



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2021/0016, 29 January 2021

# E-petitions 300239 and 327566 relating to grooming gangs

## Summary

A debate on e-petitions 300239 and 327566 relating to grooming gangs is scheduled for Wednesday 3 February 2021. The Member leading the debate will be Tom Hunt MP.

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 The Home Office review

In May 2018 Sarah Champion convened the Cross Party Working Group on Child Sexual Exploitation, formed of MPs who had each encountered gang-related child sexual exploitation (CSE) in their constituencies. The Group wrote to the Home Secretary to call for the Home Office to undertake research into “common patterns of behaviour in cases of gang-related CSE to better understand the drivers of this specific form of abuse”.<sup>1</sup>

In July 2018, the then Home Secretary Sajid Javid replied to say that the Home Office planned to conduct an inquiry into the characteristics and contexts associated with grooming by gangs.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Javid made further mention of the review in a [speech in September 2018](#). He noted the “horrendous abuse perpetrated by gangs who have been persistent and determined in places like Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford, Newcastle and Telford”. He said he would be asking “difficult questions” about these gangs:

There will be no no-go areas of inquiry and I will not let cultural or political sensitivities get in the way of understanding the problem and doing something about it.

We know that in these recent high profile cases, where people convicted have been disproportionately from a Pakistani background.

I’ve instructed my officials to explore the particular contexts and characteristics of these types of gangs.

And if the evidence suggests that there are cultural factors that may be driving this type of offending, then I will take action.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019 the press started to report concerns that the review had been “shelved” and would not be published: see for example “[Exclusive: Sajid Javid Accused Of Shelving Review Of Grooming Gang Ethnicity](#)”, Huff Post, 14 May 2019.

In February 2020, the Independent newspaper reported that it had made a Freedom of Information request to the Home Office asking for the research and any reports related to it, but had received a reply from the Home Office stating that it held the information but would not be releasing it:

In a letter to The Independent, officials said they had applied a “public interest test” but the information was exempt from the act because it concerned the development of government policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Website of Sarah Champion MP, [Sarah Co-Ordinates Cross Party Group of MPs to Demand Government Acts to Prevent Gang Related Child Sexual Exploitation](#), 29 May 2018

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, [Cross Party Working Group on Child Sexual Exploitation Welcomes Assurances from Home Secretary](#), 24 July 2018

<sup>3</sup> Home Office, [Speech: Keeping our children safe](#), 3 September 2018

“One of the main purposes of the exemption is to protect the ‘safe space’ necessary for ministers and officials to consider policy options in private without risk of premature disclosure,” it added.

“Disclosure would risk pre-empting decisions still to be made by ministers. In addition, the information could be misleading if made public and used out of context.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the publication of the Independent’s article, [E-petition 300239](#) was launched on the parliamentary petitions website calling on the Government to publish the research in full. The petition received 131,625 signatures before closing. Another petition – [E-petition 327566](#) – is calling for a public inquiry on grooming gangs and has so far attracted nearly 30,000 signatures.

The Government provided a formal response to E-petition 300239 on 24 April 2020, in which it said (among other things):

To help end this terrible form of abuse, the Home Office has been investigating the characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation. It is right, proper and routine for the Government to carry out internal fact-finding work as part of policy development, as we do across a range of crime threats. Any insights gained from this important internal work will be used to inform our future action to end this devastating abuse, including the forthcoming Strategy.

The Petitions Committee subsequently wrote to the Home Secretary to say that the Government’s response failed to address the petitioner’s question, and to ask for the Government to submit a revised response.<sup>5</sup>

The Government submitted a revised response on 19 May 2020, which stated it would be publishing a paper into group-based CSE later that year:

The paper, to be published later this year, will outline the insights gained from this work and focus on how agencies can learn lessons from the past to tackle group-based offending and safeguard vulnerable children.

The paper, [Group based child sexual exploitation characteristics of offending](#), was published in December 2020.<sup>6</sup> Its main findings are summarised in the next section of this paper.

On 22 January 2021 the Home Secretary published a new [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy](#), which includes a number of objectives aimed at tackling group-based CSE in the community: see pages 40 to 41 of the Strategy for further details.

<sup>4</sup> “[Grooming gang review kept secret as Home Office claims releasing findings ‘not in public interest’](#)”, Independent, 21 February 2020. The Freedom of Information exemption based on the development of government policy is set out in [section 35 of the FoI Act 2000](#).

