

Exclusive Report:

The Need for a National Inquiry into Grooming Gangs

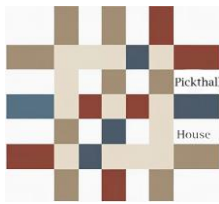
There ought to be a national enquiry into the handling of the Grooming Gangs Scandal

Pickthall argues for the national inquiry into the Grooming Gangs Scandal whilst seeking to avoid any criticism of entire religious or ethnic communities.

A national inquiry into the 'grooming gangs' scandal would help to finally provide a satisfying conclusion for victims as well as the wider public. The ongoing reluctance of the government to investigate serious failures by local authorities at the time ensures the continued growth of far-right conspiracy theories surrounding the scandal. A national inquiry would also help to better understand the specific pathologies of grooming gangs, and thereby avoid the rising blaming of entire religious or ethnic communities while still addressing cultural problems that contribute to patterns of criminality.

Summary of Findings –

- The initial handling of the victims by the police and local safeguarding authorities indicates severe errors in dealing with the grooming gangs. This includes a reluctance to take the victims seriously and an unwillingness to properly target abusers due to fears and sensitivities around race and religion.



- There appears to be serious issues with the data processing at the time, that ensures an incomplete picture of the true scale of the Scandal.
- The decision by Yvette Cooper to allow local inquiries in affected towns shows a continued lack of government willingness to properly investigate grooming gangs at the national level and an unacceptable lack of prioritisation of this crucial issue.

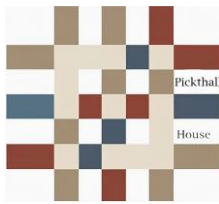
Summary of Recommendations –

- Pickthall has investigated the issue and come to the conclusion that a new national enquiry is not only in the best interests of the victims, but also the wider public.
- This is due to the serious mishandling of the case by police and councillors at the time, despite apparent access to revealing information.
- A new inquiry must target both the failures of the authorities at the time, and the continued gaps of data and evidence that fail to account for the full scale of the Scandal.
- The local inquiries initiated by the government are insufficient to satisfy the victims and the residents of affected towns.
- However, actions must be taken to condemn language that invokes the condemnation of entire communities. This is entirely unhelpful to a successfully national inquiry.

What was the Grooming Gangs Scandal? -

The Grooming Gangs Scandal is a series of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) crimes committed prior to 2013. The earliest police operations began in 2006 by the Greater Manchester police and Oldham Councils, but in 2013, the existence of gangs in towns such as Rotherham, Rochdale, and Telford, revealed a disturbing network of men trafficking and abusing young girls (both physically and sexually). This triggered a national inquiry to discover how this mass criminal activity had gone seemingly unnoticed for so many years.

The enquiry into the Grooming Gang Scandal initially struggled to find a lead in 2014-2016, before finally coming under the directorship of Professor Alexis Jay. She would lead the enquiry to its completion in October 2022, with the publications of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). However, this ultimately was not



about the grooming gangs in particular, but decades of CSE in England and Wales. The scale of this report both regarding its historical outreach and discussion of various different communities ensures it remains unsatisfying as an inquiry to this case.

The report criticised institutions for covering up years of abuse that “prioritised their reputations” over the safety and justice of the victims.

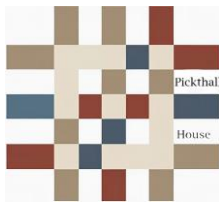
For 15 months not one of the recommendations suggested by Jay were enacted. Those that have been set into law by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper appear to only be as such due to the recent interest in the case. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged by some Ministers that such gangs continue to operate.

In recent months, the Grooming Gang Scandal has experienced a strong resurgence back into the centre of the British public. This was provoked first by a local issue in Oldham, where the Safeguarding Minister Jess Philips refused demands for a national inquiry from Oldham City Council. On X, Shah Arooj (leader of Oldham councillor) wrote that Oldham Council asked the government for an inquiry into non-recent CSE. On the international stage, the Scandal has been pushed by Elon Musk on X. In a Tweet from earlier this month, Musk wrote “the snivelling cowards who allowed the mass rape of little girls in Britain are still in power... for now”.

Issues of Handling of Case by Authorities -

There remains strong concerns over how the original cases were handled by authorities. These issues were not sufficiently answered by the IICSA report. Many victims lived in state children’s homes or were already known to local authorities. Indeed, many of the victims were picked up in taxis directly in front of these buildings, without any clear attempt to hide their actions. The manner in which the Police dealt with these victims indicated a consistent ignorance to the cries of help of those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. This is referenced in the IICSA report, where 47% of victims say they were never taken seriously.

A further issue with the investigation was the gaps in data that obscured the full picture of the case. For example, ethnicity was only recorded for 34% of suspects and 47% of victims. This has been further supported by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, who said that “the data on ethnicity of both perpetrator and victim is still inadequate”. This is also referred to in the 2022 IICSA report, which states that data limitations and gaps means that there are no real concrete answers to how many children in England and Wales



have been victims of CSE. As far as the evidence continues to remain inadequate, there can never be a satisfactory conclusion to the Scandal.

