. It currently requires that all children who go missing be given the opportunity of having a Return Home Interview (RHI) within 72 hours of being located. However, Ofsted has observed that some local authorities are still not offering RHIs to enough children. There also appears to be significant variation in the extent to which the contents of RHI are processed, shared and utilised for the disruption of offenders and protection of the children.



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## Theme 4c: Looked After Children

82. Children in care have been described as some of the most vulnerable in society, both due to the experiences and situations that lead to them becoming looked after in the first place and due to some factors associated with being in care. This theme will consider:
- a. *To what extent do looked after children go missing?*
  - b. *How are children placed in foster care placements and residential homes, whether privately or local authority run and whether regulated or not, including in areas other than their home areas protected from sexual exploitation by networks?*
83. The profile of children in care has changed dramatically over the past five years, with 1/5th aged 16 or over and 2/3 aged 10-15. Compared to younger children, teenagers in care are, according to recent research:
- a. Six times more likely to be victims of child sexual exploitation;
  - b. Seven times more likely to go missing from home; and
  - c. 12 times more likely to be victims of trafficking.
84. Many witnesses have raised particular issues about the CSE threats to looked after adolescents, including supported accommodation being targeted by perpetrators, the dangers when children are placed in unsuitable locations in hostels and bed and breakfast establishments, and the variability of support provided to care leavers. Some of the victims who will give evidence to the Inquiry describe adverse experiences in this regard.
85. Linked to this, Inquiry has received a considerable amount of evidence in relation to the use of unregulated placements. The DfE reports that, as of March 2019, 8% of looked after children were placed in such accommodation. It suggests that unregulated placements can be appropriate for older children - a view which is supported by the Association of Directors of Children's Services. However, the DfE suggests that it will not be appropriate for children under 16 and vulnerable children. Despite this, in March 2019 over 100 under 16s were placed in such accommodation and it is also disproportionately used for BAME and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This month, the Children's Commissioner for England called for the use of unregulated accommodation to be banned for all under 18s in care.
86. The Inquiry has also received evidence on the use of out of area placements. Between 2018 and 2019, the proportion of children placed out of area rose from 37% to 41%, with 20% of children living in distant placements. Two thirds (64%) of children living in children's homes now live out of area, up from 46% in 2012. There are questions about the extent to which placing authorities do thorough risk



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assessments of the placements out of area, or notify and consult with the local authority, police force and health agencies where the child is being placed. The Association of Directors of Children's Services has given evidence that the use of such placements is largely unavoidable as a consequence of insufficient provision overall and a concentration of residential homes in the north of England.

## **Theme 5: Male Victims**

87. Male victims appear to be under-represented in statistics on child sexual exploitation due to a combination of under-reporting and professionals failing to recognise the signs of exploitation in boys and young men. Despite frequently only accounting for around 10% of CSE referrals, 2014 research by Barnardo's found that almost a third of victims are male. The issues to be addressed under this theme are:
- a. What is the threat of sexual exploitation by networks to boys and young men?*
  - b. What are the barriers to (a) the identification of males as victims; and (b) the disruption of perpetrators of sexual exploitation in respect of boys and young men?*
  - c. What is being done to safeguard boys and young men who are at risk of sexual exploitation by networks?*
  - d. Is there any regional variation in identifying and protecting male victims of sexual exploitation by networks?*
88. Research suggest that there are different routes into exploitative relationships for young men, and they may respond differently to the experiences of exploitation. Studies emphasise the importance of understanding the role of masculinity and sexual identity in supporting boys and young men who have been sexually exploited. Additionally, gender matters in understanding risk and vulnerability, impacting on behaviour and ability to disclose. Additionally, Barnardo's research showed that boys are more likely to come to child sexual exploitation services via the criminal justice system.

## **Theme 6: Children with disabilities**

89. Children with disabilities are disproportionately at risk of being victims or at risk of sexual exploitation - Children with a disability are three times more likely to be abused than children without a disability. Within this group, children with behaviour or conduct disorders are particularly vulnerable. Evidence given to the Inquiry by the NWG network suggests that children with ADHD and other autistic spectrum disorders may have increased vulnerability. Research suggests that the abuse of young people with disabilities has been largely invisible for much of history, and that disabled young people in residential care are particularly at risk of all types of abuse.





