

Baroness Longfield of Ilkley CBE
Chair of the Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs
c/o Inquiry Secretariat

14 August 2026

Dear Baroness Longfield

Grooming Gangs Inquiry

I am writing in my capacity as Leader of Kirklees Council.

Firstly, I welcome the establishment of the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs and the important role it will play in supporting victims, establishing the facts, identifying lessons to be learned and helping to restore public confidence.

I recognise that it is entirely a matter for the Inquiry to determine which areas and organisations fall within the scope of its investigations. I do not seek to influence the independence of that process, and I have confidence that the Inquiry will approach its work with impartiality, rigour, thoroughness and fairness.

Given the significant public interest in this issue, I felt it appropriate to place on record my commitment, and that of my administration, to openness, transparency and constructive engagement with the Inquiry's work.

Since my election, I have received a considerable volume of correspondence and representations from residents regarding this issue, including correspondence from victims and survivors of grooming gang offences. While individual experiences and concerns differ, a recurring theme has been a desire for transparency, accountability and confidence that victims' voices are heard and properly considered as part of any examination of these issues.

Many constituents have followed reports of these offences over a number of years and have been profoundly disturbed by the scale, duration and brutality of the abuse that has emerged through criminal investigations and court proceedings.

The evidence heard in court has included accounts of vulnerable children being subjected to rape, violence, coercion, intimidation and prolonged abuse of a nature that has shocked communities across the country.

However, the very scale and seriousness of these crimes can make scrutiny uncomfortable. Examining difficult events, institutional decisions and potential failings is rarely easy, particularly where the suffering involved is so profound. Yet it is precisely because these issues are difficult that they must be approached with honesty, rigour and openness. Only by confronting uncomfortable questions can confidence be rebuilt and lessons properly learned.

As a major metropolitan authority within West Yorkshire, and given the public record of child sexual exploitation prosecutions affecting communities across the region over many years, I recognise that public interest in this issue remains significant.

Against that backdrop, it is entirely understandable that there is a strong public expectation that legitimate questions should be examined thoroughly, independently and without fear or favour. It is time for this shame in our society to be approached directly, allowing victims their voices. Only then can healing begin within our communities and institutions.

I welcome the fact that the Inquiry has already contacted Kirklees Council to arrange a visit to meet with survivors. I hope this will provide an important opportunity for victims' voices to be heard directly and for their experiences to help inform the Inquiry's work.

I would like Kirklees be considered for inclusion within the Inquiry, and I have solicited and been grateful to receive support from across the political spectrum and from key regional partners.

Those expressing their support include Kim Leadbeater MP, Harpreet Uppal MP, Jade Botterill MP, Paul Davies MP, Iqbal Mohamed MP, the Mayor of West Yorkshire Tracy Brabin, Sir John Robins QPM DL, Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police, and Mark Chamberlain, Chair of the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

While I fully recognise that the decision rests solely with the Inquiry, I believe this breadth of support reflects the importance attached to ensuring that any legitimate questions relating to Kirklees can be considered through the Inquiry's independent processes.

Accordingly, I respectfully ask that the Inquiry gives consideration to including Kirklees Council within its scope, should you consider that doing so would assist the Inquiry in fulfilling its Terms of Reference. I make that request in the spirit of openness and transparency, recognising that the ultimate decision is entirely one for the Inquiry.

As Leader of Kirklees Council, upon consultation and working with CEO Steve Mawson, I can confirm that the Council will cooperate fully with any lawful requests made by the Inquiry. We will not shy away from rigour, detail or scrutiny. We believe it is in the interests of victims, residents and public confidence that public bodies engage openly and constructively with independent examination.

As you may be aware the Council has already participated in two independent reviews commissioned by the Kirklees Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Kirklees Council has also demonstrated its commitment to supporting victims and survivors through the establishment of an ongoing survivor support service, and we remain committed to ensuring that appropriate support and funding continue to be available.

We believe that independent scrutiny should be viewed not as a threat, but as an opportunity to strengthen public confidence. Thorough examination does not inevitably reveal institutional failure; equally, where shortcomings are identified, they can be properly understood, addressed and learned from. In either case, openness serves the interests of victims, residents and the wider community.

Experience shows that confidence is built not by avoiding difficult questions, but by confronting them honestly. Where concerns are unfounded, transparency can provide reassurance. Where concerns are borne out, transparency provides the foundation for accountability, healing and lasting change.

Our position is plain: where legitimate questions exist, they should be examined; where lessons can be learned, they should be learned; and where improvements can be made, they should be made. Public confidence is strengthened not by avoiding scrutiny, but by demonstrating a willingness to engage with it openly.

We appreciate that the Inquiry must follow its own procedures and evidence-based processes when determining its work programme. My purpose in writing is to ensure that Kirklees Council's position is clear and formally recorded, and to offer the Council's full cooperation with the Inquiry's important work.

Thank you for your service in leading this important Inquiry. We wish you and the Inquiry every success in pursuing truth, accountability and justice for victims.

Yours sincerely,

Via email

Councillor Sarah Wood

Leader of Kirklees Council