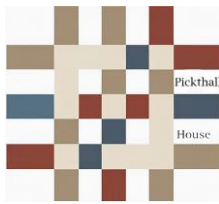
Issues of Ethnicity and Race -

Much of the publicity for this case in particular has focussed on the ethnic dimension of the Scandal, with the majority of the crimes committed by Pakistani men. This has ensured the popularity of the case amongst the far-right, being used as a narrative to demonise the entirety of the Pakistani community. To suggest that such behaviour is endemic to the British Pakistani community is not only factually incorrect, but does little to benefit the pursuit of justice for the victims. However, whilst many may wish to ignore this dimension of the case so as to not 'fan the flames' of the far-right, ultimately it remains a crucial aspect of the case due to how it shifted the perceptions, and subsequent actions, of the police.

From multiple sources, the fact that the crimes were most perpetrated by Pakistani men created an unwillingness by the Police to get involved further. This reluctance is also evident by how MPs have discussed the case, with some Labour MPs describing a fear of being labelled racist for discussing these dimensions as relevant to the case. This was true with the case of Sarah Champion, MP for Rotherham (one of the major towns affected by grooming gangs). In an op-ed for The Sun, Champion states - "Britain has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls". In this piece, she argues that the public has long been intentionally ignorant to the race of the abusers. Such intense criticism of this article forced Champion to quit the Labour front bench, apologising for her "extremely poor choice of words" that set a "dangerous precedent".

The failure of the 2022 inquiry to address this issue of ethnicity within the case, alongside the entirely detrimental actions of local Police at the time, ensure that this issue has to be discussed as part of a satisfying conclusion to the case.

It is crucial to mention that such ethnic or religious dimensions to the case are not representative of all British Asians or British Muslims. There are many towns with a far higher Pakistani percentage of the population, such as Pendle or Bradford, which did not suffer from grooming gangs to the same extent. Furthermore, there has been strong work done in local towns by authorities to appropriately engage with Muslim communities. For example, in 2008 each Mosque in Rotherham was appointed a designated figure responsible for child protection.



Weaknesses of Local Inquiries -

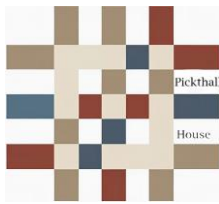
The series of local inquiries carried out in Telford and Rotherham are not sufficient. This is true in the opening to the executive summary, where it states that “No one knows the true scale of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham over the years”. This report reveals the specific failures by the police, including not taking the victims seriously and failing to appropriately act when it was clear that sexual abuse was occurring in the town. This report reveals that councillors failed to engage with the Pakistani-heritage community in a way that was appropriate for the known demographics of the criminals. Indeed, it states that many crucial staff members “described a nervousness about identifying the ethnic origins of the perpetrators for fear of being thought racist”. Furthermore, these local inquiries cannot be considered conclusive enough. For example, the Rotherham report only read 66 case files out of the 988 available.

A New Inquiry -

Last week, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper initiated a new series of local inquiries into grooming gangs. These have been criticised from several different perspectives. For example, Rotherham MP Sarah Champion has criticised the new inquiries for not having the ability to summon witnesses to give new evidence. Perhaps most damning of all, these new local inquiries have experienced criticism from the original victims themselves.

The IICSA inquiry remains unsatisfactory for the victims, and implementing its recommendations may not be sufficient. This is because the original inquiry can be considered a flawed document to begin with. The final report only mentioned Rotherham once and didn’t reference Telford at all. This is in spite of the continued lack of answers for the serious failures by the police and authorities to protect the victims. Furthermore, the 2022 IICSA report does not target the specific pathologies of grooming gangs, but is more a larger piece in CSE in England and Wales. This ensures there is no real limit to the scope of the inquiry, indicating why many continue to feel it is an inadequate response to this case.

The idea of a national inquiry has been strongly opposed by the majority Labour government, with a recent attempt by the Conservative Party to force a national inquiry voted down by 364 MPs. In particular, the Labour MPs for Rochdale, Oldham East, and Oldham West voted against a national inquiry, despite the continued demands from their constituents. The MP for Telford did not vote.



The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, announced he would back a ‘limited’ national inquiry. He has argued that local investigations were limited in comparison to what a national investigation could achieve. Further arguing that it was “appalling” that some police officers in Rochdale refused to take part. This suggests that local inquiries will lack sufficient funding or legal power to be able to deliver a final and satisfactory answer to the British public.

The absence of a new inquiry has granted an opportunity for many conspiracy theories to flourish, resulting in several deeply unfortunate incidents of violence. This includes the murder of Mushin Ahmed in Rotherham as well as the writing of “For Rochdale” and “For Rotherham” on the bullets of the Christchurch shooter in 2019. Insufficient transparency surrounding the case has created these new circles of violence, and this threat has resurfaced with the new interest in this case. It is in the interest of public safety and security that a new inquiry is put forward.

Concluding Remarks -

The complete failure of local authorities to help the victims despite strong evidence that such crimes were ongoing demands an answer.

This is further supported by the continued data gaps despite the decades of abuse.

The only way to achieve this is through a national inquiry with the complete administrative and legal support of the government.

Not only will a national inquiry benefit the victims who are yet to feel justice, but will also provide the greater public the answers for which it still demands.

A continued lack of answers may actually continue to fan the flames of the far-right, as the Labour Government appears unable to control the situation the more it rejects public demands for a national inquiry.

Whilst undergoing this national inquiry, it will be important to consider the culture and environment of British Muslims in northern towns, whilst remaining cognisant of the fact that the perpetrators represent a tiny minority and that the majority of British Muslims find these crimes appalling.

This is highlighted by the fact that not all towns with large British Muslims or Pakistani-Heritage communities appear to suffer from grooming gangs.