<sup>5</sup> Petitions Committee, [Correspondence with the Home Secretary relating to e-petition 300239](#), 7 May 2020

<sup>6</sup> Home Office, [Priti Patel publishes paper on group-based child sexual exploitation and Group based child sexual exploitation characteristics of offending](#), 15 December 2020

## 1.2 What do we know about child sexual exploitation and grooming groups – statistics

The exact scale of CSE and grooming groups is unknown as data on both offenders and victims can only be collected where cases have been identified and/or reported. It is known that around three-quarters of victims of rape or assault by penetration before the age of 16 do not report it to the police.<sup>7</sup>

What we do know about offenders and victims is set out in the Home Office publication: [Group-based child sexual exploitation characteristics of offending](#). The main findings are summarised below:

- In 2019/20 around 10,500 crimes were flagged by police as being CSE related but in most of cases this related to a single offender rather than a group (Para 61).
- **Victims of CSE** who are identified are most commonly female and aged 14-17 years old, with a peak at around 14-15 years old. The main risk factors associated with becoming the victim of CSE can be identified as “being in care; experiencing episodes of going missing; and having a learning disability”. Other factors noted include “drug/alcohol dependency, mental health issues, and experience of previous abuse” (Para 52).
- The main **characteristics of group-based CSE offenders** appear to be: predominantly, but not exclusively, male; generally older than those operating in gangs, but younger than those operating alone; and often under the age of 30, although some groups do involve much older offenders. (Para 72).

It is evident from the low level of information in the report that further data collection is required to properly understand the extent of, and factors involved with, group-based CSE (Paras 65-70).

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<sup>7</sup> ONS, [Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019: Appendix Tables](#), Table 20, 14 January 2020.

## 2. Press articles

### 2.1 News articles and blogs

[Grooming gangs to be put under spotlight in new Home Office strategy to combat record levels of child abuse](#), Telegraph, 22 January 2021

[Why we still can't shake the harmful myth of 'Asian grooming gangs'](#), by Aniqah Choudhri, The New Arab, 22 January 2021

[Victims of grooming gangs have been failed again](#), The Spectator, 21 December 2020

[A new Home Office report admits grooming gangs are not a 'Muslim problem'](#), Guardian, 19 December 2020

[The sex gangs whitewash: Home Office report into abuse of young girls found attackers were 'most commonly white' despite evidence of mass grooming by Asian men... but DAN HODGES reveals the inside story of a politically correct cover-up](#), MailOnline, 19 December 2020

[New Home Office Report Dispels the Asian Grooming Gangs Myth](#), Urban Muslimz, 18 December 2020

[Grooming gangs come from 'diverse backgrounds', says Home Office as review finally published](#), Independent, 15 December 2020

[Child abuse inquiry 'scared of racist tag'](#), Times, 24 October 2020

[We must expose the hidden horror of child abuse under lockdown](#) by Savid Javid, Telegraph, 30 May 2020

[Grooming gangs review was 'internal', government says after 120,000 people demand publication](#), Independent, 25 April 2020

[Grooming gang review kept secret as Home Office claims releasing findings 'not in public interest'](#)", Independent, 21 February 2020

[Exclusive: Sajid Javid Accused Of Shelving Review Of Grooming Gang Ethnicity](#), Huff Post, 14 May 2019

[Sajid Javid lambasted for 'Asian paedophiles' tweet](#), Guardian, 20 October 2018

[Sajid Javid orders research into ethnicity of grooming gangs and victims](#), Sky News, 26 July 2018

## 3. Parliamentary material

### 3.1 Written statements

[Paper on characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation](#)

15 Dec 2020 | Written statements | HCWS648

### 3.2 Debates

[Operation Augusta](#)

HC Deb 05 Feb 2020 cc85-106WH

[Grooming Gangs](#)

HL Deb 14 May 2019 cc76-90GC

### 3.3 Parliamentary questions

[Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Pearson of Rannoch

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to their response to the petition Release the Home Office's Grooming Gang Review in full, published on 24 April, how many victims of grooming gangs they estimate there have been in the UK since 1998; how much financial support they are providing to each victim per annum; which Minister was responsible for clearing the wording of that response; what plans they have to hold a debate to consider that petition in Parliament; whether they intend to publish any research into such gangs; and if not, why not.

