

### Victims and Survivors Forum Pilot Event

#### 5 August 2016

Thank you very much to everyone who attended the Victims and Survivors' Forum Pilot on August 5.

We are grateful to everyone who took the trouble to contribute comments and ideas on how the Inquiry can progress. Your suggestions have been taken on board and are being carefully considered by the Inquiry.

Some suggestions have already been actioned. These include:

1. **Freepost address.** The Freepost address is currently being set up and we will update our website shortly.
2. **Audio/visual material.** Victims and survivors may now choose to submit Truth Project statements as an MP3, audio file or a video, as well as a written document. These may be emailed or submitted on a USB or memory stick at a Truth Project session.
3. **Dedicated area on website for victims and survivors.** This has been launched <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/victims-and-survivors> using feedback from victims and survivors and all future website development will continue to use direct input from victims and survivors.
4. **Videos.** We will commission new informative videos which will explain the work of the Inquiry. The first of these is now available on the Inquiry website.
5. **Male support workers.** We will make sure everyone has the opportunity to access both male and female support workers and counsellors during both the Truth Project and Forum events.
6. **Plain English.** We commissioned a specialist to write this report in plain English. Where we can, we will write reports in plain English avoiding legalese, including areas such as our website and other reports.
7. **Whistleblower protection.** Strong protection for whistleblowers has been available since June 2015. The details of this protection can be found on our website at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/news/attorney-general-grants-protection-to-whistleblowers>.
8. **The Forum Pilot.** We have collated all feedback on the Forum and will use this to improve future Forum events. The next Forum event will take place in Cardiff in November.

#### **Areas and issues discussed**

Lots of suggestions and comments were made on a wide range of subjects at the Forum. We collated everything that was raised in general discussion, question and answer sessions and table (small group) discussions.

Here is a record of what was discussed.

### **Chair/Panel**

Questions were raised about the status of the Inquiry and areas such as the Preliminary Hearings following the resignation of Dame Lowell Goddard DNZM as Chair of the Inquiry.

The Inquiry Panel confirmed the Inquiry would carry on without delay. There will be no impact on the Preliminary Hearings that have already been held and a new Chair and Panel will continue to consider what further preliminary hearings may need to be held in the future. Anyone appointed for any role by the former Chair (such as Core Participants) is not affected by the change and will not need to reapply for their role.

It was explained that the Home Secretary is responsible for the appointment of the new Chair and that any nominations should be made to the Home Office. (Shortly after the Forum met, Inquiry Panel member Professor Alexis Jay OBE, was appointed as the new Chair of the Inquiry. Her statement of commitment to the work of the Inquiry is linked [here](#) for your information).

Further suggestions concerned the profile of the Panel and the Inquiry. In particular, this includes raising awareness about the work of Inquiry and making sure people know that the Inquiry is not just about one person – the Chair – but involves the work of many people including the Inquiry Panel, Victims and Survivors’ Consultative Panel, Academic Advisory Board, Victims and Survivors’ Forum and other support teams.

### **The work of the Inquiry**

#### **Victim and Survivor input into the Inquiry**

Many victims and survivors felt they had not been able to inform the work of the Inquiry and were not at the heart of the Inquiry.

Some people felt the Victims and Survivors’ Consultative Panel (VSCP) was not representative of all victims and survivors. Suggestions for improvement included making sure all victims and survivors could easily contact the VSCP so that their voices and opinions could be heard by the Inquiry. Comments were also made about raising awareness of the role of the Inquiry offices.

To confirm, the role of the VSCP is to assist the Inquiry on aspects of its work. Although they do not represent the individual views of all victims and survivors, they play a vital role in delivering the work of the Inquiry by providing advice and shaping the aspects of the Inquiry that will directly assist victims and survivors collectively.

In relation to the comments about the Inquiry offices outside of London, we can confirm that we are setting up Inquiry offices across England and Wales. The first Inquiry offices are now open in

the north west (Liverpool), the north east (Darlington) and Wales (Cardiff). The Inquiry office for the south west (Exeter) will be open before the end of the year.

### **Scope and definitions**

Forum participants suggested several areas where the Inquiry could improve communication and wider understanding. These included:

- The definition of the word ‘institution’ (ie the organisations being investigated by the Inquiry)
- What the Inquiry can and cannot do (ie the scope of the Inquiry, and our work)
- Making sure the public understands that the Inquiry’s work is independent from Government and politicians
- What happens when a victim or survivor shares their experience.

