

P-06-1514 Welsh Government should commission a Wales-wide inquiry into sexual exploitation by grooming gangs

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 6 Hydref 2025
Petitions Committee | 6 October 2025

Reference: RS25/11930-1

Introduction

Petition Number: [P-06-1514](#)

Petition title: Welsh Government should commission a Wales-wide inquiry into sexual exploitation by grooming gangs.

Text of petition: I was the victim of sexual exploitation by grooming gangs. I know that this practice is more prevalent than the authorities acknowledged. I believe the Welsh Government should undertake an inquiry to see how widespread the problem is and to support victims in Wales

The text provided above is submitted by the petitioner. The petitions team make every effort to ensure it preserves their authentic voice. This text has not been verified for accuracy, or errors, and may contain unverified opinions or assertions.



1. Background

In summary, in June 2025, the UK Government said it will establish an ‘Independent Commission on Grooming Gangs’ and that it will have statutory powers to direct targeted investigations in local areas. The terms of reference are yet to be set.

In response to this petition, Welsh Government says that an England and Wales inquiry is “the optimum choice” and it would be “counterproductive” to establish a separate national inquiry in Wales. It says:

The First Minister has already written to the Home Secretary requesting assurance that investigations in Wales will be included in the national inquiry. It was always our intention to revisit the suggestion of a national inquiry as discussed in the Senedd in March.

Previously, in 2022 the UK wide Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published a report on Child sexual exploitation by organised networks Investigation Report, which included Swansea as one of six case studies.

1.1. UK Government’s England and Wales audit

Baroness Casey’s National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was commissioned by the UK Government in January 2025 in response to concerns arising from high profile court cases relating to group-based child sexual exploitation.

Its terms of reference included “group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse based in England and Wales” and referred to:

[...] the historic and ongoing crimes of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation, of the kind that have taken place in Rochdale, Rotherham, Telford, Walsall, Oldham and Oxfordshire.

Welsh Government’s response to this petition refers to the audit and says it “provided information to the audit team that was requested”. In addition to England and Wales data, the audit report into child sexual exploitation and abuse states it drew on the following Wales-wide specific data:

- Number of children reported during the year where child exploitation was a factor by local authority

- Children placed on the child protection register during the year, by local authority, category of abuse and age

The audit report says:

Data from Wales shows that child sexual exploitation remains the most frequent form of exploitation identified by Children's Services in Wales [...]but that the coincidence of both criminal and sexual exploitation was significant.

It notes this level of data is available in Wales only and that a different type of child exploitation data is published in England.

No conclusion on the scale of exploitation

On the question of the scale of exploitation in England and Wales, the audit concluded that:

We were unable to provide an assessment on the scale of group-based child sexual exploitation. There is no recent study of the prevalence of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the population. Confusing and inconsistently applied definitions and incomplete data across the police, local authorities, health and the criminal justice system, obscure it. The concept of 'grooming gangs', while well-known to the public, is not captured clearly in any official data set.

It says that the England and Wales data that was identified shows that:

The only figure on group-based child sexual exploitation comes from a new police dataset (called the Complex and Organised Child Abuse 7 Dataset - COCAD) which, while suffering a number of limitations, has identified around 700 recorded offences of group-based child sexual exploitation in 2023.

And goes on to say:

*Given how under-reported child sexual exploitation is, the flaws in the data collection and the confusing and inconsistently applied definitions, **it is highly unlikely that this accurately reflects the true scale of child sexual exploitation, or group-based exploitation.** It is a failure of public policy over many years that there remains such limited, reliable data in this area. [Bold is our emphasis]*

UK Government to establish an Independent Commission on Grooming Gangs

One part of the audit's 12 recommendations was to call for:

A national inquiry co-ordinating a series of targeted local investigations. This would be overseen by an Independent Commission which has full statutory inquiry powers, is time limited, targeted and proportionate to the numbers of victims.

In its [response](#) in June 2025, the UK Government said it “will establish a national inquiry under the Inquiries Act to co-ordinate a series of targeted local investigations”. It went on to say:

- “Established under the Inquiries Act and headed by an independent chair, the Independent Commission on Grooming Gangs will have statutory powers to direct targeted investigations in local areas, with the aim of holding institutions to account for current and historic failures in their response to group-based CSE¹.
- The commission will have the powers to compel local organisations to comply with its investigations, including providing information and summoning witnesses where required to get to the truth and learn lessons from the past.
- Following the appointment of the independent chair, the commission will urgently begin considering evidence and data to decide the first local areas for investigation. This will be based on information provided by the police, inspectorates, or through referrals from local agencies, victims and survivors, and members of the public. We will now work at pace to appoint a chair and agree a Terms of Reference.
- The Commission will be time-limited. The exact length of time will be determined by the terms of reference.”