**Answering member:** Baroness Williams of Trafford |

**Department:** Home Office

There is no official definition of 'grooming gang' offending and no means of delineating data on offending that might be described in this way from other forms of child sexual exploitation. The Government has estimated that there were approximately 6,850 victims of organised child sexual exploitation in the UK in 2015. This estimate includes all forms of child sexual exploitation and does not distinguish between rape and other sexual offences. It includes organised child sexual exploitation committed by groups and gangs within a range of contexts.

We are determined that all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, whether they are a child or an adult, can access the specialist support they need. In 2019/20 the government through a number of funding streams provided over £7m for non-statutory organisations providing support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse across the country. Victims and survivors can access these services throughout their lifetime to help them cope with and, as far as possible, recover from the abuse they have suffered.

We are increasing funding. For example, last month the Ministry of Justice and Home Office launched the Support for Victims and Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Fund, doubling the value of last year's fund and providing £2.4m over two years to voluntary sector organisations providing direct support to victims and survivors at a national level. Home Office will also shortly be launching a new £2.8m transformation fund to promote and embed best practice in child sexual abuse victim support.

On 19 May, the Home Office announced its plans to publish a paper on group-based child sexual exploitation later this year. The paper, which will be published following engagement with subject matter experts, will bring together the insights gained from the Home Office's work and set the direction for future policy and research. In announcing these plans the Home Secretary said *'What happened to these children remains one of the biggest stains on our country's conscience. It is shameful. I am determined to deliver justice for victims and ensure something like this can never happen again.'*

The Home Office's response to the petition was cleared by the Home Secretary. It has now been revised and re-issued to reflect this decision.

It is for the Petitions Committee to decide whether a petition should be put forward for debate

08 Jun 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL4140

**Date tabled:** 06 May 2020 | **Date for answer:** 21 May 2020 |  
**Date answered:** 08 Jun 2020

### [Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Pearson of Rannoch

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 21 January (HL158), whether they have made any recent estimate of the number of women and girls raped by Muslim men involved in grooming gangs since 1997.

**Answering member:** Baroness Williams of Trafford |  
**Department:** Home Office

Government does not hold data on the religious beliefs of perpetrators of rape and there is no data that delineates sexual offences which might be described as “grooming gang” offending from other forms of sexual offending.

The Government has estimated that there were approximately 6,850 victims of organised child sexual exploitation in the UK in 2015. This estimate includes all forms of child sexual exploitation and does not distinguish between rape and other sexual offences. It includes organised child sexual exploitation committed by groups and gangs within a range of contexts.

The Government is developing a first of its kind national Child Sexual Abuse Strategy which will set out our long-term ambition in tackling all forms of child sexual abuse.

Our new strategy, which will be published this year, will set out our whole system response to tackling child sexual abuse and how we will work across government, law enforcement, safeguarding partners and industry to root out offending, protect victims and help victims and survivors rebuild their lives. We will work tirelessly to end these heinous crimes; there will be no no-go areas

28 May 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL4428

**Date tabled:** 13 May 2020 | **Date for answer:** 28 May 2020 | **Date answered:** 28 May 2020

### [Local Government Finance: Protection of Children](#)

**Asked by:** Graham Stringer

Andy Burnham’s inquiry into the abandonment of Operation Augusta showed a shocking scenario in parts of Manchester where children were being groomed in open sight. It also showed that before Operation Augusta was abandoned, and when the children’s department was working with the police, it was beginning to be effective in stopping that grooming. I simply do not accept the Minister’s answer that there is sufficient money now or that sufficient money will be provided. Ninety per cent. of children’s departments in this country are underfunded, and all the children’s departments in Greater Manchester are underfunded.

**Answered by:** Luke Hall | **Department:** Housing, Communities and Local Government

Of course, of the additional £1 billion of social care grant, Manchester City Council will have access to an additional £30 million to use on children’s social care in the coming year. As we set out in our manifesto, we are committed to undertaking a review of the care system that will allow us to go even further and to make sure that all care placements and settings provide children and young people with the support they need.

I understand the review also made recommendations about policing, and of course we will be starting to recruit 6,000 police officers in the coming year.

24 Feb 2020 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 672 c16

**Date answered:** 24 Feb 2020

### [Offences against Children: Gangs](#)

**Asked by:** Girvan, Paul

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will give the police more powers to tackle child-grooming gangs.