### **Wider understanding of Child Sexual Abuse**

Forum participants were keen to make sure the Inquiry understood the impact that sexual abuse during childhood can have on the whole life of a victim or survivor. Relating to this, Forum suggestions included:

- Improving the Inquiry’s understanding of ways they can better support victims and survivors’ through the Inquiry process
- Making sure victims and survivors’ can benefit from complete confidentiality
- Understanding that everyone’s experiences are unique to them
- Making sure that the way the Inquiry communicates with victims and survivors is not too formal or intimidating
- Raising wider awareness throughout England and Wales that child sex abuse often causes ongoing physical and mental health issues for many victims and survivors.

### **Criminal Justice System**

Many Forum members described being failed by the Criminal Justice System and asked the Inquiry to seek ways that the police and courts could better support victims and survivors of sexual abuse. Specific suggestions included:

- Holding the police and courts to account to make sure they treat adult survivors of abuse with sensitivity and respect and that this is consistent across the UK
- Making sure police do not make victims or survivors share information in a public space, such as the front desk of a police station
- Reviewing court processes, including sentencing. There was a strong feeling among many Forum members that there should be minimum life sentences for perpetrators of child sexual abuse - in order to send a strong message that child sexual abuse is taken seriously

- Making sure there are strong legal protections in place for whistleblowers who wish to contact the Inquiry.

We will look into whether these questions on the Criminal Justice System, including issues related to sentencing, can be addressed by the Inquiry during its work. One way that the Inquiry could address them is through issues papers and we have already published two Issues Papers into the civil justice system and criminal compensation (linked [here](#)). Issues papers will give individuals and organisations the chance to provide their opinions on particular topics. We will be holding Inquiry seminars on these Issues Papers at the end of November.

In relation to the point about Whistleblowers, the Inquiry has already secured strong legal protection for them. (See <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/sites/default/files/attorney-general-letter.pdf>).

This includes the fact that no document or evidence provided to the Inquiry will be used in any prosecution under the Official Secrets Acts or any prosecution for unlawful possession of the evidence in question. The link to our guidance is included at point 7 on the first page of this document.

### **Truth Project**

Calls were made to raise awareness about the Truth Project and improve some of the ways it operates. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Step-by-step outlines of the Truth Project process, including making sure people know how information they share with the Truth Project is fed into the work of the Inquiry
- Case studies of victims and survivors' who had taken part in the Truth Project (Keep an eye on our website as these are due to be published soon)
- Making sure the Truth Project is inclusive for people from different ethnicities, cultures and abilities
- Better explanation of the support offered by the Inquiry, including what signposting is available to other support services
- Making sure people understand what involvement, if any, the police will have if a victim or survivor makes a statement to the Truth Project
- Being clear that the Truth Project is independent of the Public Hearings, and is not a legal process
- Enabling victims or survivors to choose the way they would prefer to share their experience with the Inquiry, including in writing, in an audio file such as a podcast, in a video, or in person (see point 2 on the first page of this document)
- Providing a freepost address for victims and survivors to use to send in evidence (see point 1 on the first page of this document)
- Allowing people to either retain their anonymity or speak out about their involvement with the Truth Project.

We know we need to make the rules clearer concerning anonymity and confidentiality in the Truth Project. This includes our creation of a Restriction Order.

This order gives privacy to everyone who wanted to share their experience through the Truth Project. The Restriction Order does not mean that people involved in the Truth Project cannot discuss their experience with others. It simply adds confidentiality to the Truth Project process. The Restriction Order helps ensure that we can keep information provided to us confidential. The Restriction Order **does not** prevent a victim or survivor from:

- talking about their experience of sexual abuse with anyone else
- telling others that they shared their experience with the Inquiry or attended a Truth Project private session
- discussing how they felt about sharing their experience with the Inquiry.

### **Support**

Concerns were raised about the lack of Inquiry funding for support services outside of the Inquiry process and for family and friends.

Unfortunately, we only have funding to provide support for victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are directly involved in the Truth Project or the Inquiry during that engagement. And, as we have to remain completely independent, we can't endorse any single support organisation over another.

However, we can provide signposting for wider support for victims and survivors and their families. We know this signposting could be improved and we are currently working on ways that this can be done. The Inquiry has also asked NHS England to consider services for victims and survivors in the NHS's planning.

We understand that access to support is an issue and will consider what wider things we could do to help raise awareness of the lack of funding for support services, for example, by putting out an Issues Paper on the topic for consultation. We will also consider what work we can do to support the improvement in availability of support services across England and Wales.