However whilst the Centre for Women’s Justice [welcomed the Home Secretary’s pledge](#) it said:

This is not, however, the first time that a statutory inquiry has been tasked with investigating how institutions respond to group-based grooming and sexual exploitation of children. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (‘IICSA’), which ran

¹ Child Sexual Exploitation

for seven years, included a strand of inquiry focused on child sexual exploitation by organised networks.

It also said that the majority of IICSA's recommendations were never implemented.

1.2. Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

Baroness Casey's 2025 audit refers to the UK wide [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) and says

[...] we want to acknowledge the importance of the recommendations made by the Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in their final report to improve how child sexual abuse as a whole, should be tackled. Our recommendations are therefore made on the basis that their proposals for change are being implemented.

IICSA included a specific report on [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks Investigation Report](#), including [Swansea](#) as one of six case studies.

The overall final UK wide [IICSA report](#) was published in October 2022 and its recommendations included 6 directly to the Welsh Government. In its [final response in April 2023](#) Welsh Government fully accepted 4 recommendations and accepted 2 'in principle'.

2. Senedd scrutiny

2.1. In Plenary

There have been a range of questions and debates in Plenary about 'grooming gangs' some of which have included references to the petitioner specifically:

- [14 January 2025](#): Question from Darren Millar to the First Minister:

[...]do you agree with the growing chorus of voices, including the Labour MP for Rochdale, the Labour MP for Rotherham and the Labour mayor of Greater Manchester, that we need a new UK-wide inquiry into child sexual exploitation by grooming gangs?

- [30 January 2025](#): Written response to a question from Darren Millar:

What representation has the Welsh Government made to the UK Government about the need for a UK-wide inquiry into child sexual exploitation by grooming gangs in light of the growing chorus of voices from political figures, victims and the Welsh public?

- 12 February 2025: Welsh Conservatives debate proposing that the Senedd:

Calls on the Welsh Government to commission an independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation by grooming gangs.

- 17 June 2025: Question from Darren Millar to the First Minister:

[...]Do you regret rejecting the calls of victims and survivors for an inquiry last January? Do you accept that the delay has caused further harm and hurt? And will you now give a full public commitment that the Welsh Government will back that UK inquiry and instruct all public bodies under your control here in Wales to co-operate fully with it, because victims and their families deserve nothing less?

2.2. Senedd Committees

Children on the Margins

The Children, Young People and Education Committee's (CYPE) Children on the margins report focused on two main groups of children and young people, those who go missing, and those who are victims of criminal exploitation. Its remit included examining the:

- Nature and scale;
- At risk groups; and
- Policy and practice in the context of devolved and UK powers.

The Committee called for evidence from stakeholders and heard from St Giles Trust about the risk factors for vulnerability to grooming:

Children who are homeless and/or in temporary accommodation are, in our experience, particularly likely to be exposed to the risk of exploitation and to be groomed by gangs.

The Committee's report made 23 recommendations of which the [Welsh Government accepted 15](#), accepted in principle 6 and rejected 2. None of the recommendations referred to 'grooming gangs' specifically.

Care Experienced Children

Baroness Casey's [National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) found that children in care are disproportionately represented as victims of grooming gangs.

The final IICSA report also referred to the risk factors of children in care being vulnerable to sexual exploitation when they are housed by local authorities in unregulated placements. Unregulated placements refer to accommodation for a child or young person that does not provide them with 'care', for example B&Bs, Airbnb's, and hostels.

The CYPE Committee report, [Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform](#), heard that the use of unregulated placements was making it increasingly challenging to keep children safe where they live. One of the Committee's recommendations was that Welsh Government should carry out and publish an analysis of the use of unregulated accommodation across Wales for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 21.

Issues related to unregulated placements were also covered in the scrutiny of what was then the [Health and Social Care Bill](#).

House of Commons petitions

Although dated 2021, this House of Commons [debate pack on petitions relating to grooming gangs](#) provides some historical context.

3. Welsh Government action

This petition related to both devolved and non devolved matters. Welsh Government has the powers over health and social services but not over most aspects of criminal justice or policing.

There have been calls for [grooming to be criminalised in Wales](#) but [Paragraph 4](#) of Schedule 7B to the Government of Wales Act 2006 is clear that the Senedd cannot create or modify any sexual offences. Therefore, the Senedd does not have the powers to create an offence of grooming with intent to commit a sexual offence.

Welsh Government has a range of guidance relevant to the issues raised in the petition, including, but not limited to:

- [Safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation](#)
- [Safeguarding children from Child Criminal Exploitation](#)
- [Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care](#)

Welsh Government is currently consulting on a new [National strategy for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse](#) after its three year [national action plan](#) came to an end.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.