**Answering member:** Victoria Atkins | **Department:** Home Office

Child sexual abuse is an abhorrent crime and this Government will not allow there to be any safe space for predators to operate.

We are giving law enforcement the powers and tools it needs to bring those who exploit children to justice. Last year, we announced that we will be investing a further £30m in law enforcement capabilities to ensure offenders are no longer able to prey on society's most vulnerable.

This year the Government will publish a comprehensive national strategy to tackle all forms of child sexual abuse, including grooming. Our new strategy will set out our whole system response to tackling child sexual abuse and how we will work across government, law enforcement, safeguarding partners and industry to root out offending, protect victims and help victims and survivors rebuild their lives.

New sentencing laws will ensure the most serious violent and sexual offenders spend time in prison that matches the severity of their crimes, protecting victims and giving the public confidence. We have already updated charging guidance to help ensure child sex offenders are properly brought to justice.

24 Jan 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 4462

**Date tabled:** 16 Jan 2020 | **Date for answer:** 20 Jan 2020 |

**Date answered:** 24 Jan 2020

### [Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Pearson of Rannoch

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent discussions they have had, and with whom, about the investigation of whether any police officers, social workers and council officials failed to fulfil their statutory duty to protect victims of grooming gangs;

and whether (1) there have been any, or (2) there are planned to be, prosecutions of any such officers and officials.

**Answering member:** Baroness Williams of Trafford |  
**Department:** Home Office

The extent to which statutory authorities have failed to protect children from sexual exploitation is being investigated by bodies that are rightly independent of Government.

The Government established the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse to consider the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have failed in their duty to protect children from sexual abuse. As part of its work, the Inquiry is investigating institutional responses to child sexual exploitation by organised networks. While independent of Government we welcome the Inquiry's work in this area and, as always, the Government will cooperate fully and will give careful consideration to its findings in due course.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) investigates the most serious and sensitive incidents and allegations involving the police. The IOPC is independent of Government and the police and is responsible for the investigations it carries out.

Government does not hold information on prosecutions specifically relating to different types of misconduct in a public office.

21 Jan 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL159

**Date tabled:** 07 Jan 2020 | **Date for answer:** 21 Jan 2020 |  
**Date answered:** 21 Jan 2020

### [Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Pearson of Rannoch

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many council officials have been (1) charged with, (2) convicted for, and (3) are awaiting trial for, dereliction of duty for failure to support victims of grooming gangs since 1997.

**Answering member:** Lord Keen of Elie | **Department:** Attorney General

Tackling the sexual exploitation of children remains a top priority for the CPS. Specialist CPS lawyers work closely with police investigators to build strong cases, resulting in many successful prosecutions of complex grooming cases for example in Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxford and Newcastle.

The CPS does not maintain a central record of defendants' occupations, nor of the specific circumstances under which a person has been charged with an offence. This information could

only be obtained by an examination of CPS case files, which would incur disproportionate cost. The CPS collects data to assist the management of its prosecution functions. The CPS does not collect data that constitutes official statistics as defined in the Statistics and Registration Act 2007.

20 Jan 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL160

**Date tabled:** 07 Jan 2020 | **Date for answer:** 21 Jan 2020 |  
**Date answered:** 20 Jan 2020

### [Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Champion, Sarah

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department has taken to help further understand the specific characteristics and motivations of child sexual abuse offenders whose methodology is defined as group-based grooming as set out in the National Crime Agency's National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2018.

**Answering member:** Victoria Atkins | **Department:** Home Office

The Government attaches the highest priority to tackling all forms of child sexual abuse.

We have been pursuing work on several fronts to improve our understanding of group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE), considering the broadest evidence base and applying due scrutiny to quantitative and qualitative research and analysis. This work includes efforts to improve data collection by law enforcement, qualitative research into police operations and reviews of existing literature on group-based offending.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse announced its investigation of child sexual exploitation by organised networks and set out the scope of its investigation at a preliminary hearing in May this year. While independent of Government, we welcome the Inquiry's work in this area and as always, the Government will cooperate fully and we will give careful consideration to its findings in due course.

On 4 September the Government announced an additional £30 million to safeguard children from child sexual exploitation and abuse. Increasing funding for cutting-edge technology and the best intelligence and law enforcement capabilities will enable police officers to continue to target the worst and most sophisticated offenders.