### **Engagement and communication**

A clear message to the Inquiry was that we have not done enough to communicate clearly with victims and survivors, and what has been done has not worked. For example, we were told that many of our communications are too institutional and presented in a "civil service" way, both of which can alienate victims and survivors and prevent them from coming forward. This includes our responses to letters and how we speak to people through our Information Line. We were advised that a lot of people do not know what the Inquiry is. In conjunction with VSCP, we have begun

addressing some of these issues but it is clear that we have not done enough and we need to have a better strategy which:

- Is consistent and works with victims and survivors to make sure the right messages and tone of voice are communicated
- Reiterates messages to make sure they are heard and understood
- Makes sure victims and survivors know the benefits they can bring by engaging with us and provide a variety of different ways that victims and survivors can contact us and engage with the Inquiry
- Actively reaches all victims and survivors, from all ethnic backgrounds, communities and abilities, including people without computers and people with learning difficulties
- Uses plain English
- Communicates the work of the Inquiry Panel more clearly
- Looks at the longer term impacts of child sex abuse on victims and survivors and helps to educate the public

A lot of helpful suggestions were made about what communication tools and tactics should be used.

### **Inquiry website and social media**

Many people at the Forum agreed that our website is not good enough. It was described as too formal and legalistic, written by lawyers for lawyers. Most Forum contributors suggested we need to include victims and survivors when developing our website.

The Inquiry recognises that the website will be used by a broad range of people and although we have made attempts to make it more user-friendly; we have not done enough. The strong feedback from Forum participants has led to a review of the website and we have now developed a dedicated area on the website for victims and survivors (see point 3 on page 1 of this document).

Some people also suggested we should use Twitter and other social media. Discussion centred on whether there could be a better Q&A discussion via Twitter or an online forum.

At the moment, we do not provide advice to the public and do not recommend that Twitter is used as a method of submitting questions or referrals, asking instead for questions or comments to be sent to us via email at [contact@iicsa.org.uk](mailto:contact@iicsa.org.uk).

### Children and young people

Concerns were raised about how the Inquiry currently engages with children and young people and, in particular, children who have been trafficked from overseas who tend to be very vulnerable.

We take the need to engage with children and young people seriously and are currently working with a wide range of specialist stakeholders to make sure that our policy for engaging with children and young people is fully informed.

### **Forum**

We received excellent feedback on the Forum pilot and will be using the comments and suggestions to inform our future Forum events. Suggestions included:

- The need to revise the information sent out in advance (agenda, code of conduct) and for use on the day
- Amending the Code of Conduct. The Code itself was considered necessary by most people, but it will be amended to include reference to non-discrimination on the basis of sexuality; we will also consider renaming the code to for example, a 'commitment of conduct;
- Continuing with the telephone calls made in advance of the Forum, which were in general considered to be useful
- Sticking to the agenda and making more time for questions and small table discussion (although it was acknowledged that the Chair's resignation had dominated discussion and affected timings and the agenda)
- Broadening the topics on the agenda to include ideas from the pilot
- Greater management on the day to ensure fewer interruptions from the floor
- Asking panel members to sit as part of the small table discussions and to be present at every Forum event
- Checking that introductions are made on the small tables as well as agreeing with the Facilitator which points should be fed back to the room at the end of the table discussion
- Making sure male support workers/counsellors are available at the Forum and considering whether attendees could bring their own support into the room
- Checking that attendees know who the support workers are and how they should be accessed
- Looking into how the Forum itself was managed and publicised – there was some criticism that it was too secretive (although it was accepted that there was a level of confidentiality required because of the nature of the event)
- Making the Forum more diverse - and ensuring that participants come from a range of backgrounds
- Consider holding different Forum events for participants with varying levels of knowledge (in reflection of the fact that some individuals present felt intimidated by others in attendance who knew a lot about the Inquiry)
- Ensuring that there is a better management of participants at the beginning of the day

- Ending the Forum event less abruptly, for example, by offering further refreshments
- Offering greater opportunities for participants to chat informally with other participants, as well as Panel members and Inquiry staff

Our Forum policy will be reviewed in light of these comments.

We are planning a further Forum event in Wales this November. Future events will also be held across England and Wales so that everyone who wants to has the opportunity to attend.

If you would like to provide any further comments about the presentation or the content of this document, please do reply to [forum@iicsa.org.uk](mailto:forum@iicsa.org.uk). Please also get in touch through this email address if you are concerned that we have missed any of your points.