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90. The impact of sexual exploitation on and the vulnerability of children with disabilities has been covered by several reports in recent years, including:
- a. A 2016 report by Barnardo's which asserted that young disabled people face additional barriers to protection from CSE due to, amongst other things, their social isolation, and false perceptions about their needs and desires. It identified severe challenges with identifying the number of young people with disabilities who are at risk of, or who had experienced CSE. It made a number of recommendations, including that Safeguarding Boards appoint a designated CSE lead for disabled children and young people.
  - b. A July 2016 report by the National Working Group on Safeguarding Disabled Children which identified deficiencies in the approach of LSCBs to disabled children, including a failure to systematically gather and evaluate information on them and to develop strategic preventative approaches.
  - c. The CSAE Prevention Programme's 2018 toolkit on *Working with Deaf and Physically disabled children and young people in relation to child sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation*. This identified that disabled children are at increased vulnerability to exploitation and other forms of abuse due to, among other things, their dependency on others, communication barriers, increased isolation, lack of appropriate education on staying safe and higher levels of bullying. It also found that children with disabilities are less likely to disclose their abuse.
91. The issues to be addressed under this theme are:
- a. *What is the threat of sexual exploitation by networks to children with learning and other disabilities?*
  - b. *What are the barriers to (a) the identification of children with disabilities as victims; and (b) the disruption of perpetrators of sexual exploitation in respect of children with disabilities?*
  - c. *What is being done to safeguard disabled children who are at risk of sexual exploitation by networks?*
  - d. *Is there any regional variation in identifying children with disabilities as victims of sexual exploitation by networks?*

## **Theme 7: Partnership working on CSE**

92. The issues to be explored under this theme include:
- a. *How well do partnerships share information in relation to child victims and perpetrators of child sexual exploitation by networks?*



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*b. Does effective partnership work prevent victimisation and support children?*

93. Chair, you will hear evidence from several police forces, local authorities and other agencies, including about how they work together to protect children from and respond to sexual exploitation.
94. At a national level the Children and Social Work Act 2017 imposes a duty on the three safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and CCGs) to work together with relevant agencies for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area. In this vein, the Home Office is working with the NHS to roll out a national Child Protection-Information Sharing system. Implementation of this project so far has resulted in more than 186,000 vulnerable children who are subject to Child Protection Plans, Unborn Child Protection Plans and LAC being uploaded by local authorities to the NHS IT infrastructure. Inspectorates have also been piloting joint inspections.

## **Theme 8: Audit, review and performance improvement**

95. This theme looks at the extent to which institutions audit and review their own practice in respect of CSEN and the extent to which they respond to external inspections and audits.
96. The issue to be addressed under this theme is:
- To what extent has audit activity driven improvements in professional practice responses to child sexual exploitation by networks?*
97. Chair, you may also wish to consider whether there is any variation between areas in the level of attention given to auditing practice on CSE and specific issues, such as children with a disability, missing children, and male victims of CSE. You may also want to consider whether these should routinely be multi-agency.
98. Evidence before the Inquiry suggests that the degree of scrutiny of CSE work has increased significantly over recent years. Key examples include the launch of HMICFRS's rolling National Child Protection Inspection programme, which has now inspected 31 police forces at least once. HMICFRS is also working to develop a similar programme in Wales. In addition, Ofsted has produced a number of Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) on the theme of CSE and missing children. Chair, on the final day of the Inquiry, you will hear about the Inspectorates' views about the themes selected by the Inquiry, inspection findings in the selected areas, and what should change or improve.