07 Oct 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 290805

**Date tabled:** 25 Sep 2019 | **Date for answer:** 30 Sep 2019 |  
**Date answered:** 07 Oct 2019

[Offences against Children: Rochdale](#)

**Asked by:** Lloyd, Tony

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will take urgent steps to deport non-UK nationals who have completed custodial sentences for the grooming of young people in Rochdale.

**Answering member:** Caroline Nokes | **Department:** Home Office

I am aware of the cases referred to, but I am unable to comment on individual cases.

The crimes committed by child sexual exploitation gangs who prey on the young and vulnerable are appalling. I have every sympathy with their victims. Once we are in a position to do so, we will also be in contact with the victims to provide them with an update.

This Government puts the rights of the British public before those of criminals, and we are clear that foreign criminals should be deported from the UK wherever it is legal and practical to do so.

20 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 265438

**Date tabled:** 17 Jun 2019 | **Date for answer:** 20 Jun 2019 |  
**Date answered:** 20 Jun 2019

[Offences against Children](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Blencathra

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 15 January (HL4538), whether they will now answer the specific questions asked, namely (1) whether they have made any assessment of the finding of the report by Quilliam, Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation – Dissecting Grooming Gangs, published in December 2017, that 84 per cent of child sexual exploitation offenders who operate in gangs or groups are Asian, most of whom are men “of Pakistani (Muslim) origin”, (2) what is their estimate of that percentage, and (3) if different, on what statistics and records they have based their estimate; and if they will not answer those questions, why not.

**Answering member:** Baroness Williams of Trafford |  
**Department:** Home Office

Improving our understanding of the scale and nature of all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including that involving gangs and groups, as highlighted by the Quilliam Foundation, is a

priority for this Government. As referred to in the previous answer we have invested a significant amount of funding in a new independent Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse which is drawing on government, academic, law enforcement and civil society sources of information to assess the scale and nature of CSEA.

With enhanced understanding of the nature and demographics of offending, we will further improve our response. We have not assessed the Quilliam report assessment. We will ensure that the work of the Centre of Expertise, bringing in other partners, considers the wide range of information available, including the Quilliam report.

22 Jan 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL4738

**Date tabled:** 16 Jan 2018 | **Date for answer:** 30 Jan 2018 | **Date answered:** 22 Jan 2018

### 3.4 Committee reports

[Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming - follow up: Government response to the Committee's sixth report of session 2014-15: Home Affairs Committee seventh special report.](#)

24 Feb 2015 | Parliamentary committees - House of Commons papers - Select Committee reports (Government responses) | HC 1072 2014-15

## 4. Organisations and further reading

### 4.1 Reports

Home Office, [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy](#), 22 January 2021

Home Office, [Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation: Characteristics of Offending](#), December 2020

[The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse: Final Evaluation Report](#), April 2020

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, [A new typology of CSA offending](#), March 2020

Senker, S., Scott, M., and Wainwright, L. (2020) [An explorative study on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation convicted alongside others](#). London: Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

Allnock, D., Miller, P., and Baker, H. [Key messages from research on identifying and responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse](#). Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, 2019

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, [Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation: scoping report](#) by Professor Liz Kelly and Kairika Karsna , July 2017, updated August 2018

HM Government, [Tackling child sexual exploitation](#), 2015

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, [Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham 1997 – 2013](#), 21 August 2014

### 4.2 Other useful information / websites

Home Office, [Priti Patel publishes new strategy to protect children from sexual abuse](#), 22 January 2021

Home Office, [Keeping our children safe](#), Home Secretary Sajid Javid speech on online child sexual exploitation, 3 September 2018

Website of Sarah Champion MP, [Cross Party Working Group on Child Sexual Exploitation Welcomes Assurances from Home Secretary](#), 24 July 2018

W. Tufail, [Rotherham, Rochdale, and the racialised threat of the 'Muslim Grooming Gang'](#). *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 4 (3). 30 – 43, 2015

Ella Cockbain and Waqas Tufail, [Failing victims, fuelling hate: challenging the harms of the 'Muslim grooming gangs' narrative](#), *Race & Class* 61(3) 3-32, 2020

Rafiq H., Adil M., *Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation: Dissecting 'Grooming Gangs'* (London: Quilliam, 2017).

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