## **6. The six areas**



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99. There are 178 local authority areas in England and Wales and 43 police force areas. It would not have been possible for the Inquiry to consider the issue of sexual exploitation by organised networks across that range of areas and forces.
100. The Inquiry therefore considered publicly available data (including number of children on child protection plans, deprivation index, policing arrangements, absence from school etc.) and chose a sample of 13 local authority areas. Institutions in these areas were asked to provide information and complete questionnaires. A large volume of material was provided in relation to those requests which the Inquiry carefully considered.
101. Having considered that material the Inquiry decided to focus on **six** particular areas, which provide a range of features including size, demography, geography and social characteristics as well as being likely to illustrate contrasting practice and performance on the selected themes.
102. The chosen areas are defined by local authority boundaries and reflect the Core Participant status I have already outlined. They are as follows:
- 1: Durham**
  - 2: Swansea**
  - 3: Warwickshire**
  - 4: St Helens**
  - 5: Tower Hamlets**
  - 6: Bristol.**
103. The Inquiry carefully considered the extent to which, if at all, it should focus on areas such as Rochdale, Rotherham and Oxford, all of which had attracted public attention because of high-profile prosecutions. They had all been the subject of investigations, serious case reviews or inquiries which looked at past mistakes; Recommendations have been made in those areas, some of which were intended to have national application.
104. The Inquiry considered that it was more appropriate to focus on different areas, not least because it is intended to be a forward-looking investigation, building on analysis that has already been done; and because it is clear that the sexual exploitation of children by networks is not a rare problem faced by a small number of areas with high-profile criminal cases.
105. The March 2019 Update Note made clear that while the Inquiry was likely to obtain evidence from a range of institutions a significant focus of the investigation would be



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placed on the role of the police and local authorities in these geographical areas in relation to these themes. I will give a brief summary of the six areas now.

## Durham

106. **General:** County Durham has a population of around 530,000, 98.2% of which are white. There are around 100,000 children.
107. As at March 2019, there were 840 LAC in Durham, a rate of 83 per 10,000 children - considerably higher than the national figure of 65 per 10,000. County Durham is ranked as the 38th most deprived local authority in England.
108. Durham Constabulary polices the area of County Durham and Darlington. Since 2016, they have led a multi-agency group called 'ERASE' (Educate and Raise Awareness of Sexual Exploitation) which specifically focuses on child sexual exploitation.
109. **Scale:** As to the scale of child sexual exploitation in Durham - there is no clear picture of the number of offences relating to child sexual exploitation.
110. In 2018/19, Durham Constabulary recorded 14 allegations of children abused through sexual exploitation, and 112 allegations of sexual grooming. This likely does not capture anything close to the full scale, as there are a considerable number of other sexual offences (such as rape and sexual assault) which are not "CSE-specific" offences.
111. DfE statistics show that in 2018/19, there were 133 assessments carried out by Durham Council which identified sexual exploitation as a factor contributing to concerns about the child.
112. The following information is taken from police statistics: a problem profile carried out in July 2019 found, over a period of three months (between October and December 2018), around 20 allegations of offences showing evidence of child sexual exploitation; between February and April 2019, there were a total of 11 contact offences recorded which contained elements of child sexual exploitation and between August and October 2019, the police recorded 14 reports of offences containing elements of child sexual exploitation.
113. We have no evidence on the number of convictions for child sexual exploitation offences in recent years. Durham's Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker lists 35 children as being at risk of exploitation. From April 2019 to March 2020, the Council report that there were 106 new cases where a child was considered to be at risk of or a victim of sexual exploitation. The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership's Annual Report recorded 115 CSE referrals in 2019/20.



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114. **Issues:** Some of the key issues to be explored in relation to Durham include the use of a Child Exploitation Vulnerability tracker, the use of the Philomena Protocol for missing looked after children, and the approach to return home interviews.

## **Swansea**

115. **General:** The City and County of Swansea had a population of around 247,000, the second highest of in Wales. Around 5.9% of the population are ethnic minorities. As at March 2019, there were 565 looked after children in Swansea, 117 per 10,000 children. Swansea has slightly above average levels of deprivation in Wales.
116. South Wales Police polices the City and County of Swansea, as well as six other local authorities, including Cardiff, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.
117. **Scale:** As to the scale of child sexual exploitation in Swansea, the police evidence is that in 2018/19 there were four incidents of child sexual exploitation reported in Swansea. Over the period from 2017 to 2019, there were four incidents of direct contact CSE investigated in Swansea relating to four alleged perpetrators - one led to a conviction.
118. In the calendar year of 2019, there were 74 incidents of CSE reported in Swansea. The reason for this steep increase is unclear, although it is likely due to a different approach to recording incidents.
119. As at March 2019, there were 15 children considered to be at risk of or subject to sexual exploitation. This rose to 17 in July 2019, and decreased to 7 or 8 in November 2019. As at January 2020, there were eight children in Swansea on its CSE protocol - thereby regarded as being at risk of sexual exploitation.
120. Figures for children's assessments where sexual exploitation was identified as a factor are not yet collected in Wales but Welsh Government guidance from March 2020 will require this going forward.
121. **Issues:** Some of the key issues to be explored in relation to Swansea includes the extent to which problem profiling is used to understand the scale of CSEN in the area, the development of a contextualised safeguarding approach, the extent to which RHIs are carried out and passed to the Local Authority, the approach to out of area children placed in Swansea, and the extent of auditing of practice.
- a. The support provided to children as care leavers;
  - b. The extent to which disability is taken into account in work to assess risk and protect from harm.



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## Warwickshire

- 122. General:** The county of Warwickshire has a population of around 570,000 people. Over 120,000 children live in the Warwickshire county. The county council comprises the five districts and boroughs of North Warwickshire, Rugby, Warwick, Stratford and Nuneaton and Bedworth.
123. From 2013 to April 2020, Warwickshire Police operated in an alliance with West Mercia Police before transitioning to single force structures.
- 124. Scale:** As to the scale of child sexual exploitation in Warwickshire,
- As at March 2019, there were 111 looked after children who were either victims of CSE or at risk of sexual exploitation.
  - The council reports that of those children, 58% were female, 81% were 'white British' and 73% were aged between 15 and 18 years old.
  - Evidence from the police provides a less clear picture on the ethnicity of victims of CSE in Warwickshire given that ethnicity is not a mandatory recording field.
  - DfE statistics show that in 2018/19, there were 173 assessments carried out by Warwickshire Council which identified sexual exploitation as a factor contributing to concerns about the child.
  - 58% of all CSE Assessments conducted during the year 2018/19 identified vulnerability to CSE as the outcome.
  - Between April 2019 and March 2020, there were 245 CSE crimes recorded by Warwickshire Police. Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, 49 Warwickshire looked after children were placed out of county where a CSE concern was noted at some stage in their contact with the Council.
  - In March 2019, there were three ongoing CSE operations, namely Operation Jive, Operation Voltage and an emerging case in the Rugby area. At that time, the operations involved 12 children. Operation Jive concluded in April 2020 with no further action being taken.
- 125. Issues:** Some of the key issues to be explored in relation to Warwickshire include the use of disruption techniques and CSE analysis to inform disruption, the conduct of risk assessments of children at risk of CSE, the placement of looked after children, including those placed in Warwickshire by other local authorities and the effectiveness of partnership working.



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## St Helens

126. **General:** St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council has a population of over 180,500 residents. There are over 32,200 children between the ages of 0-15 years old. St Helens is the 26th most deprived of the 317 local authorities across England, and the 8th most deprived authority in terms of health deprivation and disability.
127. There are over 480 children currently in care in St Helens, significantly above the national average. In the financial year 2018/2019, 287 children and young people in care were placed outside of St Helens geographical area. In December 2019, 4 children looked after by St Helens were placed out of borough who had been assessed as at risk of CSE, including 2 assessed as being at high risk.
128. Merseyside Police is responsible for policing in the areas of Wirral, St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley and Liverpool. Catch 22 is commissioned in St Helens to provide a missing from home service in a commission shared by Knowsley and Wirral. From 1 May 2019, child sexual exploitation is within the remit of the Children at Risk of Exploitation (CARE) group.
129. **Scale:** As to the scale of CSE in St Helens:
- a. The council has provided recent figures which confirm that there are currently 63 children open to the MACE process; including 20 girls and 3 boys for CSE.
  - b. Of the 63 children, 20 are looked after by St Helens Council. There are an additional 42 young people reported as residing within St Helens placed by another authority who have been identified as vulnerable to exploitation.
  - c. This is almost double the 13 children and young people who were identified as at risk of CSE over the period April 2017 and March 2019.
  - d. In the year April 2018 to March 2019, all but 2 of 157 CE1 referrals were for children recorded as 'white British'.
  - e. DfE statistics show that in 2018/19, there were 59 assessments carried out by St Helens Council which identified sexual exploitation as a factor contributing to concerns about the child.
  - f. As at December 2019, the local authority was not aware of any live investigations into child sexual abuse by organised networks. The police confirm that at that time, there were three live investigations in the Merseyside area.
  - g. The police report that between 2017 and 2019, there were 342 criminal offences amounting to child sexual exploitation. The force does not hold conviction data on convictions of those involved in abuse by organised

networks and it is accepted by the police that conviction rates for CSE are low.

130. **Issues:** Of the topics to be considered in relation to St Helens, some of the key themes are effectiveness of risk assessments, the scale of children going missing from home or care including children placed outside of St Helens, the suitability of placements for children at risk of CSE and the collection of data on CSE that informs both the problem profiling and disruption in the area.

### **Tower Hamlets**

131. **General:** The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has a population of over 300,000. It is the 10th most populous of the 32 London Boroughs. In 2018, it was the fastest growing local authority in the UK in terms of population and the second most densely populated local authority in the UK. The population is ethnically diverse, with 55% of the population made up of BME groups. Tower Hamlets is one of the most socially deprived boroughs in the UK, with 57% of children living in poverty. 57% of the children in the borough are Bangladeshi.
132. The Metropolitan Police Service is responsible for policing all 32 London Boroughs, excluding the City of London, consisting of over 8 million people. The Central East Basic Command Unit territorially covers the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney. This affects Police analysis which on occasion, aggregates Tower Hamlets and Hackney. The Children's Society is contracted to undertake return home interviews for children who go missing within Tower Hamlets.
133. In response to the critical Ofsted Inspection of 2017, Tower Hamlets launched their Child Exploitation Team in March 2018 as part of an improvement strategy. It is a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team combining staff from the police force and children's social care, who provide support, guidance and training to social workers and other professionals. Since December 2019, the team has including an analyst.
134. **Scale:** As to the scale of CSE in Tower Hamlets:
- a. in 2018/2019, 296 risk assessments found CSE concerns substantiated. There were 374 CSE episodes that led to the convening of a CSE Child Protection Strategy Meeting in the period.
  - b. Between 2018/2019, 69 children looked after by Tower Hamlets were assessed as at risk of CSE, comprising 61 girls and 8 boys.
  - c. Between March 2017 to March 2019, 31 children were discussed at MASE. 20 of the children who were discussed were assessed as being sexually exploited and 11 were assessed as being at risk of sexual exploitation.





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- d. Between 2018/2019, 294 Tower Hamlets children went missing, including those placed out of borough, of which 35% identified as Bangladeshi. There were a total of 1319 missing episodes.
- e. As of April 2019, the exploitation police team had conducted work with 121 referrals where direct work was done. This number includes both criminal and/or sexual exploitation as police data did not separate those categories of cases.
- f. Between April 2018 and March 2019, the police received 102 reports of CSE in Tower Hamlets.
- g. In March 2020, the council reported 161 children were in the care of the local authority where there were substantiated concerns of exploitation (both criminal and sexual), of these children, 31 were placed in Tower Hamlets and 130 were placed out of borough.
- h. In June 2019, there were two named operations that were linked to open CSE cases but no live investigations in relation to organised networks.

**135. Issues:** Some of the key areas to be considered in relation to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets are the conduct of risk assessments, the number of children placed outside of borough and the proportion of children going missing, the effectiveness of problem profiling and the intelligence that informs disruption strategies.

## **Bristol**

- 136. **General:** The City of Bristol has a population of 463,000 and is the largest city in the South West. 16% of the population are black or minority ethnic. As at March 2019, there were 617 LAC in Bristol, a rate of 68 per 10,000 children. Bristol is the 82nd most deprived local authority in England.
- 137. Avon & Somerset Constabulary polices Bristol and other areas, including Bath, North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.
- 138. Back in 2016, a Police Foundation briefing looked at data from 2013-2014 and found that 52% of the 371 (alleged and convicted) perpetrators of CSE who had been flagged were linked to a network - i.e. to at least one other perpetrator. There were 43 groups in total, with an average of five perpetrators in each. Only 6/43 groups had been formally recognised and mapped by the police force, four of which had been the target of large-scale police operations in Bristol. 310 children had been identified as victims or at risk of CSE - 58% of whom were exploited by or at risk of exploitation by a network. Two-thirds of the children linked to groups of perpetrators had not disclosed exploitation but practitioners had raised concerns that they were at risk or were a victim of CSE. The briefing concluded by noting a potentially wide gap



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between the established organised CSE picture recorded on the police's organised crime group mapping system, and the true scale of the problem.

139. Following a serious case review into a CSE case in Bristol completed in the same year, Avon & Somerset police piloted Operation Topaz in Bristol in 2016 - a specialist team focusing on the disruption of perpetrators of CSE. This has since been embedded as a core part of the force's approach to CSE.
140. **Scale:** As to the scale of child sexual exploitation in Bristol:
- a. In the calendar year of 2018, there were 204 allegations of contact child sexual exploitation recorded.
  - b. In 2018/19 there were a total of 108 children with active flags identifying that they were at risk of CSE - a 30% reduction from 2017/18.
  - c. DfE statistics show that in 2018/19, there were 175 assessments carried out by Bristol Council which identified sexual exploitation as a factor contributing to concerns about the child.
  - d. As at September 2019, 68 children were flagged as at risk of CSE.
  - e. In total, as at June 2020, predictive analytics identified over 1000 children in Avon & Somerset as being at some risk of sexual exploitation based on risk factors, of which 479 children were identified as actually being at specific risk of sexual exploitation. However, the police recorded only 276 reported offences during this period, and therefore noted that there was likely a considerable number which were not reported.
  - f. By January 2020, there were 444 children across Avon & Somerset considered to be at heightened risk of child sexual exploitation on the list produced by predictive analytics based on risk factors. Of that figure, 181 were flagged to Operation Topaz as being at risk of CSE, 132 of whom were in Bristol.
  - g. In 2019/20, 65 child sexual exploitation offences were reported by police in Bristol.
141. In 2019, there were 13 arrests, with five suspects charged with a total of 14 offences and 10 convictions for offences connected to child sexual exploitation. Since March 2017, there has been one prosecution of four individuals for child sexual exploitation by an organised network. There are three live investigations into sexual exploitation by organised networks.
142. **Issues:** Some of the key issues which will be explored in Bristol include the use of predictive analytics (algorithms) in identifying children at heightened risk of sexual exploitation and potential perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, the focus on



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disruption of perpetrators, the use of engagement officers for those at risk, practice in relation to Bristol LAC placed out of area, and the extent of auditing of practice.

## **7. The individual children**

143. Child-specific evidence is an important source of evidence to the Inquiry regarding the experiences of children who currently or very recently have been sexually exploited. Documentation about particular children gives the Inquiry an insight into the reality of what is happening 'on the ground' in local areas.
144. The Inquiry therefore dip-sampled a selection of children's cases across the six areas, and chose a small number of cases for each area, on which to focus more closely. The children's cases were chosen because it was considered that **(i)** there was evidence that the child case had been sexually exploited by a network within the Inquiry's definition; **(ii)** the case was recent, because of sexual exploitation concerns as at April 2018' and **(iii)** it was considered that the case would illustrate one or more of the themes selected for this investigation. The Inquiry also ensured that at least one male child was included in the sample of cases for each area.
145. Through the lens of children's social care and police documents, and the witness evidence provided by the authorities about the selected children, Chair and Panel, we hope that you will gain an insight into the threats and dangers that some of these children faced, and how the relevant agencies responded to them, in light of the selected themes.
146. General issues arising from the children's cases are the extent and frequency of children going missing from home/ care/ education; the threats to looked after children including those placed at a distance from their home area; the quality of planning before and after children are placed in care; and the effectiveness of action to track down, disrupt and prosecute alleged perpetrators of crime. You will hear evidence from witnesses about these issues as well as issues concerning male children, children with disabilities and young care leavers.
147. You are also going to hear evidence from national witnesses in the next two weeks about the need to distinguish between risk and actual harm and this may be another issue to consider when you hear evidence from police and children's social care witnesses about the children in the case studies.

## **8. The evidence and timetable to come**

148. The evidence will start tomorrow. As well as CS-A12 and CS-A371, you will hear from Dr Helen Beckett and Dr Sophie Hallett, both academics working on child sexual exploitation and Sheila Taylor MBE of the National Working Group.



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149. In respect of the six selected geographical areas, Chair you will hear from senior members of the respective local authority and police force. From each of the six areas, the Inquiry has received written statements from the relevant Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) and on Day 3, you will hear from a representative of the SCP in Durham. Statements have been obtained from charities and agencies working within the geographical areas, including Catch 22 from whom you will hear on Day 6 in relation to their work in St Helens with missing children. Barnardos will give evidence on Day 8 in relation to their work in Swansea, Warwickshire and Bristol as well as providing insight into the national picture. There are a broad range of written statements that have been helpfully provided to the Inquiry to assist in considering the geographical areas and the broader picture of child sexual exploitation in England and Wales.
150. With a slightly earlier start time of **10 am**, Day 9 (Thursday 1 October 2020) will also consider the national picture with evidence from the Home Office, Department of Education and the Welsh Government, Ofsted the Care Quality Commission and HMICFRS as well as the Crown Prosecution Service.
151. In addition to the evidence that is heard in the hearings, a list of further relevant evidence which has been provided by witnesses not being called to give oral evidence, will be adduced at the end of each hearing day.
152. Documents that have been identified on the topics lists as relevant, but are not referred to in oral evidence, will also be listed and adduced on Day 10 of the public hearings.
153. Generally, we are aiming to ensure the evidence is as up to date and practical as possible. Our hope is that this will provide a robust evidential platform for your important task of making, as appropriate, effective forward-looking recommendations for change.
154. Finally, on Day 10, we intend to adduce a list of reports that are relevant to child sexual exploitation, and may be of assistance to the Panel in considering the evidence you have heard. Core participants have been provided with lists of reports on 2 June 2020 and 7 July 2020 to assist in preparations for these hearings. The Core Participants who wish to will then make their Closing Statements.

## **9. Logistical issues about the evidence**

155. As is usual, the material obtained for this investigation has been redacted, and ciphers applied, where the Inquiry considers it appropriate, in accordance with the Inquiry's Protocol on the Redaction of Documents. There are Restriction Orders in place that protect the identities, names, addresses and images of any complainant Core Participants and also the identities of any individual whose identity has been



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redacted and/or ciphred by the Inquiry and any information redacted as sensitive and irrelevant.

156. Chair, you have ruled that the hearings will be held virtually by Zoom and live streamed.
157. Due to the nature of the live stream, it is not possible to subject the broadcasting to a 3 minute delay. Accordingly, in order to reduce the risk of a breach of any restriction order imposed to protect their identity, the evidence of those anonymous witnesses whose identities are protected by restriction orders will not be live streamed. However, a transcript of their evidence will be uploaded to the Inquiry's website as soon as possible thereafter, together with an audio file of the evidence where appropriate.
158. All witnesses will be reminded of the meaning and effect of any restriction order by their legal representatives and the Inquiry legal team before giving evidence and of the need to refer to ciphers for those covered by them and who should remain anonymous.
159. We ask for the assistance of all concerned in respecting the processes in place and drawing to our attention promptly any issues that arise in respect of a breach of a restriction order, so that the live stream can be terminated and the matter resolved. Guidance has been given to Core Participants as how to raise a matter with us in this remote hearing.
160. If there is a breach of a restriction order, I will say the following **“An issue has arisen as a result of which, Chair, I invite you to terminate the live stream link and make an immediate further restriction order over the evidence incorrectly given”**.
161. We will then take a short break while the issue is explained to the witness.

## 10. Conclusion

162. Chair, that concludes what I wish to say in opening, and you will soon hear Opening Statements from those Core Participants who wish to make one.

**HENRIETTA HILL QC**

**PAUL LIVINGSTON**

**ANTONIA BENFIELD**

**BEN FULLBROOK**

**18 September 2020**